

Representation of the *négresse*, Trauma and Marronnage in Post-Slavery Narratives

by

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Abstract

The notion of the *négresse*, even though derogatory, is often used in post-slavery narratives in reference to the black female body. However, the representations of this notion and the persona is rooted in white patriarchal hegemony and its enabling institutions. I explore in this research, the representations of the *négresse* in literary narratives that recount her lived experiences through the historical events of slavery and in the contemporary structure of post-slavery. I theorize the concepts of trauma, and marronnage in the lived experiences of the black female body in the structure of post-slavery through the reading of Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba sorcière...Noire de Salem*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Marie-Célie Agnant's *Le livre d'Emma*. I use these three texts because they portray an identical characterization of the *négresse* that fits into the spatiotemporal continuums of slavery and post-slavery. This research aims to examine the concept of post-slavery as a contemporary ideology yet historically dependent, based on transferred racial-gendered prejudices that the *négresse* experiences. I reveal the historical construction and representation of the *négresse* as a model by which the contemporary black female body is defined and by which the *négresse's* contemporary lived experiences are formed. I identify Eurocentric and male hegemonic narratives as limitations that repress the stories of the *négresse*. Therefore, this thesis supports the need for more intersectional criticism specific to the black female body.

Keywords: *négresse*; representation; trauma; marronnage; slavery; post-slavery

Dedication

For the diasporic *négresse*.

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Glossary

African diaspora	The concept of the African diaspora is contextually symbolic to slavery, created by the Trans-Atlantic slave trade (Terborg-Penn 11).
Cimarron	The term was used by Spaniard colonial settlers on the Island of Hispaniola (now known as Haiti and Dominican Republic) to represent their fugitive pets and domestic animals. Consequently, drawing from the recalcitrant behavior of their animals, the term was appropriated in reference to black fugitive slaves (Bona 37).
Creolization	The process through which new African American cultures emerged in the New World (Sidbury 624-625).
Maroon	is a term spring from historical marronage to connote areas of African cultural survival or isolated resuscitation, resistant to the blandishments of the plantation (Brathwaite 87). Maroons are fugitive slaves that escaped from plantation. It was a term adopted from the word “Cimarron” (Bona 37-38).
Maroon communities	Slave rebellion and escape from the slave master led to the setting up of maroon communities outside of the slave plantations. Maroon communities were set up by slaves on the island, in the mountains, along the river or in forested areas (Brathwaite). Brathwaite notes that “the most spectacular maroon community was established at Palmares in Brazil in 1631 and it was able to maintain its independence for 70 years (Brathwaite 87-88).
Marronage	Marronage was a political act of resistance that arose from the interplay of the transatlantic slave trade, slave experiences in the middle passage, slave labor and commercialization on slave plantations (206). It denotes a behavioral composure against an external force that places the maroon in a position of obligation and constraint and thus encouraging flight (Béchéacq 232).
mawon	Early concept of the word “marron” (Béchéacq 232).
mawonaj	Early usage for the concept of “marronage” (Béchéacq 232).
Middle passage	Refers to the Trans-Atlantic space that constituted the movement of black slaves from Africa to America. This historic largest migration and trade of African slaves over the Atlantic created what is known as the African diaspora (Lovejoy, <i>The “Middle Passage”: The Enforced Migration of Africans across the Atlantic</i>).

<i>Négresse</i>	A black female slave (Forbes 74), a racial-gendered persona constructed from the black female-slave master relationship.
Négrillonne	Négrillonne is a derogatory term used in reference to the black female child. Négrillon, masculine noun. See Larousse dictionary (http://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais-anglais/n%C3%A9grillon/53736?q=négrillon).
Negro cimarron/ Negro maroon	A term formed from the Spanish word “cimarron”. It refers to black slaves who escaped from slave plantations (Bona 38)
Post-slavery	Refers to the period after the abolition of slavery. Before the term was adopted in reference to slave histories, the term “emancipation” and “abolition” were used to refer to the end of slavery. Lecocq and Hahanou note that “post-slavery was first used in the context of the American and Caribbean histories of slavery” (182). Post-slavery also refers to the criticism of past slaveholding societies, where the institution of slavery was a legal system and continues to have a deep impact on its societies (Rossi 303; Lecocq and Hahanou 181).

Chapter 1.

Introduction

Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba sorcière...Noire de Salem* (1986), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and Marie-Célie Agnant's *Le Livre d'Emma* (2004) are three slave narrative accounts that portray a closely similar persona of the *négresse*, revolving around the historical timeframe of slavery and post-slavery. These texts offer a similar yet different glimpse into the *négresse*'s resistance to and survival against intersectional profiling and intergenerational trauma of her lived experiences. By offering her a literary voice to recount her experiences, each text provides a literary perspective into the trauma faced by the *négresse* of slavery and post-slavery.

The naming of the black female as a "*négresse*" in this thesis is not intended to restrict the black female body to this stereotypic notion. However, it is used in reference to Condé's naming of her as such¹, in order to criticize this notion and its different historical representations that Condé presents in her 1986 novel. Although, the concept of the *négresse* is based on a "propositional truth or falsity" (Ankersmit 64-65) put forward by the slave master. Agnant's naming of the post-slavery black female persona² by this notion in her 2004 novel *Le livre d'Emma*, does prompt a contemporary criticism of this notion and its representations as they continue to give meaning to the persona of the *négresse* in post-slavery.

¹ Maryse Condé in *Moi, Tituba sorcière...Noire de Salem* uses the notion of *négresse* in reference to Tituba and the general idea of an enslaved black female body.

² Agnant refers to the black female body as the *négresse* in her narrative of Emma. However, her use of the word is in reference to both slavery and post-slavery *négresse*.

The introductory chapter to this thesis explores a literary review of existing scholarship on the historical events of slavery, the incorporation of the *négresse* into the institution of slavery, and contemporary ideologies that believe that the *négresse* is existing in the structure termed “post-slavery”. I characterize these contemporary ideologies of post-slavery as a reductive reasoning that attempts to rationalize slavery as purely profit-driven. However, these criticisms overlook a more troubling and deeply embedded racial-gendered prejudice that enables and justifies modes of representation, which dehumanizes the persona of the *négresse*.

Moi, Tituba sorcière...Noire de Salem would allow this thesis to review the notion of the *négresse* as constructed from the middle passage and as it has developed its definitions throughout the institution of slavery. This novel examines the representations of the *négresse* as a constructed image of not just race but also of gender through an intersectional perspective - racism and sexism- to explore the various readings and criticisms of this text and the literary perceptions of the *négresse*. Establishing Condé’s constructed image of the *négresse* is important because she creates a typical persona of a slave *négresse* that helps set the tone for understanding the post-slavery symbolism of the *négresse* in Agnant’s narrative. Agnant’s *Le livre d’Emma*, by contrast, may be seen to explore the post-slavery representations of the *négresse* in order to redefine the concept of post-slavery. The notion of post-slavery does not mean slavery has disappeared but that slavery and its institution, as represented in the contemporary black female body, continues to give meaning to the black female body.

In chapter three, the notion of intergenerational transmission of trauma by the *négresse* develops the notion of trauma as slave master and contemporary diaspora as slave plantation, as concepts in exploring “psychological slavery” (Lecocq and Hahonou 191) in post-slavery. Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* will examine the historical trauma of slavery and its metaphors, internalized and transmitted by preceding generations of the *négresse* to the next. The persona of the *négresse* in the contemporary may not necessarily have been in direct contact with the old master in the structure of slavery, yet this chapter will argue that she is a victim of the “new slave master” – trauma – in post-slavery through the notion of intergenerational trauma. This chapter will also argue that

the knowledge of trauma through its transmission from one generation to the next continues to define lived experiences of the *négresse* in post-slavery.

In chapter four, *Le livre d'Emma* examines the comeback of the maroon in the persona of the *négresse* and marronnage as a contemporary strategy of resistance and survival in the socio-psychological structure of post-slavery. I investigate ways in which the post-slavery *négresse* re-conceptualizes and develops the ethos of marronnage in order to escape from the “new slave master” and “post-slavery plantation”.

Although this thesis aims at developing its individual subjects of representation, trauma, and marronnage through the literary writings of Condé, Morrison, and Agnant, these three novels are interwoven as they all cut across the different subjects explored in this work. In addition, the literary analysis of the novels is structured in the form of a historical chronology. They had to follow this structure because they explore a chronological structure of the *négresse*'s lived experiences. Understanding the concept of intergenerational trauma hinges on the historical events and representations leading up to trauma in the persona of the *négresse*. Therefore, a careful historical exploration of slavery in chapter one is required before the literary criticism of the historical construction of the *négresse*, and the experience of trauma explains the need for the *négresse*'s resistance and survival trajectory in post-slavery.

It is also important to note that these books were chosen because they are written by black female writers, whose works are renowned in their respective languages and publishing regions. Toni Morrison's novels are specifically published in the United States by a major publishing house. Her novel, *Beloved*, was made famous by Oprah Winfrey's book club, popular culture and academic critical research. Additionally, Maryse Condé, a Guadeloupien French writer, publishes in France. She has been acknowledged by critical researchers inside and outside of France and her works have been translated into English and other languages³. In contrast, Marie-Célie Agnant is a Haitian writer who publishes in a small feminist publishing house located in Montreal,

³ See Columbia University, Department of French and Romance Philology.

Québec. Even though she writes in French, this is a problem for her because she finds it problematic to write the experiences of the *négresse* in the hegemonic language of the slave master.

The middle passage and slave structure

In order to explore the historical construction of the *négresse* in this research, it is useful to explore the notion of slavery and its relation to the *négresse* because an analysis of these historical moments is useful in understanding the history from which Condé, Morrison and Agnant draw from in their fictional writings. What are the underlying structures in which the persona of the *négresse* emerged? What were the factors and social norms that defined her existence and role in slavery? While putting into consideration the two spatiotemporal continuums in the three novels discussed in this research, my discussion of slavery will focus on the context of the slave economy and practices in the Americas. I discuss the historical events of slavery with emphasis on the introduction of the *négresse* into a stereotypical space, in which racial-gendered prejudices overlap in shaping her lived experiences.

The transatlantic slave trade usually referred to as the middle passage⁴ witnessed the transportation of Africans forced aboard slave ships and across the Atlantic from the African coast into the Americas, in a journey that took the space of six months to a year (Klein 130) into the system and institutions of slavery. Slavery, according to Patterson, is one of “the most extreme forms of the relation of domination, approaching the limits of total power from the viewpoint of the master, and of total powerlessness from the viewpoint of the slave” (1). Patterson’s perspective makes clear the notions of social power and hierarchy when considering the master-slave relationship through the institution of slavery. Lecocq and Hahonou also explore a more general view of slavery through their definition. Defining it as a “system of economic, social, cultural and political inequalities among socially constructed categories of people

⁴ See Paul E. Lovejoy, *The “Middle Passage”: The Enforced Migration of Africans across the Atlantic*. 2005

within a society, created through sanctioned forms of legal or non-legal commoditization of human physical and mental capacities, leading to the loss of autonomy and self-ownership of those being commoditized” (182). This definition, Lecocq and Hahonou argue, not only differentiates slavery from other forms of human exploitation (182) such as colonization, dictatorship, neo-colonialism, etc., but also encompasses the entirety of the slave structure, in that slavery was a system of many systems (Lewis and Lewis xii) that interacted in creating Patterson’s argued definition of total power and powerless. This definition also includes the notion of social death and destruction of identity embedded in the institution of slavery.

The system of slavery is characterized by socio-physiological situations that would ultimately have resulted – whether from physiological or social laws – to the death of an individual (Elwahed 243). It was governed by social norms and ideologies often times legitimized by the law and were enforced through means of physical and violent coercion and abuse (Lecocq and Hahonou 182). Many historical studies have estimated varying figures regarding the numbers of “perishable goods”(Burnard 1023) that were shipped across the Atlantic and the rate of mortality that occurred through this voyage. According to a study focused exclusively on slavery in American states, “historians estimate that between 1450 and 1850, more than ten million enslaved men and women were forcibly brought from Africa, yet less than 5 percent ended up in the United States” (Lewis and Lewis xii). Buxton’s statistical argument shows that a larger percentage of 71% of deaths occurred while transporting slaves to the coast while 18% of deaths occurred in the middle passage and some other deaths were due to the introduction and adaptation of slaves into the new environment (qtd. Klein 130). Some of these statistics aim to shift the blame of death from the harsh conditions imposed by slave masters in the voyage to the adaptability of slaves to new climate on the plantation. However, regardless of the place and condition of death, slavery in its entirety accounts for the murder of a large percentage of black men and women over the Atlantic.

In *Accounts Unpaid, Accounts Untold*, Fehskens highlights certain situations that resulted in high mortality on the slave ship “Zong”⁵ in 1781. These situations include lack of water, starvation, an outbreak of sickness caused by suffocation and heat because slaves were confined together in ship decks with scarcely enough space for each to turn himself. Sick and dying slaves were reportedly thrown overboard or forced to jump into the Atlantic while some slaves jumped of their own will because they preferred dying in the Atlantic to the life of enslavement that awaited them on the other side of the coast (Fehskens 407; Northrup 66-70).

Slavery according to Kolchin, was a form of civilization or culture that shaped the existence of prominent slave societies (111). American states in the 18th century depended on slavery and coerced labor and most of their politically celebrated figures were large-scale slave masters (Kolchin 3). Slaves were important in societal construction and played a crucial role in “economic and demographic development of colonies in the Americas” (Lovejoy, *The “Middle Passage”* no pag). Patterson notes, for instance, an ironic structural situation of western societies and cultures in which democracy and freedom were the mantra while slavery was the substratum of their political and societal structures:

Americans have never been able to explain how it came to pass that the most articulate defender of their freedoms, Thomas Jefferson, and the greatest hero of their revolution and history, George Washington, both were large-scale, largely unrepentant slaveholders [...]. We assume that slavery should have nothing to do with freedom; that a man who holds freedom dearly should not hold slaves without discomfort; that a culture which invented democracy or produced a Jefferson should not be based on slavery. (Patterson ix)

According to Patterson, these great innovators of slavery not only took slavery for granted, but also insisted on its necessity to the slave masters’ way of life. In doing so, they were guilty of an “unfathomable lapse of logic, and of admirable candor” (viii).

⁵ See Nourbese Philip, Marlene, and Setaey Adamu Boateng. *Zong: As Told to the Author by Setaey Adamu Boateng*. Toronto: Mercury Press, 2008

Additionally, the structure of slavery was an institution of distinction, which allowed for social, political, and psychological differences in race, gender, social class, and power. Wood in her comparative study of constructed representations of Native Americans versus Africans during the enslavement of both, posits that the slave masters were already prejudiced to consider the black body “as suitable candidates for enslavement” and naturally turned to them “to satisfy their labor requirements” before their crossing of the Atlantic (20). Although there are conflicting and ongoing arguments on the notion of slavery and race, research by scholars such as Winthrop Jordan, Eric Williams and David Eltis⁶ have argued for or against the racial and the economic motive of the slave trade.

Williams, for instance, bluntly states that “the origin of negro slavery was economic, not racial; it had to do not with the color of the laborer, but the cheapness of the labor”(19). However, as slavery developed, “racial differences made it easier to justify and rationalize negro slavery, to exact the mechanical obedience of a plough-ox or a cart-horse, to demand that resignation and that complete moral and intellectual subjection which alone make slave labor possible” (19). Here, I must interject a little. As I have earlier stated in the example of the slave ship *Zong*, such narrative accounts of the middle passage help to criticize Williams’s argument. For if economic profits were the only consideration during the transportation of slaves over the Atlantic, it would have made sense for white slave traders to minimize the percentage of lives lost in order to maximize profit. The fact that this was not the case complicates William’s assumption/reduction, as slavery was no longer an objective economic institution as Williams argues. Rather, slavery is defined by who should be considered human or non-human, valuable or invaluable. It becomes apparent, then, that we cannot disassociate race when we discuss the institution of slavery in the middle passage, for the only conceivable reason white slave traders associated “cheap labor” with blackness and enslavement is because of the existing racial prejudices they harbored for blackness and black lives. These racial prejudices justified the idea that black lives were worth less and

⁶ See Winthrop Jordan’s *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, Eric Williams’s *Capitalism & Slavery*, and David Eltis’s *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (2000)

would be easy to manipulate and enslave. In other words, while economic institutions can reduce bodies to mere commodities and statistics, racial prejudice acts as the moral compass that facilitates and even justifies the ability to dehumanize, commoditize and incarcerate slaves.

In addition, in order to understand and criticize slavery and post-slavery, research and criticism must shift from the economic Eurocentric arguments such as Williams' that tend to dominate the debates on slavery and the middle passage. This is because it is impossible to assume that "European based legal and economic thinking on slavery, as it took shape in the historical developments of the transatlantic slave trade and the west Atlantic plantation slavery system, hold equal meaning and value in other slavery systems" (Lecocq and Hahonou 186).

Eltis, on the other hand, posits a counter-argument to William's theorized economic motives for which millions of blacks were shipped and lost in the middle passage and in slavery. He argues that these motives "operated under the aegis of fundamental non-economic values, in part socially constructed [...] one central issue here is the perception of race [...] who is to be considered an outsider and is, therefore, enslavable" (58). Jordan also further argues that white slave masters already harbored three stereotypes for Africans which aided in the enslavement of the latter, the first stereotype being their black skin (Kolchin 14). Jordan and Kolchin's studies of slavery and race also seem to take a mutual position, arguing that slavery and racial prejudice "seem to have generated each other. Both were, after all, twin aspects of a general debasement of the Negro [...] continuously reacting upon each other, dynamically joining hands to hustle the Negro down the road to complete degradation" (80). Kolchin adds that slavery thrived and succeeded due to the disparate relations between blacks and whites and it interacted with [racial] prejudice to establish the particular set of social relationships that existed in [slave] colonies (14).

Furthermore, the institution of slavery annihilated the black body by ascribing stereotyped representations. These representations were important in shaping the master-slave relationship through the institution of slavery (Wood 25). Slave masters ascribed names and modes of perceiving the black body, which were defined through a

racial lens, as “the difference in social positions between the master and the slave [was] justified as a natural difference” (Lecocq and Hahonou 189). In the Caribbean and American South, for instance, Campbell et al state that racial division was very pronounced because large groups of black slaves lived and labored segregated from predominantly white owners (4). In most of these slaveholding societies⁷, the black body, in particular, was synonymous with the status of a slave (Hoetink 270). For this reason, it was difficult for black slaves to escape because they were easily identified unless they could prove they were free slaves (Lewis and Lewis xv, Kolchin 13), for the only reason they existed in that space was because of the existing structure of slavery.

Though the forms of slavery varied from one slaveholding society to another, they “shared the underlying concept of owning a human body” (Brooten 3). The circumstances surrounding the trade and ownership of slaves were governed by the main principle of slave as properties (Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery* 1) and the denial of slave humanity which gave slave masters absolute right over their “properties” (Parish 1; Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery* 2). Slaves were by definition “a piece of conveyable property, a chattel, with no legal rights or social status whatsoever” (Wood, *The Origins of American Slavery* 9). They were “held permanently rather than for a few years [...] and were at the same time both objects and [...], human property held for the purpose of enriching the masters and individuals with lives of their own” (Kolchin 12, 111). Wood, on the other hand, in her introduction to *Slavery in Colonial America, 1619-1776*, posits that slaves in some slaveholding societies were considered ‘entitled to certain legal right’ while they were properties in others. She argues that geographical situations played a principal role in the different structure and laws that governed slave plantations (vii-viii). Slave masters had total control over every element of existence including the ability to ascribe representations and definitions to the enslaved and, the ability to control social and family relations (Lecocq & Hahonou 182). And so the concepts of freedom and property, Patterson makes clear, became two antithetic notions within the slave institutions (viii). Brooten notes that, “the concept of owning another

⁷ See Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social death*, for explanation on the context of slaveholding societies.

human being's body led to the right of sexual access to that body [...]. Slavery included master's having sex with enslaved women and girls" (10).

The unending structure of slavery in post-slavery

Following the abolition of slavery came the structure that has come to be theorized as post-slavery. Nevertheless, what is the analytical definition of the "post" in post-slavery? Is this structure a perfect representation of a total end to a system of social hierarchy and prejudice?

Post-slavery scholars have argued that the legal abolition of slavery has not led to the cessation of the socio-political tenants of slavery. Considering that "post" stands for what is considered as ended, Lecocq and Hahonou explain that the hyphenation in the case of post-slavery is an indication of the connection and influence that slavery as a historical past has on the present. They argue that the abolition of slavery⁸ in Africa⁹ ended the legal and political means by which people of "inferior" racial profile were enslaved, but it did not end the social, cultural or economic hierarchy that coexisted and strengthened the institution of slavery (181-185):

⁸ The historical moments for the abolition of slavery and its enabling institutions differed across slaveholding societies. In Great Britain, for instance, the movement for the abolition of Slave trade was set in motion towards the end of the 18th century. The society for the Abolition of Slave Trade was established in 1787 but abolition movements did not gain momentum until the 19th century. In 1807, the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act was passed. However, with the passing of this act, slavery continued in British territories but it prohibited them from participating in the transatlantic slave trade. The abolition movements did not gain momentum in the Americas until the 1830s. Notable of such movements was the abolition convention held on May 17, 1838, in Philadelphia. Although, this convention was unsuccessful due to record of anti-black and anti-abolitionist riots that plagued the convention. However, the issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 was the beginning of a gradual end to slavery in the American states. On January 31, 1865, the Emancipation Proclamation passed both houses of congress and ended long years of slavery in America (Cornell University Library). Other slaveholding states in continents of Europe, North America, Latin America, Africa and the Caribbean followed suit with abolition movements and acts in the 19th century (The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture).

⁹ See *Introduction: Exploring Post-Slavery in Contemporary Africa*. Lecocq and Hahonou's criticism focused on slavery and its aftermath in Africa. However, their criticism of post-slavery is applicable to other slaveholding societies.

although abolition [of slavery] was intended as a legal measure to prevent the slave trade and slavery practices, the abolition of slavery had a limited impact on the long-standing and entrenched practices of slavery. [...] the implication of abolition did not reduce or weaken the norms, values, and ideals of slavery systems. [Also] legal and normative pluralism create[d] the conditions for slavery to continue after abolition. (187-188)

A summarized study of post-slavery generally refers to it as the criticism of past slaveholding societies, where the social institution of slavery was a legal system; where the abolition of slavery has been followed by resilient legacies of its racial hierarchy and abuse; and where slavery continues to have a deep impact on its societies (Rossi 303; Lecocq and Hahonou 181). In this context, post-slavery is viewed not as a period but as a situational position of a period. According to Berlin, the structure of post-slavery which would refer to the demise of slavery “might better be understood as a near-century-long-process [...] entwined with an even longer transatlantic struggle, rather than the work of a moment” (12). Although Berlin’s criticism is specific to the United States, this argument could be true for the majority of previous slaveholding and trading societies.

Pelckhams states that the abolition of slavery hardly impacted the existing social norms and therefore slavery persisted into the 20th century (281). There is the belief that the socio-political structures in contemporary societies that used to be slaveholding – such as America, Africa, French and its colonies – are governed by norms and practices of slavery (Lecocq and Hahonou 185). Those societies who have gained from slavery have retained the definition of what it means to be enslaved and such past practices of slavery have been replaced in post-slavery to maintain the hierarchy embedded in enslaving others. It is, therefore, a given that the socio-political structure of the current period has been ineffective in phasing out the existing different socio-cultural hierarchies created by slavery. Instead, it has continued to define the black body – and in this case the black female body – by her historical past. Such a view therefore puts into consideration the related proposition that the contemporary criticisms of post-slavery are particularly explored in relation to the historical institutions of slavery; accepting post-slavery as a product of an end to slavery is to ignore the contemporary dynamics in which the black female body is aware of traumatic inheritance enabled by slavery.

Considering the slow evolution of the structure of post-slavery and its related hierarchies, Lecocq and Hahonou draw a conclusion that regards post-slavery as slavery replicating through changed dynamics (184). However, how do these arguments help to shape post-slavery from a contemporary perspective? I believe post-slavery is a contemporary ideology yet historically dependent based on transferred racial-gendered prejudices and I credit my conclusion to the Rossi, Lecocq, Hahonou and Pelckmans' debates on the situation of post-slavery in Africa. Therefore, this discussion on slavery and the structure of post-slavery draws a conclusive stand from Rossi's argument. She posits a similar argument to Ira's, stated above, that post-slavery is perhaps not a present reality, but a future option. Perhaps slavery or neo-slavery rather than post-slavery would be a more appropriate analytical term in understanding the aftermath of slavery in the present structure (306). In addition, the persistent nature of slavery in the present calls for new analytical approaches in examining the heterogeneous state of slavery as an institution in the past and in the present. Also, it allows the examination of intersectional criticism that includes not just slave history but other disciplines of discrimination and representation, and the polysemy of its legacies not only as a discourse but also as an embodied practice as demonstrated by trauma in the black female body (Pelckmans 281; Lecocq and Hahonou 188).

Chapter 2.

Representation of the *négresse* in Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba sorcière...Noire de Salem*

In *Ar'n't I a Woman*, Deborah White notes that what makes the *négresse* unique is her position at the intersection of two well-developed ideologies that are rooted in and molded by slavery and its enabling institutions. One ideology regards her sexuality and the other her race (27). The notion of the *négresse* has embodied varying representations and expectations in the historical context (Stein 1).

This chapter explores the “representational intersectionality” (Crenshaw, *Mapping the Margins* 1282) of the *négresse* through the institution of slavery in Condé's post-slavery historical narrative. I examine the notion of the *négresse* as constructed by the slave master in the middle passage, slavery, and the development of these representations. I focus on this persona as a socio-historical construction in which such representations that were shaped by “intersecting patterns of racism and sexism” were developed (Crenshaw 1243).

This chapter functions under Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, to express the marginalized position of the *négresse* that is torn between the double oppression of racism and sexism. The black female body, however, experiences forms of discrimination through the other categorization of identities that are considered as “vestiges of bias and domination” (1242) such as class, religion, age, education, sexual orientation, and geography. Though I am highly influenced by Crenshaw's developed notion of intersectionality, however, in this chapter, I separate the criticism of the racial and sexual representations of the *négresse* in order to achieve a form of analysis that underlines racism and sexism as both important intersectional and separate modes of marginalizing the *négresse* in Condé's narrative.

Intersectionality: Racism and Sexism

In *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Policies*, Kimberlé Crenshaw developed the concept¹⁰ of intersectionality to denote the intersecting patterns of oppression in the lived experiences of the black female body. She investigates the ways in which “race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions” of the black female experiences in contact with historical and contemporary reality (139- 67; *Mapping the Margins* 1244).

Though it has been argued by several scholarship that the ideology of intersectionality was not new, neither was Crenshaw the first to address this issue. She is, however, known for introducing the concept (Davis, *Intersectionality as Critical Methodology* 17). Davis argues that Crenshaw’s named ideology of intersecting oppression, “intersectionality”,

was part of a growing body of feminist scholarship which was looking for more sophisticated and dynamic ways to conceptualize how socially constructed differences and structures of power work at the level of individual experiences, social practices, institutional arrangements, symbolic representations and cultural imaginaries. Intersectionality addressed the concern of what was increasingly perceived as the ethnocentrism of white, First World feminist scholarship, offering the promise of a much-needed corrective. (17)

The criticism of the white hegemonic structure of slavery, in particular, with the persona of the black female body in view, makes “apparent how dominant conceptions of discrimination condition us to think about subordination as disadvantage occurring along a single categorical axis” (Crenshaw 140). Crenshaw argues that the single-axis form of criticism of the body usually shifts and limits focus of discrimination to privileged members of a group whose experience of discrimination occurs on a one-sided framework of race, gender or class. Consequently, “those who are multiply-burdened”

¹⁰ I am aware of the theoretical debates of intersectionality as a concept, theory, heuristic device or a reading strategy in Feminist discourse. See Kathy Davis, *Intersectionality as Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes a Feminist Theory Successful*, 2012, 43

are marginalized, such as the black female body, erasing her in the “conceptualization, identification and remediation of race and sex discrimination” (Crenshaw 140).

Although, racism and sexism readily intersect in the lived experiences of every individual, they, however, often intersect in feminist and antiracist discourse (Crenshaw, *Mapping the Margins* 1242). Crenshaw argues that the black female body is often times excluded from these discourses because both forms of criticism are based “on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender” (140). “Feminist efforts to politicize experiences of women and antiracist efforts to politicize experiences of people of color have frequently proceeded as though the issues and experiences they each detail occur on mutually exclusive terrains” (Crenshaw, *Mapping the Margins*, 1242). Therefore, when these criticisms are applied to the conceptualization of the black female body and her lived experiences, “they relegate [her] identity to a location that resists telling” (1242). The need to theorize the experiences of the black female body as falling “between the cracks of both feminist and antiracist discourse” informed Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality (Davis, *Intersectionality as Critical Methodology* 17)

The notion of the *négresse* through the institution of slavery brings a different perspective into how racism and sexism played a major role in placing her at the intersection of her lived experiences. This is because the lived experiences of the black female body “are not subsumed within the traditional boundaries of race or gender discrimination as these boundaries are currently understood” (Crenshaw, *Mapping the Margins* 1244). The concept of racism according to Todorov denotes on one hand a behavioral disposition and on the other hand an ideological concept (213). To Todorov, a racist ideologist and a racist behaviorist do not denote the same thing. Racism, he posits, “is an ancient form of behavior, a manifestation of hatred or contempt for individuals who have well defined physical characteristics different from our own” while he establishes racialism as the ideology concerning human races (213). Sexism, on the other hand, is the belief that one sex is superior to the other and therefore possesses sexual hegemonic privilege over the other (Lorde 45).

Hinging from the historical comportment of the slave master towards the *négresse*, I focus my discussion of racism on the behavioral conduct, which Albert Memmi conceptualizes in his book *Racism*. For Memmi, one is not racist because one identifies the differences in another but racist in using those differences against another to one's advantage (52). "Racism, according to Memmi emerges from within human situations, rather than [...] an ideology" (Martinot xxii). He understands the concept of racism "as a structure rather than an idea, a social relation rather than a feeling" (Martinot xvii).

In a broad and narrow perspective, racism "makes reference to biological differences for the purpose of subjugation and the establishment of certain privileges and advantages for itself"

Racism subsumes and reveals all the elements of dominance and subjection, aggression and fear, injustice and the defense of privilege, the apologetics of domination with its self-justifications, the disparaging myths and images of the dominated, and finally the social destruction or social nullification of the victimized people for the benefit of their persecutors and executioners. (Memmi 93)

Martinot, in an introduction to Memmi's translated book, notes that the behavioral consequence of racism is contingent on a generalized knowledge about a person, which connects "somatic characteristics to temperament, culture, or social propensities"(xxiv). This generalized knowledge he further notes is "nonempirical" because it is not derived from an established contact with the victimized body or from personal experiences. However, when contact is made, any pre-established assumption eliminates "real encounter [...] because it substitutes the prior generalization for the person encountered"(Martinot xxiv). Martinot's analysis, however, stands true in exploring the relationship that existed between the *négresse* and white master during slavery. As earlier noted in the previous chapter, the institution of slavery thrived on the pre-assumptions and generalizations that slave traders and owners constructed before their encounter and assumed these assumptions in constructing behavioral and institutionalized racism towards the *négresse*.

According to Stein "the social construction of race is fundamentally a story of power, in which those in positions of political, economic and social authority create and

recreate categories of difference and assign meaning and value on the basis of those categories to maintain and naturalize their own dominance” (1). Behavioral racism was important in structuring the institution of slavery, in legitimizing and consolidating hegemonic power dynamics and racial privileges for the slave master (Memmi 38). While citing the example of European colonizers and the structure of colonization, Memmi makes clear that dominant white groups “literally had to be racist to legitimize their control. To continue to live as colonist, to which all alternative had already become unimaginable for them, they had to render inferior their ill-fated partners in the colonial relation” (Memmi 31). Moreover, establishing a racist structure in order to define a power structure in any of the white hegemony, slavery or colonization, was created out of fear of the other through self-affirmation (Memmi 31). They were conscious of potential forms of resistance for the oppressed group and used racism, the subjugation and dehumanization of the other, to protect their privileges and power.

While racial marginalization played its role, sexism contributed to the dehumanization of the black female body, arousing a double consciousness of the victimized. In order to view slavery as structured by institutionalized sexism, I offer philosopher, Marilyn Frye’s definition of the term sexist in which she characterizes “cultural and economic structures which create and enforce the elaborate and rigid patterns of sex-making and sex-announcing which divide the species, along lines of sex, into dominators and subordinates. Individual acts and practices are sexist which reinforce and support those structures, either as culture or as shapes taken on by the enculturated animals” (38). Looking back on slavery and the lived experiences of slaves, hooks notes that, sexism played just as much of a role as racism, “as an oppressive force in the lives of black women. Institutionalized sexism – that is, patriarchy – formed the base of the American social structure along with racial imperialism. Sexism was an integral part of the social and political order white colonizers brought with them from their European homelands and it was to have a grave impact on the fate of enslaved black women (15).

Slavery as a cultural and economic institution was governed by the principle of sexual domination that socio-culturally affected the master-slave relationship. The black female body while dealing with racial stereotypes like its male counterpart, also struggled with sexist notions that regarded them as helpless victims or whores (Morgan

76). Gender prejudice was an economic and racial motive for which slavery strived and equally influenced the different ways in which the black male body and black female body experienced slavery (White 62; Morgan 74). By the year 1662, the institution of slavery in America became distinctly gendered (C. Lewis and J. Lewis xvi). Though all slaves, regardless of gender, suffered physical abuse, male slaves in the Americas suffered mainly because of their slave status, the racism and the individual perverse cruelty of the slave masters; while the black female bodies in the same region suffered additionally because they were female (Campbell, Miers, and Miller 4). These institutionalized differences were due to the different expectations that were required from both genders. “Different expectations gave rise to different responsibilities, and these responsibilities often defined the life chances of the male and female slave” (White 62).

While the institution of slavery controlled the construction of the *négresse* and the process of her non-individuation, “it also heighten[ed] and intensif[ied] the experience of motherhood – of connection and separation. It raises questions about what it means to have a self and to give that self away” (qtd in Caesar 113-14). As earlier noted in the introductory chapter that slavery functioned on an underlying factor of corporeal ownership, the sexual and reproductive ownership of the black female body was a major part of that factor (Brooten 10). Most scholarship attributes the introduction and role of the black female body in slavery to her sole ability to reproduce (Robertson and Klein 5). While the black male body “constituted a labor force, a means of production”, the black female body, according to Augé “constituted a means of reproduction”, biological reproduction in this sense, in order to expand and grow a means of labour for the slave master (qtd in. Robertson and Klein 5-6).

The notion of sexual relations and childbirth in the black female body collided with white patriarchal domination and economic profit in slavery. However, the white master was slow to realize the profitability of the *négresse*'s procreative role, but once this potential was acknowledged, it contributed to the sexual victimization of the black female body by slave traders (White 67-68). Most notably, after the abolition of slave trade in 1808, slave masters simply treated the black female body as a channel for reproducing labour and enslaved her for that purpose. Although, healthy young men held the rank for the highest priced slaves, Williamson and Cain's statistical report on

differential slave prices in the Old South and New South shows that young females were next on the value chart to the young male. Their abilities to produce and procreate means of labour were major factors in determining their value ("Measuring Slavery in 2011 Dollars"). In addition, Eltis establishes in his book, *The rise of African slavery in the Americas*, that sex price differential of black slaves varied across transatlantic slave-trading societies. In the late 17th and early 18th century, young women were sold for 80-85% of the young male price in the Caribbean, while in Africa, young women were sold for over two-thirds of the male price (111). Although this differential slave price in Eltis record varied beyond the procreative ability of the young females. Female slaves with procreative capacity were commercialized and over-priced, stripped of their clothes and displayed for potential buyers to examine them like livestock. Slave traders pressed their bodies and stomach to determine their breeding potential and placed high value for women who were considered to be "good breeders" (Harrison 19; Zaborney 132).

Consequently, when the institution of slavery was fully developed in Virginia by 1670, certain legislations were passed that further revealed the gender prejudices that had structured and strengthened the institution. One of such laws declared all children born by the *négresse* to be enslaved according to her existing status (Stein 3; Fett 199). The enslavement of the black body went from a total and perpetual form of enslavement to becoming hereditary (Wood, *The Origins of American Slavery* 10). This decree, Stein argues, alleviated the sexual exploitation of the black female body by white masters and also increased slave population and profit (Stein 3).

Not only was the child to inherit the status of the mother but the female body was denied the right to her children, including the right of "motherhood and mothering" (Gupta 2). According to Patterson, slaves had no custodial claims or powers over their children, and children inherited no claims or obligations to their parents. Patterson's argument, however, failed to note the evolving institutionalization of slavery that became structured by motherhood as noted above. As property of the master, the black female body could not keep relationship ties to others as she solely belongs to her owner. Hence, everyone that was connected to the *négresse* by blood or by physical association "got rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized" (Morrison 27). This way the *négresse* was totally dedicated to the master.

Motherhood as influenced by the master, structured the *négresse's* behavior and resistance to slavery (White 75) in that she was enslaved by it even if she was ever set free from slavery and her reproductive obligations to her master. She was trapped by her maternal responsibilities because, she was incapable of abandoning her children for her shot at freedom (Robertson and Klein 7). White argues that the *négresse* was underrepresented in maroon communities because of her procreative ability. The demographic age for potential fugitives, she notes, was between 16-35 years. Most of the enslaved women in this age group were either pregnant, nursing or caring for one or two children. And for maroon *négresses* who managed to escape the slave master, they did with her child or children. White again notes that maroon *négresses* who were advertised in newspapers were always recorded to have escaped with their children (White 70). Toni Morrison's narrative account of Sethe bears witness to this historical evidence.

Representations and literary narratives

According to Judith Still, "representations are constructed [symbolism], a reflection of reality, be that reality a historically specific one or a natural and eternal one", that "shape our 'experiences' of reality". Still propounds that "any reality to which one has access is shaped by the representations of it which one encounters" (379). In the criticism of the black female body, her experiences of reality are shaped by an underlying historical reality – the middle passage and the institutions of slavery. These underlying factors not only shaped her historical experiences but also continue to define her post-slavery experiences of reality.

With the inception of slavery, white patriarchal hegemony "stole bodies" (Spillers 67), with emphasis on the black female body, from Africa, interrupting "years of black African culture" (Spillers 68) and identity. However, just as black masculinity and femininity experienced slavery differently, they also combatted different stereotypes (Morgan 76). The black female body was taken on a trip over the Atlantic, where she will be used, abused, marginalized and dehumanized to suit the master's constructed identity. The slave master did not only gain corporeal hegemony of the black female body, he consequently gained the right of naming and redefining the existing persona of

the black female body (Spillers 69). Once introduced into the dehumanizing structure put in place by the slave master, the existing definition of the black female body became “disrupted by externally imposed meanings and uses” (Spillers 67).

The annihilation of the black female’s subjectivity, Gump posits, was a principal requirement in achieving a stable socio-political structure in the institution of slavery (Gump 626). The black female body was confronted with identity amnesia imposed by slave masters in order for her to internalize their slave position and obligations. The abuse of the black female’s body, soul and memory functioned as a means by which the white master retained corporeal hegemony because a body without an individualized persona and memory brings less resistance (Bona 39). Therefore, the chipping off of every bit of the *négresse*, her naming and derogative representations were precautionary measures against rebellion and to submission. This identity annihilation, first had to be constructed in the psyche of the slave master and then that of the black female psyche, destroying and extinguishing her sense of being and reconstructing her lived experiences (Gump 626).

The slave master “constructed images of blackness and black people to uphold and affirm their notions of racial superiority, their political imperialism, their will to dominate and enslave (hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* 2) and “reorder[ed] the social reading” of the black female body (C. E. Henderson 45). In her analysis of the black body as a captive body in *Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American grammar book*, Spillers asserts that the captive body through the process of construction and representations “becomes the source of an irresistible, destructive sensuality” (Spillers 67). In this analysis the contextualized “captive body” is the black female body. For the black female body, however, her historical naming and representation operated “at the intersection of gender, race and status” (Schiller 267).

In borrowing and replacing the captive body as the *négresse* in Spillers’ analysis, I explore a process of dehumanization that the *négresse* was subjected to by the slave master. First, the black female body is reduced to a thing for the slave master. The slave master erases her “from a subject position” and annihilates her self-individuality. The sexuality of the black body, Spillers continues begins to peg “a physical and biological

expression of "otherness". Once this categorization of otherness was passed and internalized into the master-slave psyche, the black female body is translated into a potential object "for pornotroping and embodies sheer physical powerlessness that slides into a more general "powerlessness," resonating through various centers of human and social meaning" (Spillers 67).

Years after emancipation, literary narratives of the *négresse's* reality began to document her history and historical encounter with white patriarchy and racism (Schiller 269). Earlier narratives of slavery repressed certain discussions in the criticism of slavery because they exclusively used male experiences in recounting general slave experiences, as though female slaves did not exist (Robertson and Klein 3; C. Lewis and J. Lewis xi). Wilson argues that Eurocentric narratives, black male writers and theorized male slave experiences dominated the few narratives of slavery that existed. These narratives were "produced under the guidance of the anti-slavery movement [...] and therefore avoided the topic of sexual oppression" but proffered the theories of racial and mental inferiorities as justification for the slave system (4). Prominent of such narratives include Frederick Douglass's, *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave*, Ulrich B. Phillips's *American Negro slavery: a survey of the supply, employment and control of Negro labor as determined by the plantation régime*, Kenneth Stampp's *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-bellum South*, and Stanley Elkin's *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Wilson 4; C. Lewis and J. Lewis xi).

Of the thousands of slave narratives that were published in the years that preceded slavery, women wrote 12% and these narratives recount feminine experiences that include but are not limited to sexual exploitation and forced separation from their children¹¹.

¹¹ *I will be heard: Abolitionism in America*, 2002. Online Exhibition by Division of Rare & Manuscript Collections, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY. This document claims that 6000 slave narratives were published in 250 years after the abolition of slavery in which 12% of those narratives were written by women and criticized women experiences in slavery. <http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/abolitionism/narratives/Narratives.htm>.

Nevertheless, literary appreciation and criticism of slavery experienced a rebirth when contemporary narratives – especially written by black women and that use experiences of black female slaves – began to draw upon their criticism of slavery and its institutions from a feminine gendered perspective (C. Lewis and J. Lewis xi-xii; Campbell et al 1). Post-slavery black female writers engage in narratives that recount the horror of the *négresse*'s experiences, revealing her as a historical and social construction that began and is produced by institutions, practices of the middle passage, slavery, the relationship between the slave and the slave master, and her contemporary diasporic experiences.

These literary narratives, by adapting non-fictional accounts and lived experiences in recounting the horror of the *négresse*'s experience through the middle passage and the diasporic space of slavery, have focused and developed such perspectives that transcend racial perspectives. These accounts as written by black women describe similar events as told from a male perspective of slavery, but rather highlight the additional degradation that female slaves were forced to bear through their experiences. These feminine narratives now “occupy a special place in the long history of [...] slave narration” (Lowance 125). They also draw attention to topics that have been ignored because of male gendered narratives. Theorizing the position of the black female body in the history of slavery “brings new perspectives to the past” states Morton. These are perspectives that emancipate women's history from slavery's silencing of women's voices" (13).

Historical representation of the *négresse*

Analysis of the *négresse*'s representation in this thesis is drawn from the persona of Tituba in Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba sorcière...Noire de Salem*, because she takes a center position as a historical symbol of the *négresse* in Condé's narrative. Maryse Condé is a Guadeloupian writer born February 11, 1934. Her early education started in Guadeloupe before moving to Paris to study at the Université de Paris III (Sorbonne). After her education, she lived in West Africa, particularly: Guinea, Ghana, and Senegal. In the late 1960s, Condé was deported from Ghana to London because of her political activism. She returned to Université de Sorbonne for her doctorate degree in the early

1970s, with her research focusing on Black stereotypes in Caribbean literature and thereafter, taught at different universities. Condé also moved to the USA after the publication of her fourth novel and taught at prestigious universities such as Harvard, UC Berkeley, the University of Virginia, the University of Maryland, and Columbia University.

Condé is the author of several novels all originally published in French, that explore the aftermath of slavery in the French Caribbean and the legacy of the African diaspora. Her literary writings have earned her numerous literary awards and recognition in by Caribbean, French and English writers. Condé's 1986 novel, *Moi, Tituba sorcière...Noire de Salem* is acknowledged as "the first francophone Caribbean novel to connect the English Caribbean with the colonial United States" and the first of her works to "combine an introspective journey with what it means to be Caribbean" (Scarboro 187)¹².

Moi, Tituba sorcière...Noire de Salem presents historical racial-gendered literary representations that the *négresse* embodied through the institution of slavery through the persona of Tituba. Tituba, a slave woman from Barbados was born from an act of sexual violence of her mother's middle passage experience. Tituba was driven off the plantation after her mother was hanged for attempting to kill her white slave master, and adopted by Mama Yaya, who is known and feared for her witchcraft. From her, Tituba learns the act of healing and communicating to the dead. After Mama Yaya's death, Tituba, blinded by her love for John Indian – a slave – compromises her freedom and identity by submitting herself to enslavement under Susanna Endicott and is then sold together with John into American slavery as property of Samuel Parris. In America, she was accused, tried and sent to jail for being a witch. She was bought and granted her freedom by a Jewish merchant and afterwards returned to Barbados to join a group of maroons where she was hanged for her role in an anti-white and slave rebellion.

¹² See <http://ile-en-ile.org/conde/>,
http://www.columbia.edu/cu/french/departement/fac_bios/conde.htm,
<http://bombmagazine.org/article/2248/maryse-cond> for biographical reference on Maryse Condé.

In keeping with the stereotypic representation from slavery, Condé explores this constructed persona by giving her a voice in order to create a counter narrative to the Eurocentric accounts of the marginalized black female body. According to Bécél, “Tituba’s *prise de parole* in a first person narrative and her center stage position [...] emphasize her story as a counter narrative to western historical perspectives on oppressed and colonized peoples” (608). Condé evokes the “myth of creation” (Bécél 608) of the black female body, and “the particular scene of her naming” (609) that “foreshadows her relationship to the transformative power of historical and self-invention, and the possibility of identitary re-creation” (609).

Apart from her compelling interest in writing the story of Tituba, Bécél argues that one of Condé’s motives for venturing into the literary writing of the black female body through Tituba is the *négresse*’s “invisibleness in the annals of [slave] history [...], and her minor role in fictional accounts (Bécél 608). In revisiting the historical Tituba, Condé restores the persona of the *négresse* “either suppressed, or stereotyped, or weakened by previous accounts” (Bécél 609) to literary narratives.

Drawing upon Condé’s account of the historical persona of Tituba, the narrative lens through which the *négresse* was portrayed was confined strictly to a demeaning stereotypical imagery. The persona of Tituba was pinned against white patriarchal standards and was found lacking in many areas. And so the slave master imprinted on the *négresse* what he conceived to be a befitting representation of her identity (Wood, *The Origins of American Slavery* 20-21). The *négresse* was reduced to the master’s constructed identity, to what the master wanted her to be: “je n’étais plus que ce qu’elle voulait que je sois. Une grande bringue à la peau d’une couleur repoussante” (Condé 47) ‘I was reduced to what she wanted me to be: a gawk of a girl with skin of a repulsive color’ (Philcox 26). She became an “abused object of attention” for white masculinity and femininity, “while trying to claim a respectable existence” (Green 3).

Racial representation

Slavery aroused a corporeal consciousness in the black female body, how she thought about her body, what she thought of her body, and how she used her body

(Brooten 2). “Tituba devenait laide, grossière, inférieure parce qu’elles en avaient décidé ainsi” ‘Tituba became ugly, coarse, and inferior because they willed her so’ (Condé 44; Philcox 24). Tituba expresses a loss of awareness of her racial marginalization, until she was subjected to the visual criticism of the slave master:

Jusqu’alors, je n’avais jamais songé à mon corps. Etais-je belle ? Etais-je laide ? Je l’ignorais [...] j’ôtai mes vêtements, me couchai et de la main, je parcourus mon corps. ‘Up until now I had never thought about my body. Was I beautiful? Was I ugly? I had no idea [...] I took off my clothes, lay down, and let my hand stray over my body’ (Condé 30: Philcox 15)

During one of her first encounters with Susanna Endicott, her white mistress, Tituba was conscious of the mode of seeing that she was subjected to: “Dans ses yeux [...] je pouvais lire toute la répulsion que je lui inspirais. Elle me fixait comme un objet dégoûtant” ‘I could read all the aversion she had for me in her eyes [...] She stared at me as if I were an object of disgust’ (Condé 39; Philcox 21). The mode of seeing the black female body was not pretentious on the part of the master or done in secret. She was regarded as a non-existing piece of property, to her knowledge; the *négresse* only existed to the extent of the master’s imagination:

Ce qui me stupéfait et me révoltait, ce n’était pas tant les propos qu’elles tenaient, que leur manière de faire. On aurait dit que je n’étais pas là, debout, au seuil de la pièce. Elles parlaient de moi, mais en même temps, elles m’ignoraient. Elles me rayaient de la carte des humains. J’étais un non-être. Un invisible. Plus invisible que les invisibles, [...] Tituba, Tituba n’avait plus de réalité que celle que voulaient bien lui concéder ces femmes. (Condé 44)

It was not so much the conversation that amazed and revolted me as their way of going about it. You would think I wasn’t standing there at the threshold of the room. They were talking about me yet ignoring me. They were striking me off the map of human beings. I was nonbeing. Invisible. More invisible than the unseen [...] Tituba only existed insofar as these women let her exist. (Philcox 24)

While dealing with the “repulsive body” of the *négresse*, the slave master concocted different explanations for her blackness. Wood notes that “the negative connotations that the English attached to the color black deeply prejudice their assessment” of the black skin. Tituba’s skin was regarded as “discolored” and she was specially instructed not to touch her mistress’ food with her “waxy palms” or sit next to

her (Condé 21, 38). Wood again argues that quasi-genetic and climatic explanations were primarily suggested as the reason for the *négresse's* black skin, but later disregarded when the *négresse* retained her skin color even in colder climates and bore black children (*The Origins of American Slavery*, 23).

In the same vein, the white master concocted religious and spiritual justifications for the racial stereotypic representation of the *négresse*. Wood argues that the color black in Christianity – which was considered the white master's religion – signified sin and evil. The slave master, through his Christian theological beliefs and biblical accounts, presumed that the originating parents of the entire human race were documented to have been fair-skinned and so constantly struggled to racialize the black body (23). The black female body was, however, considered a creation in opposition to white spirituality, of a devilish priesthood. Samuel Parris, the priest, who was to become Tituba's new master after the death of her sick mistress, was sure that Tituba's blackness was synonymous to evil: "I know that the color of your skin is the sign of your damnation" (Condé 41). The superstitious beliefs of Tituba, what the slave master considered to be black religion or the lack of religion (Wood, *The Origins of American Slavery* 24), also played a role in the construction of her identity because it was upsetting to the white racial status quo:

A Bridgetown, Susanna Endicott m'avait déjà appris qu'à ses yeux, ma couleur était de mon intimité avec le Malin [...]. A Salem, cette conviction était partagée par tous. [...] vivait depuis des mois dans l'atmosphère délétère de Salem parmi des gens qui me considéraient comme l'agent de Satan et ne se privaient pas de le dire, s'étonnant qu'avec John Indien, je sois tolérée dans une maison chrétienne. (Condé 104-113).

In Bridgetown Susanna Endicott had already told me she was convinced my color was indicative of my close connections with Satan [...]. In Salem such conviction was shared by all. [...] living for months in the rotting atmosphere of Salem with people who took me for Satan's deputy and didn't mind saying so, surprised that I was allowed to live with John Indian in a Christian household" (Philcox 65,71).

Her magical practices were not only upsetting to the white racial status quo, they also upset the intellectual and religious status quo. Tituba was regarded as a witch and to white spirituality the notion of the witch was a constructed identity of evil associated with the devil. To the whites, being a witch meant "dealing with Satan" (Condé 27). Black

heathenism became a justification for the racial and gendered marginalization of Tituba in Salem and the system of slavery in general. Tituba's black skin and womanhood only reinforce her stigmatization as a witch (Bécel 611). The *négresse* was considered unworthy of exhibiting goodness because of her racial-gendered identity: "Vous, faire du bien? Vous êtes une négresse Tituba ! Vous ne pouvez que faire du mal. Vous êtes le Mal!" (Condé 123) 'You, do good? You're a Negress, Tituba! You can only do evil. You are evil itself.' (Condé 77)

Racial prejudice equally animalized the persona of the *négresse*. Canetti argues that the desire to animalize the enslaved body was one of the most powerful drives of the institution of slavery. The black body was considered less human with a detached personality, without dreams, memory, future and roots (Bona 38-39). In one of the narrative experiences, Tituba recalls tending to Elizabeth Parris' illness and being treated like an animal, reprimanded for sitting next to her white master's wife:

Maitresse, vous semblez mal portante ! De quoi souffrez-vous ?
Je posai la main sur son front, paradoxalement glacé et moite de sueur.
A ce moment, la porte s'ouvrit sous une poussée brutale et Samuel Parris entra.

Il dit simplement : Elizabeth, êtes-vous folle ? Vous laissez cette négresse s'asseoir à côté de vous ? Dehors Tituba, et vite. J'obéis
L'air froid du pont agit sur moi comme une réprimande. Quoi ? Je laissais cet homme me traiter comme une bête sans mot dire ? (Condé 65-66)

Mistress, you don't seem in good health. What are you suffering from? I asked

I laid my hand on her forehead, which was curiously cold and damp with sweat.

At that moment the door was pushed open brutally and Samuel Parris walked in.

He simply said: "Elizabeth, are you mad? Letting this Negress sit next to you. Get out Tituba, and quick". I obeyed

The cold air on deck hit me like a reprimand. How could I let this man treat me like an animal without answering back" (Philcox 38-39)

Additionally, racism pinned the black female body against the slave master standard of literacy and was found wanting. The white master considered her to be "morally and culturally irredeemable" (Wood, *The Origins of American Slavery* 30) and so ascribed representations to assert the black female body's "intellectual inferiority" as both a definitive racial and gender trait (Schiller 268). She was called a "poor ignorant

negress” (Condé 44) for simply seeing a cat as an animal rather than the white constructed omen of darkness and evil that was sent to torment them upon their arrival in Salem.

Sexual representation

Sexual prejudice distinguished the lived experiences of the black female body in slavery from the black male body, making it unbearable and devastating. “Black women’s sexual vulnerability and the institutionalized access” that white masters had to her sexuality “is one of the most salient aspects of black women’s lived experiences” (Sommerville 21). While this aspect of slavery protected the black male body, hooks argues that it “socially legitimized sexual exploitation of the black females. The black female lived in constant awareness of her sexual vulnerability and in perpetual fear that any male, white or black, might single her out to assault and victimize” (*Ain’t I a Woman* 24).

According to Brooten, the pre-assumptions about the sexuality of the black female body before the encounter differed from those standards upheld by white women (12). The sexual representation of the black female body as “licentious” enabled her constant sexual violation by the slave master. These pre-assumptions about the black female body “possessing unbridled passion and the alleged promiscuousness that went with that passion served as a convenient rationalization for [her] institutionalized sexual exploitation”(Sommerville 21). The black female body as a victim of sexual violation was also blamed for luring the white slave masters into sexual sin (Brooten 12). According to Roberts, “black sexuality [was] defined as inherently and essentially immoral; the black female body represents promiscuity” (qtd. in Brooten 51). The white master “justified the sexual exploitation of enslaved black women by arguing that they were the initiators of sexual relationships with men. From such thinking emerged the stereotype of black women as sexual savages” (hooks 52). The *négresse* was represented as an accomplice rather than a victim of sexual victimization (53)

The status of the *négresse* as property also contributed to the abuse of her sexuality because as a human chattel, she had no personal right which included the

“right to not be raped” (Sommerville 21). These sexual acts often resulted in pregnancy and the birth of innocent *négresses* that were to experience a similar fate and consequently inherit maternal slave status. The personae of Tituba, Sethe and Emma explored in this research were products of the white slave master’s sexual exploitation of the black female body. Tituba, for instance, recounts her mother sexual abuse by a white sailor, from which act she was born:

Abena, ma mère, un marin anglais la viola sur le pont du Christ the King, un jour de 16** alors que le navire faisait voile vers la Barbade. C’est de cette agression que je suis née. De cet acte de haine et de mépris.

Abena, my mother, was raped by an English sailor on the deck of Christ the king...while the ship was sailing to Barbados. I was born from this act of aggression. From this act of hatred and contempt (Condé 13; Philcox 3)

Also, the black female body, under the severe conditions of slavery was a victim of “externalized acts of torture and prostration” (Spillers 68) inflicted by both white and black masculine brutality. Agnant, in her narrative, documents the historical sexual exploitation of the black female body by white traders in their journey through the middle passage and additionally represents the role of the black male body in this sexual violation of the *négresse*:

Pendant la traversée, [...] les marins [...] prenaient les femmes sans même leur ôter leurs lourdes chaînes sitôt qu’acostaient les bateaux, à peine avait-on enlevé les chaînes aux pieds des nègres et des *négresses*, qu’ils étaient envoyés aux champs. Et là, Blancs et Nègres, moins Blancs, moins Nègres, tous se jetaient sur les femmes couleur de nuit, sans leur demander leur avis, comme s’ils puisaient l’eau à la rivière pour éteindre leur soif (Agnant 134-135).

During the crossing, [...] the sailors [...] took the women without even letting them out of their heavy chains. As soon as the boats docked, hardly had the chains been removed from their feet, than the blacks, both men, and women, were sent to the fields. And there, whites, blacks, less-white whites, less-black blacks, all threw themselves on the night-coloured women, unbidden, as though they were drawing water from the river to quench their thirst. (Ellis 166-167)

White and black masculinity bonded on a sexist note because they both share a patriarchal social belief that is based on sexual discrimination of the female body (hooks

98-99). On the other hand, the black male body was de-masculinized and stripped of his black patriarchal hegemony over the black female body by white masculinity: “white men effectively emasculated them, reducing them to an effeminate state” (hooks, *Ain't I a Woman* 20-22). However, due to a shared sexual privilege, the white slave master was sympathetic to his plight because “the patriarchal privileges black men demanded in the name of black power were precisely the longings sexist patriarchal white men could empathize with” (98). And so as a result of racial oppression that the black male body suffered at the hands of white male, the black female body was subjected to sexual violation by the black male body (M. G. Henderson 24). Additionally, black slave men took out their frustration on the black female body because the structure of patriarchy encouraged them to channel their anger towards those without power, those considered as inferior to their status – the *négresse* –, and therefore they joined white men to abuse her (105).

Chapter 3.

Trauma and the *négresse* in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

"There is no life without trauma. There is no history without trauma"

(Schwab 42)

The middle passage and the institution of slavery was such a catastrophic and definitive experience that none of the fifteen to fifty million Africans who were imported into the Americas during this period escaped the trauma of their lived experiences (Brathwaite 73). While the *négresse* achieved economic and political emancipation from slavery and its institutions, other aspects of emancipation such as the psychological and social ruin that slavery created have been intractable, especially in the reconstruction of her identity. The system she encounters is structured by the transformation of slavery, its institutions, and slave metaphors – which comprise but are not limited to the master and the plantation in which she was enslaved. One notes the development of trauma bearing the figure of the slave master, and the changing structure of the plantation.

The concept of trauma in this chapter is drawn from the reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Toni Morrison was born Chloe Anthony Wofford in Lorain, Ohio. Her early education started in Ohio where she finished as an honours student. She obtained her undergraduate degree from Howard University, Washington in 1953, majoring in English and Classics. In 1955, she obtained her master's degree in English from Cornell University and wrote her thesis on William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf. Growing up in the 1930s and 40s, her parents instilled strong values that helped her survive the harsh racial structure of her environment. Morrison was raised with a "strong distrust for whites" and a strong sense of emotional and socio-cultural dependency on her kind. She understood racism as part of her black existence, and, as an adolescent, engaged in the reading of writers such as Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, and Austen. In addition, growing up in

her community developed her literary consciousness of black lives, and this formed an important part of her novels. After her divorce in 1964, she moved back to Lorain and started writing her first novel, *The Bluest Eyes*. Most of Morrison's novels explore a historical past and event of blackness (Denard 385-393). To her, writing historical past and event is "a kind of archaeology". So much of [black] history, she says, "has been erased, distorted and reconstructed to a level of fantasy, it's as though avoiding the truths of the past is somehow so degrading that no one can function. But I think clarity about the past plays a very important role in how we handle the present and what we might be able to do for the future" (Noudelmann 37).

Beloved, her fifth novel, which won her the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for fiction, explored the story of a woman who escapes from slavery and kills her child. She wrote this novel in the 1980s, during the time women in America were advocating for reproductive rights. Her novel aimed to depict the irony of a more extreme situation than the *négresse* experienced in slavery; in that the *négresse* was denied all maternal rights, including the right to be responsible for her child (Noudelmann 37).

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This chapter through the reading of *Beloved* aims at exploring the concept of trauma and the transmission of trauma haunted by the historical events of the middle passage and slavery in the persona of the *négresse*. I focus on the experience of trauma through the persona of Sethe as a slave *négresse* and Denver, as a post-slavery *négresse*, who suffer from the traumatic experiences of historical events that they had and had not closely experienced. Sethe and most especially Denver's persona in Morrison's *Beloved* help to argue that the historical events of slavery and its structures have been internalized in the body of the *négresse* and are reproduced through contemporary black bodies, forming a part of her post-slavery experiences.

While reinforcing the established notion of post-slavery as an unending structure of the past and the present, I will explore the concepts of slavery and its metaphors as trauma, and its effects on the contemporary lived experiences of the black female body. I analyze her lived experiences outside of the slave plantation in a space that mimics its structure – the new diaspora as plantation. This chapter will achieve its aim through Caruth, Balaev, and Wyatt’s criticisms of trauma and its intergenerational transmission from a Freudian perspective among other critics of trauma and remembering.

Trauma refers to a person’s emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts previous ideas of an individual’s sense of self and the standards by which one evaluates society (Balaev 150). This trauma in the case of the black female body stems from her experienced relationship with the slave master on the slave plantation. In order to understand traumatic experiences in the persona of the *négresse*, and intergenerational transmission of these experiences, there must be an understanding of how the black body mentalizes her traumatic metaphors and accumulates in her memory those psychological hurts and changing historical accounts of her lived experiences in slavery (Apprey 131).

The persona of the slave master possesses the historical motivation to colonize or extinguish (Apprey 135), that a structural end to slavery does not ensure. Though the slave master is unable to exhibit his colonial ownership of the *négresse* due to the abolition of its enabling structures, his persona is recreated in the form of trauma in post-slavery (Apprey 135). The slave master in the structure of post-slavery, Apprey argues, has been internalized by the black female body as an internal tormentor and assassin (138). He becomes a psychic deformation, turning into the very thing that he projects in order to continuously assert colonial ownership of the black female body (Schwab 48). He not only continues to enslave the black female body and her generation but also kills off her will to recovery from the trauma of slavery (Apprey 138). The black female body, hence, suffers from what Gump calls “human-induced trauma” (624). Gump posits: “to be the victim of human-induced trauma is the ultimate mortification, because there is no shame as profound as that which destroys subjectivity, which says through word or action, ‘What you need, what you desire, and what you feel are of complete and utter insignificance’” (Gump 624- 25). The spatial symbolism of the plantation also undergoes

a process of re-metaphorization in post-slavery as the “new diaspora” (Falola 1). The slave plantation or perhaps the “old diaspora”¹³ has always been the spatial continuum of the *négresse*’s existence and her representation. The phenomenon of the African diaspora, as created through the process of the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Terborg-Penn 11) places the concept of the diaspora in the symbolic context of slavery. However, in theorizing intergenerational trauma and rememory, I observe the inscription of the slave plantation in the collective memory of the black female body from which the new diaspora becomes a metaphor for a restructured spatial continuum of the *négresse*’s racial and gender marginalization. The reconceptualization of the plantation in the metaphor of contemporary diaspora in this chapter and the thesis refers to the present structure in which the persona of the *négresse* is fixated on the trauma of her old diaspora.

Trauma in post-slavery narratives

The *négresse* “carries an impossible history within” her and she is also the symptom of a history that [she] cannot entirely possess” (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 4). Caruth explains that the experience of trauma is not so much of the symptom of the unconscious – which includes the unconscious knowing or not knowing of an event – as it is a symptom of history (4). This history is a subject of fictional trauma narratives used to make sense of the post-slavery representations and trauma experiences of the black female body; Balaev puts forward that the representation of trauma in narrative discourse can only be achieved through the rewriting of the historical event (150). Post-slavery fictional narratives present history and trauma as the re-inscriptions of slavery which gives rise to the concept of the internalization of slavery and its metaphors by the *négresse* and the intergenerational transmission of these institutions. This is to say that slavery is not outside of the *négresse* but has been internalized, inter-generationally transmitted and continues to form part of her racial-gendered experiences in post-slavery.

¹³ Falola 1

Balaev hypothesizes, from a Freudian perspective, that the literary production of trauma emphasizes the need to “recreate and abreact” in order to recall traumatic events and to fill the “temporal gap” that these events create (150). *Beloved* is written as a testament to Freud’s ideology. The need to explain the present by the past, to understand and explain why the present is as it is. In her Foreword to *Beloved*, Morrison writes:

[...] it was the shock of liberation that drew my thoughts to what “free” could possibly mean to women. In the eighties, the debate was still roiling: equal pay, equal treatment, access to professions, schools...and choice without stigma. To marry or not. To have children or not. Inevitably these thoughts led me to the different history of black women in this country—a history in which marriage was discouraged, impossible, or illegal; in which birthing children was required, but “having” them, being responsible for them—being, in other words, their parent—was as out of the question as freedom. Assertions of parenthood under conditions peculiar to the logic of institutional enslavement were criminal. The idea was riveting, but the canvas overwhelmed me. Summoning characters who could manifest the intellect and the ferocity such logic would provoke proved beyond my imagination. (Morrison xvi-xvii)

Morrison’s search for historical relation and explanation of her contemporary diaspora led her to the fictional characterization of historical events. She explores the literary narrative of Margaret Garner’s traumatic slave experience – a slave mother arrested for killing her children rather than see them returned to the slave master (Morrison xvii). The rethinking of historical reference through the notion of trauma, Caruth notes, is aimed at repositioning history in our understanding, changing our initial perception of particular historical events, “permitting history to arise where immediate understanding may not” (*Unclaimed Experience* 11). In *Toni Morrison and the translation of History in Margaret Garner*, Bynum examines the literary adaptation of biographical history by Morrison, to redress the limitations slavery imposes on the black female body by granting the black female body an agency of reinterpretation and self-reconstruction through Garner (Bynum 1-2). Garner’s life mattered less to Morrison than the symbolism of her action – infanticide (Bynum 4). Morrison reinvents these actions in order to relate

history to contemporary experiences of the black female body¹⁴ (Morrison xvii) through her protagonist, Sethe. She exposes the aftermath of slavery by commenting on the emotional trauma that precedes her protagonist's escape from the plantation.

Wyatt comments that Toni Morrison's narrative exposes the "crisis of subjectivity" (66) that is generationally transmitted by the black female body, the transmission of a dehumanized identity that her historical contact with the slave master created. Through her narration, Morrison testifies to the contemporary status of slavery while bearing witness to the old form – "tak[ing] part in the contemporary discourse of memory, trauma, and survival, and in so doing reflect[ing] on the problem of what it means to speak from the present moment, to have a past" (Morgenstern 108).

Theorizing from a Freudian perspective in *Unclaimed Experiences: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Caruth writes that the use of literature to describe traumatic experiences is because "literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is, indeed at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experiences precisely meet" (3). In contemporary criticism, however, the concept of trauma is becoming all-inclusive because the different domain of studies such as sociology, history, psychiatry, and literature are called upon to criticize this concept (Caruth, *Introduction* 2). This feat has been achieved because trauma "brings us to the limits of our understanding: if psychoanalysis, psychiatry, sociology and even literature are beginning to hear each other anew in the study of trauma, it is because they are listening through the radical disruption and gaps of traumatic experience" (2).

Trauma is caused by the inability to forget the traumatic experiences of the past. The intergenerational transmission of trauma is strangely possible because "trauma cannot be temporarily located". The victim of trauma "is haunted or possessed by an

¹⁴ See Morrison's Foreword to *Beloved*

image or event that she or he [had experienced or]¹⁵ missed as experience” (Morgenstern 102). Also, “traumatic experiences are often transmitted across generations, affecting the children and grandchildren of those that were initially victimized” (Bombay, Matheson, and Anisman 6). The aftermath of these traumatic events affects both the physical and psychological black body, leaving its victims with emotional scars. Often times victims of traumatic events never recover to levels that existed prior to the trauma and sometimes exhibit disparate responses to trauma (6). In Bombay et al’s defense to the notion of traumatic responses, Apprey notes through the notion of the transgenerational haunting of historic events a shift in the generational responses to trauma. This shift, she points out, can range “from suicide in one generation, murder in the next, followed by [...] incest or physical abuse in a subsequent generation, and so on and so forth”. She also notes disparate traits in which the victims of trauma “exist in a reduced form such as living but living a most unproductive life” as evident in Morrison’s personae of *Beloved*, *Denver*, and *Sethe*. This form of existence, of reducing oneself to nothingness, however, changes from one traumatized generation to the next (Apprey 134)

The experience of traumatic events, on the other hand, “is violently imposed and is always reimposing itself” (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 102), through the conscious¹⁶ or unconscious acts” (Caruth, “Introduction” 2) of the *négresse*. In her introduction to *Unclaimed experiences*, Caruth examines Freud’s thoughts on the strange and ghostly ways in which traumatic events repeat themselves for those who have passed through them. These repetitions, Freud states “are particularly striking because they seem not to be initiated by the individual’s own act but rather appear as the possession of some people by a sort of fate, a series of painful events to which they are subjected, and which seem to be entirely outside their wish or control” (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 1-2). Balaev sums up five characteristics of trauma that supports

¹⁵ I incorporate this notion into the definition, in order to include the slave experience of *Sethe* and *Baby Suggs*.

¹⁶ This addition is mine. Caruth only refers to the unknowing act of the victim. However, in reading *Beloved*, *Sethe*’s repetition of trauma experiences can be described as both knowing and unknowing

the conceptualization of trauma in the black female body and the different ways she experiences trauma. Traumatic experiences, he notes, are “repetitious, timeless, and unspeakable [...] literal, contagious and mummified”. Balaev makes clear that this characteristic nature of trauma

supports a literary theory of transhistorical trauma by making a parallel causal relationship between the individual and group, as well as between traumatic experience and pathologic responses. The theory indicates that a massive trauma experienced by a group in the historical past can be experienced by an individual living centuries later who shares a similar attribute of the historical group, such as sharing the same race, religion, nationality, or gender due to the timeless, repetitious, and infectious characteristics of traumatic experience and memory. (152)

Moreover, the notion of intergenerational trauma limits the literary conceptualization of trauma because it integrates the experiences of personal trauma and a/an historical/ancestral trauma. Personal loss, he explains, “can be understood as the lived experience of a traumatic event by an individual. Historical absence can be understood as a historically documented loss that was experienced by a person’s ancestors” (Balaev 152). Balaev argues that when these two different experiences of trauma are fused, it collapses the boundary between the individual and a group “thereby suggesting that a person’s contemporary identity can be “vicariously traumatized” by reading about a historical narrative or due to a shared genealogy that affords the ability to righteously claim the social label of “victim” as part of personal or public identity” (152-53). I note Balaev’s criticism of intergenerational trauma as an opposing argument to the use of literature as a means through which post-slavery ancestral victims of the *négresse* experience trauma and make sense of the past in relation to the present that will be explored at the end of this thesis.

Balaev, also, hypothesizes that “identity is formed by the intergenerational transmission of trauma” (149). Intergenerational transmission of trauma functions as the basis for which a post-slavery *négresse*’s identity is created, as it functions as the basis for which Denver’s experiences were constructed. The black female body in the new diaspora, however, struggles to forget, deny and disassociate from her traumatic history. To her, “the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay” (Morrison 51). The *négresse* silences the history within and dissuades herself from recounting the experience. First,

Graff argues that this refusal to remember the “existential and experiential impact” of slavery and to disassociate from this history contributes a great deal to the absence of slavery and its institutions from trauma literature until recently (Gump 625; Graff 182-183). Gump argues that more attention is given to the Holocaust, Three Mile Island, the Buffalo Creek disaster, natural disasters, sexual molestations and psychological disorders in constructing the theory of trauma and in trauma narratives than it is given to slavery. She examines two highly regarded trauma texts that do not explicitly address the trauma of American slavery. Though American slavery maintains a part of American history, it did not until recently become part of a collective consciousness (625).

Nonetheless, in the *négresse*'s bid to forget and disassociate from the trauma of her slave experiences, what she does is actually create a “psychic tomb” in which she harbors “an undead ghost” (Schwab 1). Schwab argues, “a person who refuses to mourn incorporates the lost object by disavowing the loss, thus keeping the object alive inside. Incorporation is a defensive operation based on a denial of loss” (1-2). Incorporation in Schwab's quote takes the same notion of internalization in the persona of the *négresse*. Drawing from Schwab's argument, the *négresse*, outside of the slave plantation in her new diaspora, embodies and internalizes the object of her trauma - slave master -, thereby keeping him alive. In addition, I incorporate Schwab's notion of “the refusal to mourn” in the black female body as the refusal to retell the history of slavery, to pass along this history through her silence. The trauma of the *négresse*'s history, therefore, creates a speechless fright that divides or destroys her identity even in post-slavery (Balaev 149). Silence leads to intergenerational trauma and an “involuntary repetition” of traumatic experiences (Schwab 46). The *négresse*'s repressed voice through her silence effectuates the social death she continues to experience in the structure of post-slavery. The slave master, recognizing this post-slavery fright in the *négresse*, feeds on her silence and repressed voice, to enslave and colonize and to kill the *négresse*'s will to recover from slavery.

Trauma and the *négresse*

The notion of trauma helps to explore Morrison's narrative as some sort of intergenerational behavioral repetition. In Caesar's words, it is “a novel haunted by

patterns, cycles, and symmetries, as if at once to express the need for some conventional form and to disclose its lack" (114). The repetitive compulsion of trauma "ask[s] one to think about what it means to transmit a culture, to share a story, to pass it on", whereas trauma's repetitive nature "constitutes and consolidates identity" (Morgenstern 103)

The black female body struggles to deal with her haunting history and rememorying while also trying to exist in the contemporary present (Schwab 2). In her book *Risking difference: Identification, Race, and Community in Contemporary Fiction and Feminism*, Wyatt notes that Morrison's narrative bears the mark of inherited trauma (67) "each character com[ing] to terms with traumatic transgenerational experiences, experiences that have preceded their birth but were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right" (M. G. Henderson 15). From Wyatt's criticism, I identify two notions of inherited trauma in *Beloved*: maternally inherited trauma and ancestrally inherited trauma that are both evident in Sethe and Denver's personae.

The persona of Sethe exhibits the trauma of her close relationship with the slave master, that was influenced by maternally and ancestrally inherited trauma. She suffers from the trauma of a lived experience, trapped in her "rememory". The haunting memories of her traumatic experiences of the past haunt her present and impede on her future: "Her brain [i]s not interested in the future. Loaded in the past and hungry for more, it left her no room to imagine, let alone plan" (Morrison 83). Sethe tries to "think on" this past and to "lay it all down – for good" (Morrison 215). Years after she had fled the plantation, Sethe struggles to avoid the repetitive compulsion that experiencing trauma imposes on the persona of the *négresse*. Although, her struggle ended when the slave master found them and was to take them back into slavery: Sethe slits *Beloved*'s throat.

Sethe's action of infanticide, Caesar notes, is "prefigured by that of her mother" (Caesar 114) during the latter's middle passage into slavery. According to the narrative that was retold to Sethe by Nan, Sethe's mother also had committed infanticide on the slave ship. Nan narrates the recurring sexual molestation by the slave master, the

consequent pregnancy, childbirth and infanticide: “She threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away. Without name, she threw them. You she gave the name of the black man” (Morrison 74). Sethe was the only child her mother had saved and the only one she named. Sethe abreacts an intergenerational maternal behavioral response to trauma, though it is impossible to say that Sethe possesses a vivid “rememorying” of her mother’s middle passage experience, because she was born after the fact. Caruth, however, posits an explanation to the repetitious impulse of traumatic events beyond what is seen or known. She writes “the repetitions of the traumatic event – which remain unavailable to consciousness but intrude repeatedly on sight – thus suggest a larger relation to the event that extends beyond what can simply be seen or what can be known, and is inextricably tied up with the belatedness and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of this repetitive seeing” (92). One way to look at it, is to criticize traumatic experience in the black female body, as “a fixed and timeless photographic negative stored in an unlocatable place of the brain, but it maintains the ability to interrupt consciousness and [...] to be transferred to non-traumatized individuals and groups” (Balaev 151). That is, trauma is fixed in the time in which it occurred and in Wyatt’s hypothesis, “time is [also] spatialized”, each act sticks to the place where it occurred, usurping the space where something new might happen. Sethe has suffered the trauma of the infanticide and before that the assorted traumas of slavery, so it is not surprising that her recollections bear the hallmarks of traumatic memory” (72).

In Sethe’s view of time and its link with memory and repetitive compulsion, she says:

I was talking about time. It’s so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory [...] some things you forget. Other things you never do [...]. Places are still there. If a house burns down, it’s gone, but the place – the picture of it – stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don’t think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened. (Morrison 43)

It is in her opinion that what she might have seen or not seen exists in a place in which it can at any moment interrupt new experiences.

To Wyatt's and Balaev's argument of trauma being fixated in time, I add a proposition that Sethe's traumatic response is triggered by narration. Her mother's infanticide was narrated to her by Nan, her aunt, and had been stored in her consciousness. This could be used to explain Sethe's silence and the refusal to retell this traumatic experience to Denver in order to break the repetitive compulsion that the experience of trauma imposes. However, Sethe, through her infanticide, experiences not just maternal repetitive trauma but an ancestral trauma response of slave *négresses*. She exhibits repetitive compulsion as both a sign of ancestrally inherited trauma – as she exhibits past actions – and a form of resistance against her subjective self and the new slave master (Morgenstern 108). The *négresse's* repeated infanticides in slavery and post-slavery will be further developed in Agnant's conceptualization of infanticide as a trajectory of survival in the next chapter.

Also for Sethe, Beloved's persona was a ghostly representation of the slave master in Morrison's narrative. Beloved functioned as the basis for Sethe's remembering of the slave master and the plantation. Sethe and Baby Suggs both agreed that the past was hurtful and unspeakable so that when Denver inquired about the past and the ghost, Sethe gave short replies or rambling incomplete reveries (Morrison 69). However, the *négresse's* choice to repress the slave master within does not protect the future generation of victimized *négresses* from the internalized master in post-slavery, even though they were not in direct contact with him. Apprey argues that "one generation of traumatized people may be so close to a trauma that they may choose to never speak about it to their children. Nevertheless, choosing to be silent does not mean that the next generation will not experience in uncanny ways the experience of the previous one" (Apprey 138-39). This is so because trauma in the black female body is experienced not just by the remembering of the past but also reproduced by procreation – the reproduction of bodies that are genetically linked to the history of her trauma. Morgenstern refers to it as bearing witness by bearing witnesses (Morgenstern 107). In defining the action of witnessing, Kelly Olivier hypothesizes the process of witnessing as giving evidence (Olivier 16; M.G Henderson 15). The black body produces evidence of historical subjectivity, dehumanization and trauma in a corporeal metaphor.

Sethe's historical experience and trauma are reproduced to occupy space in the present in the persona of Denver, thereby placing trauma in a corporeal metaphor. Wyatt, theorizing from Lacanian and Freudian perspectives in chapter 2 of her book, identifies a situation in which a child "functions as an extension of the parent", which prevents the child from having a separate identity and experiences (42). From Freud's perspective, a baby can experience a primary identification with the mother – either at one with her or striving to be at one with her¹⁷ (42). Wyatt notes in Morrison's narrative an over-identification of the child to the mother (46). This over-identification fixates the persona of Denver in the historical events of slavery (48). The metaphor of the slave master that her mother's body internalizes and reproduces through Denver enslaves her. She functions as an object of continuation of her mother's experiences. Wyatt posits that Denver's persona as a post-slavery *négresse* is "a conflation of self and other, [...] a fusion of the self-representation with the representation of the other" (50); the other being the mother. This maternal procreation of trauma in the black female body further reveals the doctrinal structure of post-slavery by the past; drawing from the argument on slavery and the *négresse* in chapter 1, where I explained that slavery was structured in such a way that slave children were made to inherit the status of their mother. Denver's post-slavery traumatic experiences were pegged to and dependent on her maternal relations for its existence (70).

In Morrison's narrative, Denver was constantly attached to her mother's past experiences and present trauma; she escaped the plantation with Sethe, arrived in the "new plantation" with her mother, and also went to jail with Sethe for her infanticide and took her mother's milk with the blood of her sister (Morrison 179). Wyatt terms it as "seeing the world through the mother's eyes" (58). The non-conceptualization of Denver's individualized post-slavery experience, to borrow from Lacan and Lawrence's hypothesis, is a symptom of her compulsive attachment and over-identification to her mother, and evidently sharing in her history and trauma (48).

¹⁷ Greenberg and Mitchell 161

Just like her mother's repressed voice, Denver's speech is literally repressed in Morrison's narrative "the deafness that immobilizes her for two years is a sign of her identification first with the specific trauma suffered by her slave mother [maternally inherited trauma] and second with the dehumanizing trauma inflicted by slavery on all her slave ancestors [ancestrally inherited trauma]" (Wyatt 66). The silence and trauma Denver experiences through her body signifies not only her own, but her mother's and her ancestors' (Wyatt 44). Denver was wrong to think that "only those who live[d] in Sweet Home could remember it, whisper it and glance sideways at one another while they did" (Morrison 15) as she was indirectly haunted by it. Unknown to Denver, just as the ghost of Beloved, her sister, she also represents a rememorying, a symbolic marker of her mother's past: the post-slavery *négresse* as a metaphor of trauma. As extreme as this idea might sound, the persona of Denver makes this research consider the procreation of the black female body as the corporeal reproduction of trauma and the slave master, and her existence in the diaspora as the land marker of the plantation. I also consider the extent to which the post-slavery experiences of the *négresse* are not her own but those of others, of the trauma, memory and silence of slave ancestors before her (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 18; Wyatt 70-71). To borrow Lacan's explanation, "desire is always the desire of the other" (Wyatt 71). In this case, trauma is the trauma of the other, and again the other in reference is the mother, even in Wyatt's criticism¹⁸.

Denver's experiences of trauma are also faulted by her mother's self-definition and existences through the images of her children (Wyatt 68). Graff argues that "the trauma of slavery caused an injury to the psyche generated through the mother, who in Caribbean plantation society, was deserted by men: fathers, brothers and partners" (Graff 193). To replace the absent position of black masculinity, the *négresse* over-identifies with her children. And so, "freeing [her]self was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (Morrison 111-12). Sethe's claiming ownership of herself

¹⁸ See Wyatt's *I Want You to Be Me: Parent-Child Identification in D. H. Lawrence's The Rainbow and Carolyn Kay Steedman's Landscape for a Good Woman and Identification with the Trauma of Others: Slavery, Collective Trauma, and the Difficulties of Representation in Toni Morrison's Beloved* in, *Risking Difference: Identification, Race, and Community in Contemporary Fiction And Feminism*.

from slavery by fleeing the master was one, the other was to claim her children, which were rightfully hers, by law of motherhood and mothering. According to Hobbes' notion of the sovereignty of acquisition in patriarchy, children are subjects to their parents, arguing that a mother is more physically in control of a child "so as she may either nourish or expose it: if she nourish it, it (the child) oweth its life to the mother" (qtd. in Martinich 126). Hobbes makes clear that Beloved and Denver's existence and to-be-lived experience, in or out of slavery, was a choice that rested solely on Sethe. Sethe was to choose either to "nourish" them by protecting them from the slave master and the experiences of the plantation or to expose them to its trauma. Sethe's maternal claiming of her children outside of the slave plantation exposed her to the decision to take the life of one and go to jail with the other, rather than have them claimed by the slave master. Her children were an extension of herself. As a result, her survival was contingent upon their survival¹⁹ away from the slave master and the plantation and their return to slavery meant her return to the horror of the plantation:

Not my Denver. Even when I was carrying her, when it got clear that I wasn't going to make it – which meant she wasn't going to make it either [...] And when schoolteacher found us and came bursting in here with the law and a shotgun – [...] Oh no. I wasn't going back there. I don't care who found who. Any life but not that one. I went to jail instead. Denver was just a baby so she went right along with me. (Morrison 50-51)

Contrary to the institution of slavery that denied her right to love her children, post-slavery strengthened her maternal experiences of trauma through her children's: "Look like I loved em more after I got here. Or maybe I couldn't love em proper in Kentucky because they wasn't mine to love. But when I got here, when I jumped down off that wagon – there wasn't nobody in the world I couldn't love if I wanted to" (Morrison 190-191).

Consequently, Sethe's over-defined self, through the persona of Beloved and Denver, prevents the latter's identity development in the structure of post-slavery. According to Paul D, "for a used-to-be-slave woman to love anything that much was

¹⁹ Here, the concept of survival in regards to the black female body should not be interpreted in the literal sense as it proffers different meanings. This notion will be explained in chapter 4

dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settled on to love [...] why do you think you have to take up for her? Apologize for her? She's grown" (Morrison 54). Wyatt notes that "the arrest of the child's development in the mother's imagination is reflected in Denver's failure to move forward developmentally" (Wyatt 69), in order to achieve a state of post-slavery individualization. Sethe was completely oblivious to Denver's growth. It was as if she never ceased to be the two-year-old Denver she sent ahead of her while she escaped the plantation: "I don't care what she is. Grown don't mean nothing to a mother. A child is a child. They get bigger, older, but grown? [...] in my heart it don't mean a thing" (Morrison 54).

Even though Denver was a child when Sethe's infanticide was committed, she deals with the past in a similar way as her mother. She, however, does not commit infanticide but "she waits, constantly vigilant for the past to recur" (Wyatt 72):

I love my mother but I know she killed one of her daughters, and tender as she is with me, I'm scared of her because of it [...]. All the time, I'm afraid the thing that happened that made it all right for my mother to kill my sister could happen again. I don't know what it is, I don't know who it is, but maybe there is something else terrible enough to make her do it again. Maybe it's still in her the thing that makes it all right to kill her children. I want to go to sleep but I know if I do I won't wake up. So I have to stay awake [...]. I spent all of my outside self loving Ma'am so she won't kill me, loving her even when she braided my head at night (Morrison 242-245)

Denver's soliloquy proves not just the internalization of the slave master by her mother, but she has also internalized her mother's infanticide that shapes her maternal relationship and experience. It is as if the black female body – even in post-slavery – is structured to embody a "maternal fate". Even though Denver had no knowledge of her mother's lived experiences on the slave plantation, because they refused to retell the story, it did not deter Denver's post-slavery traumatic experiences, although Denver is partly faulted for her mother's non-retelling of history. Denver "had her own set of questions which had nothing to do with the past. The present alone interested Denver, but she was careful not to appear uninquisitive" (Morrison 141). She tried to disassociate from the past by refusing to question it. "Denver hated the stories her mother told that did not concern herself. She hated it [...] because it made her feel like a bill was owing somewhere and she, Denver, had to pay it. But who she owed or what to pay it eluded

her” (Morrison 74, 91). Denver, however, processes her trauma through her body because she is neither able to process a comprehensible narrative nor a rememory, “she does not know the past but her body and unconscious know; they continue to process the information, but they cannot offer resolution – only the repletion of corporeal symptom” (Wyatt 74).

Though the concept of trauma endangers the body of its victim, trauma, on the other hand, functions as a way of preserving the traumatic history and events, through either narratives or procreation. Traumatic history in this context, as Morgenstern notes, becomes subjective to definitions, comprehension and re-interpretation, dependent on the traumatized *négresse* from which these traumatic events are narrated and the *négresse* to which they are told (105). The subsequent chapter further explores the place of narrative as a trajectory of surviving the intergenerational trauma of slavery through the persona of Emma. It researches the place of narrative as both a cure and survival trajectory for the *négresse* and, equally, a trajectory of passing along traumatic history in order to not procreate trauma in this sense but recreate trauma, to bear more witnesses of slavery.

Chapter 4.

Marronnage as a trajectory of survival in Marie-Célie Agnant's *Le livre d'Emma*

Marronnage in slavery and post-slavery

From the moment of arrival into slavery, African slaves were preoccupied with developing strategies of response to the colonial oppression of enslavement and were politically involved in everyday resistance to material deprivation and psychological abuse in the system of slavery (Echeverri 384; Stevenson 149). In slaveholding societies, slave rebellion and resistance, such as escape, the destruction of slave masters' properties and murder or attempted murder of white slave masters were dealt with harsh punishments, including capital punishment (Wood 60). However, these punishments did not deter slaves from engaging in small to collective acts of rebellion and self-emancipation, from establishing maroon communities outside of and in opposition to slave plantations and masters, to the use of outright force and rebellion (Braithwaite 87). Of the various forms of resistance that played a major role in subverting the socio-political structure of slavery and its institutions²⁰, marronnage is considered one of the most common forms of slave resistance²¹ in the history of slave and colonial oppression, especially because of the subsequent and successful slave revolutions of 1791-1793 (Manigat 420).

²⁰ Other forms of slave behavioral resistance include laziness, poisoning, abortions, slave defiance (such as talking back at slave masters and other forms of disrespect), stealing, refusing to work and suicide (Béchaq 206; Stevenson 149-50). I do not focus on these forms of slave resistance; however, this research is aware of the role they played along with marronnage in slavery.

²¹ <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/slavery/pdf/slavery.pdf>

Historically, according to Bona, the dawn of the 16th century saw the introduction of the term maroon into the institution of slavery. The first Spaniard colonial settlers on the Island of Hispaniola (now known as Haiti and Dominican Republic) adopted the term “Cimarron” to represent their fugitive pets and domestic animals. Consequently, drawing from the recalcitrant behavior of their animals, the term “cimarron” was appropriated into “Negros cimarrones” (Negro maroon), in the naming of black slaves who escaped from slave plantations. And so from the Pacific coast of the Americas to the islands of the Indian Ocean through the North Atlantic islands, the use of the term "maroon" spread throughout the slave colonies (Bona 37-38). This again is a testament to the derogative nature of seeing and naming that structured the system of slavery, in which different definitions were formed and ascribed to the black body.

According to Béchacq, marronnage was a political act of resistance that arose from the interplay of the transatlantic slave trade, slave experiences in the middle passage, slave labor and commercialization on slave plantations (206). The early notion of marronnage²² – indicated by the word “mawonaj” denotes a behavioral composure against an external force that places the maroon – indicated by the term “mawon” – in a position of obligation and constraint and thus encouraging flight (232). The brutality of slavery in the Caribbean, Vété-Congolo states, forced slaves to rebel through marronnage among the other means of resistance (75).

In her book *Defining the Jamaican Fiction: Marronnage and the discourse of survival*, Lalla notes the definitive action of the maroon as “withdrawal from the mainstream of civilization as defined by others, into the wilderness to make a last stand for freedom”. Lalla argues that the behavioral features of the maroon include “withdrawal, displacement, exile, and isolation on the one hand but involve resistance, endurance, and survival on the other” (2). Their physical flight into forests and mountains

²² This concept has been spelled differently in various research. Other notable spellings are “maronage”, “maroonage”, “marronnage”; see Cynthia James’ *The Maroon Narrative: Caribbean Literature in English across Boundaries, Ethnicities, and Centuries*. James explores her criticism using the spelling, “maroonage”. Braithwaite uses “maronage”, see *The African Presence in Caribbean Literature*. However, the concept retains a general idea of flight and slave resistance. For the spelling used in this research see Edouard Glissant’s *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*.

was not only characterized by the will to escape an imperial master, but also suggested that “isolation and labyrinth” were important maroon defenses (James 12).

Brathwaite notes that the concept of the maroon was not only a form of resisting slave exploitation. It was also an area of both physical and psychological survival for slaves (87), physical survival being the flight from the master and psychological survival being the isolation and withdrawal from colonial civilization. The persona of the maroon in the structure of slavery represented independence, resistance and self-determination while invoking fear for both slave masters and slaves (Brown 20). Slaves were driven by their pride, defiance, alert consciousness and love for freedom. Their love for freedom was, however, a major trait that pressed them to oppose slavery by fleeing from the plantation to become maroons (Vété-Congolo 79).

Marronnage ‘laid the groundwork for an uprising that united slaves across plantations and in so doing enabled them to smash the system from within in their struggle for freedom (Roberts 12). The act of marooning was practiced collectively or individually; discreetly or violently; temporarily or permanently (Bona 36). Also often described as *petit marronnage* – an “individual fugitive act of truancy”, – and *grand marronnage* – a collective and definitive flight usually outside of the plantation of origin and results in the creation of growing communities of maroons (Roberts 10; Béchacq 205). Roberts explains that the practice of marronnage revolved around the notion of distance, movement, property, and purpose, arguing that these four pillars were interrelated in helping slaves realize physical, psychological, social and metaphysical freedom (9). Both male and female slaves actively engaged in the act of marooning. Moreover, while male slaves often escaped permanently, women slaves gravitated more towards a form of temporary flight and also went over short distances (Stevenson 150)²³. Laguerre asserts that the concept of the maroon during the period of slavery was

²³ Stevenson also argued that there were lesser percentage of female runaways slave than the men stating that of the over 500 slaves fugitive slaves that were advertised in the Alabama newspaper between 1820 and 1860, 15% were female slaves (150). One of the reasons for a low percentage of female maroons during this period is due to a reason previously explore in chapter one; female slaves especially mothers were emotionally bond to slavery because of their children. See chapter 1 on slavery and the *négresse*.

practiced at different levels of intensity and differed according to the slaves, the place and the period. Likewise, the response it received from slave masters and the consequence for a slave maroon was different according to the aforementioned conditions:

Ce phénomène était pratiqué avec une intensité variable selon les acteurs, les lieux et les époques : les conséquences d'un départ en marronnage n'étaient pas les mêmes selon que l'esclave était né ou pas sur l'île [...] ; le phénomène touchait aussi bien les villes que les campagnes et permettait donc des stratégies de fuite ou de déguisement très diverses. (qtd in Béchacq 205)

Additionally, after their act of marooning and settlement on different islands, maroons "suffered different fates according to the topography of the islands where they operated (Glissant 267) just as slaves experienced different systems of slavery influenced by the geography of enslavement referenced in chapter 1.

In this chapter, I employ the concept of marronnage as a trajectory to surviving and escaping the intergenerational trauma of slavery in the reading of Agnant's *Le livre d'Emma*. This chapter questions how marronnage as a historical form of resistance and survival is re-lived in post-slavery by the black female body. What are the different forms of marronnage that the *négresse* develops in her performance of marronnage as a trajectory of surviving the intergenerational trauma of slavery? I seek to integrate marronnage as a re-conceptualized form of resistance and survival in post-slavery through the persona of the *négresse* to literarily redefine this concept beyond the historical interpretation of flight and highlight a plurality of the forms and meaning of marronnage through Agnant's narrative.

In order to understand why the concept of the maroon becomes relevant in criticizing the *négresse*, it is important to stress again, the understanding of post-slavery as a regeneration of the past in the present and the metaphorical transformations of its imageries. Understanding the relationship between the concept of marronnage, the *négresse*, trauma and post-slavery is essential to grasping the ways in which marronnage is not only thought about as a post-slavery theoretical approach in the reading of Agnant's text but also in absorbing how the marronnage as a trajectory for survival manifests in the diasporic world of lived experiences (Roberts 11). According to

Payet, the criticism of marronnage through the persona of the *négresse* provides a different and new perspective to this notion. Payet notes that previous studies that have theorized the concept of marronnage and slave maroon have obliquely addressed the question of gender variation in the practice. These studies tend to masculinize the concept of marronnage as an act predominantly masculine (10), “all the more so because history has not retained the name of female maroons [...]” (Vété-Congolo 75). As a result, the role of the *négresse* maroon in the slave resistance has been unrecognized. Therefore, in theorizing the place of the *négresse* in marronnage, one is able to highlight the role that the *négresse* played in slave resistance, survival outside of the plantation, and in the creolization of cultural and linguistic identity (Payet 10). Recognizing the role of the *négresse* in the concept of marronnage, Payet adds, re-humanizes the general persona of the maroon (10). This trajectory of criticism also helps to establish different evidence that enlarges and problematizes the content of representation of the black female body.

Marronnage in post-slavery literary criticism

Marronnage, according to Glissant and Dash, is central to the imaginative discourse of the Caribbean (xli) and has become a way of describing cultural acts, reactions, and adaptation which indicate leaving the imposed structure, abiding and performing in an exterior space (Brown 21). Roberts argues that because previous studies of marronnage are usually viewed from an anthropological and historical perspective, marronnage tends to be treated with an inflexible historicist reasoning. This relegates its imagery to a confined time period and isolationist conception (Roberts 10). Whilst the notion of marronnage goes beyond its factual notion of flight – especially in literary criticism – its criticism has been limited by Afro-centered ideology to focus its definition on flight, resistance, and survival (James 1-8). Scholars in Caribbean literature have over the years grappled with the concept of the maroon in their search for a Caribbean aesthetic (James 8). However, contemporary fictional narratives are drawing from the features of the historical maroon (Lalla 2) in order to create a post-slavery maroon persona and literary aesthetics of the maroon. In his essay *Les Parcours du marronnage dans l'histoire Haïtienne*, Béchacq writes that the socio-political structure of

post-slavery that is trapped in the complex traditions of the past, allows one to criticize the historicity of marronnage beyond the practice of slavery and to conceptualize marronnage as a practical notion and at the same time an analytical notion (204). The persistent traditions and transformations of slavery in post-slavery, as James puts it,

has led to a resurgence of the ethos of the maroon. The consequent psychosocial, political, and intellectual thrust towards indigenous reform has created transformations of original seventeenth-century maroon characteristics, spawning...a maroon theory in which terms such as “cultural maroonage” and “psychological maroonage” have specific meanings and need to be explained. (7)

Thus, the contemporary conceptualization of marronnage in post-slavery functions as a way of reinterpreting a history which continues to evolve in the present (Béchéacq 235).

The reinterpretation of marronnage as an analytic notion in the structure of post-slavery conserves and draws its definition from its historical principle of flight, resistance, and survival. Marronnage, in Caribbean literature, is the most explored concept of social interaction, constructed from the rejection of the hegemonic relationship between slave masters and slaves (Béchéacq 220). Through its literary and theoretical reinterpretation, marronnage, “devient une notion signifiante pour relire les stratégies d’adaptation des populations assujetties [dans une espace raciale post-esclavagiste]” ‘has become a significant notion in reviewing the adaptation strategies of a subjugated population existing in a racialized space’ (Béchéacq 220). This reconceptualization of marronnage in post-slavery and the evolution of its practice function as the core from which a semantic plurality of marronnage can be invested and passed on (Béchéacq 231).

There is, however, limited literature that attempts to come to terms with marronnage as an aspect of the slave experience. According to Braithwaite, there are only two fictional accounts in English (known to him) which have attempted to use the narrative of the maroon, the maroon experience, and maroon communities. In *Black Albino* (1961), author Namba Roy, who happened to have been a slave maroon himself, failed to portray meaningfully the maroon experience by writing a romantic tale of brave warriors and internecine conflict between maroons. In the other fictional narrative, *The Secret ladder* (1963), author Wilson Harris, a Guyanese born writer, however, instigates

new perceptions into the concept of marronnage but is guilty of literary misrepresentation of the maroon (Brathwaite 88). Brathwaite argues that this lack of literary appreciation of the maroon is due to Eurocentric indoctrination, as very few Caribbean writers are aware of the existence of maroon communities and the few writers who seem to be aware are “too cut off to conjure line or metaphor from this matrix” (88).

Marronnage and the *négresse*

Marie-Célie Agnant is a Haitian writer born in Port-au-Prince. She immigrated to Quebec in 1970 and worked as a French teacher, translator, and interpreter. Today she spends her time writing poems, novels, and children books. Her works though rooted in history, reflect contemporary social reality. Agnant explores through her fiction, topics such as racism, exile, memory, the *négresse* and her contemporary representation and lived experiences. She also explores the interrelationship between the past and the present²⁴.

Le livre d'Emma, her second novel, explores the lived experience of a post-slavery *négresse*, accused of infanticide and detained in a psychiatric hospital, where she must be evaluated for her mental stability while awaiting trial. Born in Haiti, Emma's earliest memories included her mother's inability to love her because of the circumstances that surrounded her birth. Fifi, her mother, was a victim of sexual violation by slave masters. Growing up, Emma constantly struggles to reconcile past histories, including the lived experiences of her mother and the generations of *négresse* before her on slave plantations. Meanwhile, Emma also struggles with the effects of past history on her contemporary diasporic experiences. In her struggle against stereotypical representations of slavery and the conflict of history and remembering, Emma develops rhythms of survival and resistance through marronnage.

Agnant's narrative of Emma recycles lived experiences of slave maroons to redefine the period of post-slavery in relation to the transformation of the oppressor –

²⁴ See <http://ile-en-ile.org/agnant/> for biographical reference

slave master –, and the space of oppression – the slave plantations. Also, she recycles these experiences to deconstruct the persona of the maroon in post-slavery while defining Emma as the representation of a *négresse* maroon in the historical context as well as in the socio-racial system of post-slavery. It is compelling to analyze the portrayal of Emma as bearing the traits of a maroon but also the radical attitudinal changes that her character presents in order to highlight and create a post-slavery definition of marronnage and its aesthetics.

The representation of the maroon did not exclusively imply a positive idea of freedom, resistance, and heroic stories, but also conveyed negative representations. However, these negative representations form a continuum among the multiple reinterpretations of marronnage as it exhibits in the socio-political landscape of post-slavery (Béchacq 232). Therefore, though slave maroons and the act of marooning have not generally served as “models of revolt and hope in the past, they do now in contemporary Caribbean literature, where their motifs appear constantly in one form or another²⁵. Agnant rewrites these negative representations of the maroon in a way that allows the *négresse* to strive against racial hierarchy and gender superiority and also creates a space for the *négresse* to voice and perform her individual concept of marronnage (Vété-Congolo 80)

The persona of Emma introduces a theoretical discourse that is based on the essential notions of feminism and resistance that is embodied by the figure of the maroon (Vété-Congolo 74) in which the *négresse* maroon wishes to break the limitations of her representations. Emma expresses different trajectories of survival in her desperate search to escape a world that misrepresents and marginalizes her; in which the traumatic experiences of slavery are being transmitted from one *négresse* to the other through spoken narrative, in the case of Emma to Flore, and by blood, in the case of Emma to her child, Lola.

²⁵ See Afterword by Ann Armstrong Scarboro in *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, 1992

Béchacq notes that marronnage in post-slavery is born of a collective rememorying caused by the transmission of historical and official memory (220). This rememorying stirs up a consciousness to the marginalizing structure of post-slavery in the black female body in order to posit a form of resistance. Vété-Congolo notes that “Consciousness is a key disposition to marronnage that is consequently internal and external” (79). In post-slavery, marronnage is a result of the *négresse*’s consciousness to the representations of slavery in the contemporary structure, hence, the need to transcend those representations. From her active consciousness, the performance of marronnage by the black female body in post-slavery “commence avec la réactivation des rythmes et mémoires de résistance” ‘begins with the reactivation of the rhythms and memories of resistance’ (Bona 41) present in the *négresse*’ consciousness. Whereby the *négresse* ripostes different forms of marronnage that bear resemblance to slave maroons in order to survive the new slave master as trauma in the new plantation as diaspora in post-slavery. Béchacq argues that the comeback of the maroon as an act of survival in the present structure resides in the conflicting relationship between history and memory (Béchacq 204). This trait of rememorying influences the contemporary experience of the *négresse* and her performance of marronnage as a form of survival. Thus, marronnage in the structure of post-slavery becomes a metaphor to represent flight from the slave master and the plantation that has been internalized in the form of trauma and that haunts the *négresse* through her contemporary diasporic experience. It is flight and survival in the face of trauma and resistance by a misrepresented black body, that is the *négresse*, in order to achieve an existential space of freedom in a marginalizing world. In his essay *the African presence in Caribbean Literature*, Braithwaite conceptualizes two forms of slave survival: physical and psychological marronnage. Even though Braithwaite did not provide a vivid meaning to these concepts, he highlights “suicide, accommodation, escape, [and] rebellion” as the rhythms of slave resistance in slave structure (87). Nevertheless, in post-slavery criticism, these two types of marronnage have been assigned specific definitions that also help in understanding marronnage as a literary theory and in the reading of Agnant’s narrative.

Physical Marronnage

In the construction of the *négresse* through the middle passage, the body, and soul of the *négresse* was the first target by the white master (Bona 39). Bona notes that the black female body was subjected to an identity amnesia in order for her to be easily enslaved: “Au-delà des corps, ce sont les âmes que la machine d’esclavage mutile [...] le maître tente de retrancher l’esprit, la mémoire, la personnalité; une âme végétative oppose bien moins de résistance” (Bona 39)²⁶. Drawing from this fact, the body of the *négresse* also becomes the first support to the *négresse’s* resistance and to Afro-American counterculture in the existing structure of post-slavery. In the face of identity amnesia and constant delineation of her contemporary experiences by past lived experiences, the *négresse* mobilizes pieces of her fragmented memory, and her ruptured culture and tradition (Bona 43), employing her body to combat and emancipate her identity.

Le livre d’Emma opens with this form of corporeal marronnage as Emma’s first riposte at representation and trauma that she experiences in post-slavery. This resistance reveals the notion of an entrapped soul and the struggle to exist in the black female body, which Emma describes as “objet de convoitise et de répulsion, de désir et de haine réunis” ‘the object of lust and repulsion, of both desire and hate’ (Agnant 108; Ellis 136). Flore soliloquys: “l’âme d’Emma se trouve ainsi prisonnière de la folie qui s’est emparée de son corps” ‘Emma’s soul is imprisoned in the madness that has taken over her body’ (Agnant 11; Ellis 13). The black female body embodies the curse of the middle passage, the plantation and the representations of her identity that were constructed through those experiences.

cette malédiction est venue des cales des négriers est telle que le ventre même qui nous a porté peut nous écraser. Et la chair de ta propre chair se transforme en bête à crocs et, de l’intérieur, déjà te mange. Pour cela Lola devait mourir [...]. Comme moi, Lola était condamnée. (Agnant 162)

²⁶ See Bona *les Métamorphoses du marronnage* (37-42) for further explanation on the animalization and zombification of the slave and the black body.

That curse from the holds of the slave ships is such that the very womb that carries us can crush us. And the flesh of own flesh transforms itself into a fanged beast and eats you up from within. That is why Lola needed to die [...]. Like me. Lola was condemned. (Ellis 199)

Through gestation, however, the curse is transmitted in the womb and it births the persona of a “négrillonne”²⁷ that must embody the trauma of a historical experience. Therefore, what is to be Emma and Lola’s lived experiences as *négresses* in post-slavery, were predefined by past experiences of the middle passage. By transmission of historic trauma, the *négresse*’s post-slavery experience is therefore marked by the constant struggle to “vivre à l’intérieur de cette peau placée à l’envers” ‘to live inside [her] inside-out skin’ (Agnant 122; Ellis 150). According to Emma, the *négresse* does not only wish to escape this cursed skin but must kill her children in order for them to also escape:

Nous voulons fuir notre peau de *négresse*, comme on fuit la nuit et ses démons. Ainsi nous abandonnons les nôtres, nous faisons mourir nos enfants, nous fuyons jusqu’à notre ombre (Agnant 108)

We want to run away from our black woman’s skin like one shuns the night and its demons. Thus, we abandon our own people; we kill our children; and we flee even from our own shadow (Ellis 135).

In this context, physical marronnage is no longer the literal flight from plantation but, “ruin/vestige, shred of breath, vital possession of the dispossessed, becomes the survival rhythm from which transformation may proceed” (Brathwaite 89; James 8). Through Emma, ruin and the shred of breath is expressed first, through the killing of her child Lola who was born with the curse of her black female body. By killing her child, Emma, first, re-lives the historical practices of slave *négresses* – who through abortions and infanticide – save their children from the horror of the slave experiences.

Infanticide “has always been the background of the slave age” (Gupta 3). According to Gupta, economic reasons were a major factor in the killing of infants during slavery, however, this act continues to “exert an unfortunate influence” in the post-

²⁷ See Agnant 153 and glossary for contextual meaning

slavery structure (2). Although, Gupta's claim contradicts fictional narratives such as in the case of Sethe in *Beloved* and Emma in *Le livre d'Emma*, because these two fictional protagonists did not commit infanticide to the economic loss of their slave masters but the gain of their children, whose innocence they wished to protect from the corruptible experience and trauma of slavery. In this case, infanticide was an act of resistance that also manifested in the form of mercy killing – euthanasia (Gupta 3). These two situations are very evident in Emma's defense, however, the choice of traumatized slave mothers to kill their child have often been misunderstood for its literalness. Nevertheless, I rely on Glover's definition of non-voluntary euthanasia²⁸, of "killing someone supposedly in its own interest, but where he is either not in a position to have, or not in a position to express any views on the matter" (Glover no. pag) in Emma's defense. Emma channels a mother's love and sovereignty to save her child from the fate that history as pre-designed for her and the historical curse that is to mark her lived experiences. Emma's infanticide – which consequently led to the release of suppressed history and a repressed voice – is also marked by the *négresse* resistance to put an end to the destruction of her persona that she enables through procreation. The birth of a new *négresse* which is dehumanized by the transmission of curse and representations that is to structure her post-slavery experience is to the *négresse*, Agnant argues²⁹, a form of destruction: "pour Emma, transmettre par le sang revient à transmettre une malédiction et elle veut rompre avec cette malédiction, elle ne veut pas détruire [...]" (Tervonen 217). Hence, to continue to birth the *négresse* by blood is to continue to reproduce personae that will be enslaved by the "slave master as trauma" in post-slavery. In killing her child, Emma not only breaks the curse that is maternally transmitted but also resists the maternal enslavement that the slave master had subjected her to in slavery and that continues to assert a significance in post-slavery.

Infanticide also poses a heightened argument "over whether the mother, in fact, kills her child in order to save herself rather than her child" (Caesar 113). Caesar, however, clarifies that "a mother can conceivably kill a child in order to protect her own

²⁸ See Jonathan Glover's *Causing Death and Saving Lives: The Moral Problems of Abortion, Infanticide, Suicide, Euthanasia, Capital Punishment, War and Other Life-or-death Choices*.

²⁹ See *Transmettre par la parole, pas par le sang*, Entretien de Taina Tervonen, 2005

self-possession because she feels enslaved by her (the child), and not only because she would save the child from slavery (113). Caesar's argument is arguable because, the structure of slavery maternally enslaved the black female body. If she was ever freed from slavery, she, however, remained enslaved by motherhood. Therefore, to kill your child was to free the mother of her colonial motherhood.

Emma also expresses a more radical form of marronnage through her suicide. Though this form of marronnage echoes a message of death, death to the black female body takes a literary meaning of a return to the ancestral country (Bona 42). Towards the end of her narrative, Agnant expresses the idea of a utopian return towards the ancestral home, metaphoric to Césaire's "retour au pays natal". In the struggle against racism that typifies the *négresse* experience in the diaspora, Emma must retake the slave ships and retrace her route on a journey to an ancestral beginning. She affirms "qu'elle reprendrait un jour la route des grands bateaux" 'that she would return to the route of the big boats' (Agnant 163; Ellis 201). Central to this statement is the proposition that the post-slavery *négresse* is consigned as long as she remains in the diaspora, to a space that marginalizes and ignores both her past and contemporary experiences. So, to truly escape the trauma of her history, she must "retrouver le chemin dont on l'a détourné" 'return to the path from which [she has] been diverted' (Agnant 138; Ellis 170). Glissant explains "we must return to the point from which we started [...] not a return to the longings for origins, to some immutable state of Being, but a return to the point of entanglement, from which we were forcefully turned away" (26)

However, retracing the route for the *négresse* transcends a spatiotemporal voyage, because, for the *négresse*, her physical body is not involved in her journey, it must be left in the diaspora where it was dehumanized. Nevertheless, her soul and blood, which she withheld from white representation, must make the return. In a conversation with Flore, Emma metaphorizes the way the *négresse*' blood must return:

Le sang, [...] quitte le corps en gros bouillons amers, et pénétrer avec colère dans les entrailles de la terre pour retrouver le chemin dont on l'a détourné. Quand tout sera terminé, mon sang s'en ira rejoindre celui de Kilima, de Rosa, d'Emma avant moi, et des autres. (Agnant 137-138)

Our blood, [...] leaves our bodies in large bitter bubbles and angrily seeps into the entrails of the earth to return to the path from which it's been

diverted. When everything is finished, my blood will rejoin that of Kilima, Rosa, the Emma who came before me, and the others. (Ellis 169-170)

The concept of the blood leaving the body of the *négresse* in the above lines is similar to Césaire's symbolic use of the heart as the means of return in his book-length poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. Césaire writes:

Partir. Mon cœur bruissait de générosités emphatiques.
Partir...j'arriverais lisse et jeune dans ce pays mien et je dirais à ce pays
dont le limon entre dans la composition de ma chair: J'ai longtemps erré
et je reviens vers la hideur désertée de vos plaies (Césaire and Irele 61)

To flee. My heart was full of generous hopes. To flee... I should arrive
lithe and young in this country of mine and I should say to this land whose
mud is flesh of my flesh: "I wandered for a long time and I am returning to
the deserted foulness of your wounds." (60)

By writing Emma's suicidal end at the end of the novel, Agnant introduces through her protagonist an ideological discourse of "radical marronnage" that attaches freedom to non-existence and allows the black female body to assert a radical individuality in the performance of marronnage. Also in this form of marronnage, the definition of freedom is made to transcend spatial existence. Emma believes that the place of death for the *négresse* denotes not just her total freedom from trauma but also a place of eternal presence where the *négresse* continues to assert her voice in the continuous struggle against alienation. Therefore, the death as experienced by the *négresse* does not denote a definitive absence, but the beginning of a new existence. Through her aunt, Mattie, Emma understands that a dead *négresse* is only a fallen *négresse* and therefore she never accepted their death as a form of total absence:

Mattie ne disait jamais des femmes qui avaient fait le grand voyage
qu'elles étaient mortes, mais qu'elles étaient tombées, une façon de dire
qu'elle n'acceptait point leur absence ou leur défaite, parce qu'une femme
pour Mattie, c'était une guerrière. Une guerrière ne meurt pas (Agnant
122-123).

Mattie never said the women who had made the big voyage were dead,
but that they had fallen down; a way of saying that she didn't accept their
absence or their defeat, because, for Mattie, a woman was a warrior. A
warrior doesn't die (Ellis 151).

She equally believes that the *négresse* is not given the right to be dead and silent: “Nous, les *négresses*, lorsque nous mourons, nous ne pouvons nous en aller pour toujours. Nous n’en avons pas le droit [...] puisque celles qui restent ont encore besoin de nous” ‘We black women, when we die, we can’t go away forever. We don’t have that right [...] since those who remain behind are still in need of us’ (Agnant 123; Ellis 152).

Psychological marronnage

Additionally, Emma exhibits psychological marronnage, through solitude, and withdrawal, in this case, James argues, manifesting in the form of internal disease (8). In her childhood, dreams were to Emma a form of marronnage that she uses to escape the trauma of her existence. She affirms :

C’est l’année de mes quatre ans, je crois, que j’ai commencé à répéter mes rêves, pour ne pas les oublier. Pour répéter un rêve, on n’a qu’à fermer les yeux et refaire, en sens inverse, le chemin du rêve (Agnant 58).

During the year I turned four, I think, I started to repeat my dreams, so I wouldn’t forget them. To repeat a dream, you simply close your eyes and follow in reverse order the path of the dream (Ellis 73).

Emma does not only find happiness in her dreams, she also uses her dreams to assert her presence in the world and reconstruct her black and feminine identity. Emma is able to accept her skin and the fate that it imposes on her but uses her dream to transform her reality.

L’instant du rêve, je suis heureuse. Je force l’univers entier et Fifie à tenir compte de mon existence [...]. Ce moment où je tente de retrouver le fil de mon rêve me sert également d’échappatoire [...]. C’est aussi le moment des grandes décisions. Si je ne peux changer ma physionomie, il faudra forcer les gens autour de moi sinon à m’aimer, du moins à tenir compte de ma personne [...]. Peu à peu, je me transforme. (Agnant 59-60)

For the moment of the dream, I am happy. I am forcing the entire universe, and Fifie, to take my existence into account [...] the moment during which I am trying to get back to the thread of my dream also serves as an escape [...]. It’s also the moment of the big decisions. If I

can't change my physiognomy, I'll have to force the people around me, if not to love me, at least to take my personality into account [...] little by little, I am transformed. (Ellis 74-75)

This act of marooning through dreams, according to Emma, transcends the notion of survival because it also allows the black female body to destroy all forms of slave transformations and re-inscriptions that qualify the *négresse's* diasporic experiences. "Dans ce rêve, tu détruis tout. Il n'est plus question de survie. Il n'est plus question de survie. C'est un rêve de tempêtes, de grands vents et d'affrontements" 'In this dream, you destroy everything. It's no longer a question of surviving. This is a dream of tempests, gales, and confrontations' (Agnant 120; Ellis 148)

Emma also uses spoken narrative as a form of psychological survival and to transmit the traumatic experiences of slavery to the next *négresse*. From Balaev's explanation of trauma as holding the "ability to interrupt consciousness and to be transferred to non-traumatized individuals", she argues that this form of experiencing trauma privileges the act of narration as the primary source of survival" (Balaev 151). Through this trajectory, however, Emma introduces a form of "oral marronnage". Emma chooses to transmit the trauma by spoken narratives because it was a means through which she could articulate the killing of her child to Flore and to the white patriarchal justice system as a historical practice of slave *négresses*. She is able to mention through her narratives that the killing of her child was a revamp of what past *négresses* did in slavery, by committing abortions to save their children the horror of the slave experience (Tervonen 217). According to Gilbert, she transmits not just the trauma of slavery but also uncovers the lived experiences of forgotten *négresses* in order to bear witness to these experiences (3).

Moreover, contrary to the destruction that the transmission of trauma by blood creates in the persona of the *négresse*, Agnant responds to the concept of marooning through spoken narratives as a form of construction (Tervonen 217), a form of not only surviving but also bearing witness through dialogical acts of narration (M. G. Henderson 15).

Therefrom, Emma prefers the form of oral marronnage through her narratives because she does not wish to destroy but to construct (Tervonen 217). Through dialogical narration, the black female body remembers, repeats and work-throughs her historical memories to re-order these memories into self-constructed “satisfying narratives”. Therein, she can integrate her contemporary reality, and according to Kelly Olivier, “begin to repair damaged subjectivity by taking up a position of speaking subjects” that was shut down by white hegemony (M. G. Henderson 16). This trajectory of marronnage as a form of construction spawns the experiences of what Emma terms a “true *négresse*”. The persona of Flore – the interpreter, hired to translate Emma’s narratives because she also refused to exhibit her oral marronnage in the language of the slave master – bears witness to this experience. Flore finds herself caught in the web of this tragic tale by historical relationship, and gradually, she begins to identify with Emma and the historical narratives of the *négresse*: “Je me suis attachée à la patiente [Emma]. Par solidarité...à cause du sang...ce même sang...” ‘I got attached to the patient. Through solidarity...because of our blood...that same blood...’ (Agnant 164; Ellis 201).

Flore also feels compelled to be reborn by Emma’s narratives and the history of the ancestral *négresse* in order to reinterpret her life and post-slavery lived experiences (Proulx 1251): “Je ne suis plus une simple interprète. Petit à petit, j’abandonne mon rôle, et je deviens une partie d’Emma, j’épouse le destin d’Emma” ‘I am not simply an interpreter. Little by little, I abandon my role; I become a part of Emma; I embrace her destiny’ (Agnant 18; Ellis 21). Prior to meeting Emma, she was a *négresse* without the consciousness of her black identity and its representations. Emma accused Flore of ignorance of her historical identity. According to Emma, Flore’s ignorance plays a major role in the post-slavery representation of the *négresse* and the curse that continues to haunt her identity:

Tu es la, à répéter pour les blancs tous mes mots sans en manquer un seul. Tu crois peut-être qu’ils te verront autrement que ce que tu es ? Qu’ils t’estimeront un peu plus ? Ignorante, va ! [...] Tu ne sais rien de la vraie histoire. Tu crois sans doute que tes cheveux couleur de paille et tes yeux faits pour tromper la nuit, tu crois qu’à cause de ça ils t’épargneront ? Hélas, plusieurs pensent comme toi ! Et c’est pour cela que la malédiction du sang nous poursuit. (Agnant 22-23)

You are here, repeating all my words for these whites, without missing a single one. Is it perhaps because you believe that they will see you for something other than what you are? That they will appreciate you a little more? Come on, you fool [...] you know nothing of the real story [...]. You probably believe that your straw-coloured hair and your eyes, yes, your eyes made to fool the night... Because of that you believe they'll spare you? Alas, many think like you! And that's why the curse of our blood continues to hound us. (Ellis 28-30)

However, Flore was unable to identify as a *négresse* because she had no historical knowledge of the notion, but feels herself experiencing a rebirth through Emma once she was introduced to the history of the black female body. Flore declares: “Emma me met au monde, elle réinvente ma naissance” ‘Emma is bringing me into the world; she is reinventing my birth’ (Agnant 167; Ellis 204). Emma emphasizes Flore’s renaissance as the construction of a “true *négresse*”. “Lorsque tu auras fini ton travail avec petit docteur, tu seras peut-être sur le chemin pour devenir une vraie *négresse*, une *négresse* debout” ‘when you have finished your work with the little doctor, you will perhaps be on the path to becoming a true black woman, a stand-tall black woman (Agnant 58; Ellis 74). The concept of a “true *négresse*” is to be understood, as Emma implies, as one who is conscious of the history and experiences that constructed her persona; she also understands the limitations of her representations but refuses to let them define her contemporary lived experiences. By definition, Agnant implies that the true *négresse* is a “standing black woman”, bold and strong, who has never had anything but her dreams, that screams for all those who deny her the right to be heard and refuses to let the representations ascribed to her define her experience (Agnant 58-62).

Agnant also expresses through her protagonist that surviving trauma through narratives must become the destiny of all black female maroons, to pass along the “true” history of slavery: that is a non-Eurocentric slave narrative fueled by white hegemonic privilege and oppression. Schultz maintains that “past histories must be must be recovered, transmitted and often translated repeatedly in order to maintain a connection to one’s cultural identity and history” (58). Contemporary black female writers are engaging these histories and experiences of the slave *négresse* in a bid to establish a recreated “cultural identity which is true to [her] collective past and free of western authority and influence” (Schultz 58). Thus, since all that Emma knows of her true history

was conveyed to her by her aunt Mattie, she must, in turn, maintain the line of connection with history and with her ancestors and pass on the history and so must Flore and every *négresse* after her (Agnant 125).

Through her narrative, Emma also breaks the silence of black women. According to Emma, a lot of history and lived experiences of the *négresse* remain unspoken. The *négresse*, on the other hand, represses her history because she does not know how to express them, and because she is afraid of the pain of remembering the past, so she pretends to forget:

Moi, je connais la vraie raison des silences [...] celle dont on ne soufflé jamais mot. Elle est quelque part au fond de nous, entre la pudeur et le secret. Personne n'en parle parce que cela fait trop honte, trop mal. On n'en parle pas parce que cela nous rappelle le temps longtemps, le temps du fouet et de l'injure [...] nous préférons les silences pour faire semblant d'oublier" (Agnant 155)

I know the true reason for the silences [...] the reason they never mention. It's somewhere deep down inside us, between discretion and secrecy. No one talks about it because it's too shameful, too hurtful. We don't talk about it because doing so reminds us of the long ago days [...] we prefer silence as a way of pretending to have forgotten' (Ellis 188)

Finding her voice through her narratives, Emma halts the silence that disregards the black female body and erases the memory of black experiences. She breaks the silence that keeps the internalized slave master alive inside her.

Emma's survival through spoken narratives is met with an alternative form of marronnage – the creolization of her history and experiences in preparation “toward[s] adaptation into the Afro-Caribbean societal matrix” (James 10) when she returns to this ancestral identity. In hypothesizing the process of creolization as a form of marronnage in the persona of the *négresse*, I must point out the early developments of the notion as emerging “from violent encounters that were colonial and imperial”. Likewise, its theoretical principles as “an open-ended process [...] when acculturation, transculturalization, mixing, and hybridization occur with enough intensity” (Lionnet and Shih 24; Haring 21). Occurring as a state and a process, as Glissant puts it, “creolization is, first, the unknown awareness of the creolized” – a state –, and a process “expressed in moments of identifiable irrationality”, and “structured in comprehensive attempts at

liberation (3). However, because of the flexible and unpredictable processes of creolization (Lionnet and Shih 23-24)³⁰, contemporary forms also tend to resonate in unpredictable forms depending on the structural dynamics like in the context of post-slavery.

Flore's expertise as an interpreter was required in Agnant's narrative because Emma refused to recount and transmit her ancestral history and lived experiences in the language of the slave master – the language of oppression “that undermined and denigrated [her] identity with bastardized terms” (James 82). Here, we are faced with another form of marronnage that is quintessential to slave maroons, in which Emma takes an antagonistic position to reject and to self-liberate from Eurocentric socio-cultural hegemony. Her performance of creolization does resonate as a process “structured in [her] comprehensive attempts at liberation” as Glissant observes (3). And a process of “transposing and adapting” Emma into the ancestral culture that she is to return in order to achieve a cultural conversion of her subjected persona (Vété-Congolo 74). By virtue of her resistance, Emma plays a historic role in creolizing the linguistic and cultural identity of the *négresse*, while asserting the *négresse*'s role in historical and post-slavery marronnage.

Before the choice of spoken narrative, Emma had used her thesis – which was rejected by a French patriarchal academic institution as a form of ideological marronnage (Vété-Congolo 86). Through it, she explores the platform of French academia in “an attempt to gain mastery over elusive or defeating histories” (Morgenstern 101) and to resist Eurocentric narrations of the *négresse* and her slave experiences. More so, literary narratives that engage in the writing of the black female body such as explored in this thesis, present a literary form of resistance in the face of Eurocentric discourse. It is the point in which “the oral is confronted with the written”

³⁰ See Francoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, *Creolization of Theory*, Duke University Press, 2011, for explanation on the theoretical shift in regional and historical notions. They argue that concepts do begin as “historically and contextually specific before they become widely disseminated” (23) on one hand. On the other hand, different interpretations and analysis evolve overtime depending on structural dynamics. Pointing out the notion of “contemporary creolization” and the point at which creolization and cosmopolitanism can overlap.

(Glissant 4). Here, Glissant states, “secret accumulated hurts suddenly find expression; the individual finds a way out of the confined circle, [making] contact, beyond every lived humiliation, a collective meaning, a universal poetics, in which each voice is important, in which each lived moment finds an explanation” (4). Through her narrative, Agnant can be said to exhibit literary marronnage, finding literary expression for a repressed history. She produces a fictional narrative of anguish, not specific to the experience of Emma who finds herself rejected by the same society, which contributed to her identity and definition, but also the anguish of the entire human race (Tervonen 216). Agnant’s consciousness to post-slavery discourse enables her to present a *négresse* whose social consciousness to the position of the black female body, her representations and the will to survive her contemporary limitations led her to actually exhibit marronnage in post-slavery (Vété-Congolo 79).

The concept of marronnage – through the persona of the *négresse* maroon in the structure of post-slavery – helps the *négresse* to establish her role and presence in the historic slave resistance and to articulate her resistance against post-slavery white patriarchal representation. In this structure, the persona of *négresse* maroon is to be understood through Vété-Congolo’s view, as “the embodiment of any form of transgression and also signifies those who oppose repression covertly and metaphorically” (79). In this definition, marronnage is made to transcend the resistance feminism of the slave *négresse* to include contemporary “free” *négresses*; and black feminist ideology to accommodate non-black feminist resistance. However, in sticking to the persona of the *négresse*, marronnage transcends the resistance trajectory of the slave *négresse*. It also functions as a resistance trajectory to different forms of historical and human-induced trauma suitable to the contemporary *négresse*, depending on the sociological structure of post-slavery in which she exists and experiences trauma. This structure is defined by the variations in individual agents, culture, politics, education, religion, etc., of the diasporic space. The social actions and relationships of the individuals in such environments will determine the *négresse*’s path of survival. As Walsh notes, the individuals are “agents who produce and sustain the society” (12), similarly, they are agents that produce and determine the lived experiences of others through their interactions. They define certain situations, subjects, and histories through different lenses of interpretation in order to organize their actions and interactions with

others, which then form the lived experiences and survival trajectories of the others (Walsh 11-18).

For instance, I, as a post-slavery *négresse* in the diaspora, embody the persona of the *négresse* maroon through the production of this thesis. This is because I am conscious of the different forms of racism that structure my post-slavery diasporic space, and I am informed of my history and blackness by the social actions and relationships with agents in my post-slavery society. I abreact with a similar academic and ideological marronnage to Emma in Agnant's narrative in order to deal with the representation and trauma of my diasporic lived experiences. Therefore, the individual *négresse* embodies a unique individuality and resistance that functions with the kind of representation and trauma she is faced with, that is dependent on geographical and socio-cultural structures of the space she occupies. This kind of individualized resistance proves the model of a semantic plurality of marronnage that Béchacq proclaims.

Chapter 5.

Conclusion: Contemporary (re)representations of the *négresse* in literary narratives

The progressive nature of this thesis has been to examine the persona of the *négresse*, the trauma of her lived experiences and her survival and resistance trajectory. To achieve this aim, I have retraced the historical construction of the *négresse*'s identity through the institution of slavery and the role that slavery played in dehumanizing her identity.

Although slavery and its enabling institutions have been outlawed, and the black female body has been "liberated" from the slave master hegemonic structure, her constructed representations continue to ripple through the contemporary diasporic space influencing how the black female body is read and represented in literary narratives (Brooten 2; Spillers 68). First, this is so because the structure is seeped in the constructed historical representations; secondly, because the black female body and her behavior are so easily seen as depraved (D. Roberts 51-52); and thirdly, because these re-representations are reproduced through internalized memory of individual agents that construct the society. In the contemporary structure of post-slavery, it has become difficult to imagine a non-marginalizing representation of the black female body. hooks notes that the racial-gendered exploitation of the black female body did not only crush her identity to the economic gain of the slave master during slavery, but this historical moment led to a devaluation that has been internalized in the psyche of the *négresse* and continue to define her experience in the contemporary diaspora (*Ain't I a Woman* 52).

Spillers states that,

dominant symbolic activity, the ruling episteme that releases the dynamics of naming and valuation, remains grounded in the originating metaphors of captivity and mutilation so that it is as if neither time nor history, nor historiography and its topics, shows movement, as the human subject is "murdered" over and over again by the passions of a bloodless and anonymous archaism, showing itself in endless disguise (68).

These dominating dynamics of naming and seeing of the *négresse* in post-slavery, Halbwachs states, inhabit the collective imagination and influence the consciousness of descendants of slaves and non-slaves (Rossi 318). Additionally, these representations are still noticeable and readable through the racist and sexist profiling of the black body whether such a black body exist in the Caribbean, the Americas, England or the post-independence Africa (Sharpe 3). In her criticism of black sexuality and its contemporary contradictions, Robert notes that there abound contemporary criticisms that recount the myths of black female promiscuity and unattractive asexuality. Hence, it is difficult for "contemporary black women to resist these sexual [and racial] stereotypes without bowing to the dominant values that delight in placing black female bodies on display or to the requirements of respectability that tend to silence sexual expressions" (42).

Contemporary criticism and black liberation struggle have made few if any revolutionary interventions in the area of race and representations (hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* 1). These criticisms can however, be read as "a chapter in the history of patriarchy and sexual repression" (Flannigan-Saint-Aubin 49). White culture, on one hand, has retained the representations of the *négresse* since slavery because they "recognized that control over images is central to the maintenance of any system of racial domination" (hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* 2). On the other hand, contemporary black women writers – that conceptualize the lived experiences of the *négresse* – have also internalized these representations and continue to reproduce them through their narratives. Contemporary narratives are "recruiting the past for the sake of the living, establishing who we are in relation to who we have been" (Hartman 14).

Although contrary to narratives that silence their protagonist's voice, Mae Henderson argues that contemporary narratives and criticisms of the black female body

explore the use of her voice in recounting both her historical and contemporary lived experiences. Agnant's *Le livre d'Emma*, as well as all of the other narratives employed in this research, "continue to shape the contemporary literary criticism [of blackness] and an evolving theoretical tradition that remains rooted in orality". They demonstrate "liberational and salvific impulses attached to the assertion of voice" in a marginalizing structure in which the black female body is a historical victim of "vocal suppression" and "self-silencing" (2). These contemporary narratives of the *négresse* are "impossible writing[s] which attempt to say that which resists being said" (Hartman 12).

On the other hand, the goal of this literary re-representation, is not only to give voice to the *négresse*, as Hartman argues, but also to re-imagine "what cannot be verified, a realm of experience that is situated between two [spatiotemporal continuums: the past and the present]" (12). These narratives use the historical experiences of slavery to engage the contemporary black female body and her lived experiences, treating her as an archive for literary reproduction. In conceptualizing the persona of the *négresse*, contemporary narratives present the black female body as a "walking text" a "bodily archive", a "fleshy reminder" of the hegemonic system that was structured by racial-gendered subjectivities (Henderson 3; Ruiz 3).

Hartman, Ruiz and Henderson's observation opens up two side of an argument: the use of the *négresse* as corporeal archive and corporeal reminder. On the notion of archive, Schultz argues that the "process of identity creation requires a revision of the past, recuperating lost and rejected experiences" (59). The struggle for the post-slavery *négresse's* identity reconstruction requires a revisioning of her past experiences, especially because these historical experiences still influence "attitudes about black women's bodies and character" (Roberts 42), interfering with their adjustment to their new host culture and preventing them from fully participating in contemporary society" (Schultz 58).

In revisioning the past, Agnant for instance, conceptualizes the persona of Emma as an extension of the "historically established restrictive representations" of the black female body (Jeffrey 5). She presents slavery as a revolving reality that traps the *négresse* from evolving in post-slavery. According to Barreiro, Agnant's narratives

contribute to the scholarship of memory. She explores the wounds that history left on the *négresse* in order to literarily present slavery as a contemporary subject as well as a historic subject (107). Emma was similarly subjected to a Eurocentric marginalizing yardstick that subjected her to historical racial and gender misrepresentation. I observe, for instance, the intellectual limitations she faced in the hands of White academia, which however, comes irrespective of her acquired occidentalization and literacy. Emma's doctorate thesis was rejected by the French patriarchal education system. She was considered as having no rights to propound to Eurocentric school of thought the aftermaths of the dehumanizing structure of slavery that they institutionalized; after all, she is still a *négresse*:

Après tout, qui était-elle pour prétendre garder un homme ? juste une femme à la peau bleue, à la peau sans une once de lumière, pour qui l'existence ne doit être que rêves [...]. n'est-ce pas la même chose qu'ils ont pensé lorsqu'ils ont rejeté ma thèse ? qui est-elle pour prétendre écrire à son tour l'histoire ? que veut-elle prouver ? de quel droit ? (Agnant 116)

After all, who did she think she was to keep a man? Just a woman with blue skin, skin without a glimmer of light, for whom existence should be only some dreams [...]. Isn't that the same thing they thought when they rejected my thesis? Who does she think she is to be aspiring to take a turn at writing history? What does she want to prove? By what right? (Ellis 144)

Therefore, for the *négresse* to find a self-identity in post-slavery, she must as Spillers puts it, "strip down through layers of attenuated meanings, [...] assigned by a particular historical order, and there awaits whatever marvels of [her] own inventiveness" (Spillers 65).

Moreover, opposing scholarship argues that the narratives of the *négresse* through her historical reality of slavery are reinforcing the damage already done by slavery, representing her as a corporeal reminder of white privilege and hegemony. They re-subject the black female body to both historical and literary expressions of subjectivities. These narratives are, according to Ruiz, "an ideological trap" (12). However, a change in the narrative can begin to reflect on the society that the black female body wishes to create (Brooten 15).

Nevertheless, there is a need for the literary representation of historical experience in order for the post-slavery *négresse* to heal in post-slavery. Going back to the persona of Denver as a post-slavery *négresse*, for instance. Denver's arrested development in the present, her inability to separate her identity from the history of slavery and maternal past, and to create a post-slavery self-representation "shows how urgent is the need for a story" (Wyatt 74) through which the post-slavery *négresse* can make sense of the past and explore a path of surviving the past in the present. There is a need to express representation and traumatic experiences in narrative, to "translate the traumatic past into narrative and thus lay it to rest" (Wyatt 77). Literary narratives, contrary to opposing criticisms, function as the means "to explain, to cure or to show why it is that we can no longer simply explain or cure" (Caruth, "Introduction" 2). For instance, Baby Suggs's disjointed narrations of traumatic moments in the past helped in liberating Denver from the temporal paralysis she shares with her mother" (Wyatt 74). This explains that the black female body can decolonize her identity and subdue the post-slavery hegemonic "slave master" if she allows her body to experience trauma in retelling her traumatic slave experience.

On the other hand, the *négresse* may be required to silence her histories in order to survive, because "some histories are so violent we would not be able to live our daily lives if we did not at least temporarily silence them" (Schwab 46). Other times, she might need to be aware of them in order to develop different maroon trajectories. Therefore, resistance and survival of the *négresse* through whatever means, are neither tragic nor hopeful, their outcomes are however, subjective. Although my political feminist standpoint does not promote the historical resistance of infanticide, euthanasia, suicide – which are considered illegal crimes –, and the different forms of marronnage that the *négresse* produces physically or psychologically, neither does it condemn her decision to any of these actions. This does not make me less feminist; it only makes me a conscious *négresse*.

I was at a conference in May 2016 at the University of Calgary where Marie-Célie Agnant was invited to speak about her new book *Femmes au temps des carnassiers*. In the moment of discussion, in a room overpowered by whiteness and white feminist perspectives, a white professor accused Agnant of not being a feminist. In

her opinion, infanticide and the taking of one's life as a show of resistance do not represent feminist ideologies. Who then is a feminist? And what are feminist ideologies? Agnant's argument makes a case that posits that feminism holds different meanings that are determined by racial histories and orientations, and I must say I am in favor of Agnant's argument. I believe that resistance and survival trajectories, especially with the persona of the *négresse* in view, become subjective to interpretations and actions of others and of the *négresse* as noted earlier. Though we might share a collective history and trauma, resistance in the black female body is defined by an individualized diasporic reminder of those experiences.

Therefore, the resistance feminism of the *négresse* is different from the feminism that informs Eurocentric criticism, because we face different histories and therefore survive differently. In order to understand the impossible position of the *négresse* that steers up radical resistance, one must be a *négresse* herself. There is no language to explain this resistance or such a particular feeling; rather one must embody the *négresse's* persona to understand it. As Toni Morrison once said in an interview, "if I'm going to imagine what it takes to kill your baby, then I have to put in my arms my baby...get into the feelings, and when that happens and it's difficult...you don't get ornamental with that, you get very still, very clean-limbed, and very quiet"³¹. Maybe this white professor or any other person who was at the conference might not have been quick to judge Agnant's feminism if they took a moment to get into the feeling and embody the persona of Tituba, Sethe or Emma.

Finally, according to Schwab "some lives will forever be overshadowed by violent histories, including colonial invasion, slavery [etc.]" (42). Though the black female body may experience a process of identity reconstruction and emancipation, it seems difficult to separate her present from her past, as it has been impossible to achieve that plight. Why is this so difficult? We would ask. Deborah White makes clear that,

³¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RP6umkgMRq4>

The black woman's position at the nexus of [...] sex and race mythology has made it most difficult for her to escape the mythology. Black men can be rescued from the myth of the Negro, indeed, as has been noted, this seems to have been one of the aims of the historical scholarship on slavery in the 1970s. They can be identified with things masculine, with things aggressive, with things dominant. White women, as part of the dominant racial group, have to defy the myth of woman, a difficult, though not impossible task. The impossible task confronts the black woman. If she is rescued from the myth of the Negro, the myth of woman traps her. If she escapes the myth of woman, the myth of the Negro still ensnares her. (28)

Therefore, the persona of the *négresse* through contemporary narratives is presented in historically, literarily, and theoretically static states because it is impossible for the *négresse* to express an identity progression and to project towards the future as long as she is captive of her historical naming. She "remains a nameless negress despite her individualized physiognomy" (Smalls 4) and therefore "trauma with its concomitant strategies of survival, becomes a chronic condition" (Schwab 42) in the post-slavery experience of the *négresse*.

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