

**Chronopolitical Interventions in the Afterlife of Slavery:
Forms and Functions of Temporal Disruptions
in Contemporary Speculative Neo-Slave Narratives**

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Declaration

Certain ideas and passages from chapter 2.1 have been published as:

- “Reading Time Travel in Octavia E. Butler’s ‘Kindred’ as Sankofa,” *COPAS — Current Objectives of Postgraduate American Studies*, 18.1 (2017).

Certain ideas and passages from chapter 4.1 have been published as:

- “‘She was standing on the edge of a new world and so ready to jump’:
Renovating the Black Technoscientific Genius Trope in Rivers Solomon’s
An Unkindness of Ghosts,” *SFRA Review*, 329 (2019). 99-103.

1. Reading Temporal Disruptions as Chronopolitical Interventions in the Afterlife of Slavery

With the publication of films such as Steve McQueen's *12 Years a Slave* (2013) and TV series like the 2016 remake of *Roots* or WGN's *Underground* the historical enslavement of Africans and their descendants in the Americas seems to have become more visible in recent years. In addition to increased mainstream medial representation, memorials of transatlantic enslavement have also started to appear in public spheres all over the world: in 2007, two new museums dedicated to histories of transatlantic enslavement opened their doors: the *Slave History Museum* in Calabar (Nigeria) and the *International Slavery Museum* in Liverpool (UK); in the same year, Liverpool collaborated with the cities of Cotonou (Benin) and Richmond, VA (US) – each of those cities now exhibits an identical “Slavery Reconciliation Statue.” In 2014, the *Whitney Plantation* in Wallace, Louisiana, was opened as “the only plantation museum in Louisiana with an exclusive focus on the lives of enslaved people” – the first of its kind in the United States (Amsden).

This increased public awareness of transatlantic enslavement is not limited to specialized museums but has also started to enter mainstream cultural institutions. In March 2019, I ambled through the aisles of the *Sigmund Samuel Gallery of Canada* in Toronto's *Royal Ontario Museum* marveling at Canadian historical artifacts from various eras, when I glimpsed what appeared to be a black Victorian style dress in one corner. Getting closer to the exhibit in question I realized that the dress in fact consisted of a multitude of braids, surrounded by cotton balls and tufts of black hair. Intrigued, I read the caption by African Canadian artist Karin Jones who created the piece in 2014:

For me the Victorian Mourning dress is a symbol of sadness, “high” culture, the British Empire, and the imposition of feminine beauty norms. I have made one out of African “hair”- actually a synthetic material created specifically for use in Africa-style braiding techniques. The work underlines African hairstyles as a craft as refined as any decorative art produced in Europe. It alludes to the invisible labour of the thousands of Africans who contributed to the wealth of the British Empire. It also references the story of Sarah Baartman, an African woman whose silhouette helped shape 19th-century European fashion. The dress rises from of bed of cotton bolls and African hair bolls, a mythic figure born of the cross-cultural forces of colonialism, commerce, and slavery. I wear my African-Canadian identity much as a Victorian woman would have worn this type of dress: proudly, but uncomfortably, shaped and also constrained by it (Jones).

Encountering this piece of art amidst furniture and portraits (of white Canadian men and British emigrants who settled in Canada) from the actual Victorian era had a

profoundly disorienting effect on me as it made visible the absence of artifacts connected to black Canadian history from the rest of the gallery.¹



Figure 1: Jones 2014. *Worn*. Photograph taken by Alena Cicholewski 22 March 2019.

¹ I later learned that this exhibit is part of the museum's *Of Africa* initiative, which is a conscious effort "to disrupt the linear authoritative narratives and promote a more significant and affectively relevant engagement with historical collections" through "the introduction of multiple voices and perspectives," as curator Silvia Forni outlines in her article (197). She explains that the relationship between the *Royal Ontario Museum* and the African Canadian community has been fraught for a long time, after the museum organized an exhibition called *Into the Heart of Africa* in 1989 (Forni 198). The exhibition was criticized as "another instance of violence whereby Africa

However, as the caption illustrates, the exhibit does not stop at the commemoration of historical transatlantic enslavement, but instead draws attention to general histories of the exploitation of women (from enslaved women on cotton plantations to Victorian textile factory workers) and connects those past struggles to contemporary topics, such as the politics of black women's hair, conventional ideals of feminine beauty or Afrodiasporic identity politics. By juxtaposing historical figure Sarah Baartman² with privileged 19th century European women who felt pressured to adhere to (in some cases physically harmful) standards of beauty, the artist emphasizes the encompassing nature of misogynist violence, but also shows that it affects women in different ways, depending on their social status – which itself can be related to racialized ascriptions. It is this depiction of complex, entangled histories and their legacies that is also reflected in my object of study – contemporary anglophone speculative neo-slave narratives.

The antecedents of those neo-slave narratives are the 18th and 19th century biographies of and autobiographies by enslaved Africans and their descendants who were forced to work in the Americas, commonly known as slave narratives. Adhering to strict formal conventions, traditional slave narratives usually feature a homodiegetic first person narrator who relates their experiences as a slave that involve the inhumane treatment of enslaved people by their slaveholders as well as depictions of slave resistance and their quest for freedom that is ultimately successful. The creation of traditional slave narratives was supported by both American and British abolitionists who used those publications to change public opinion in their favor (Fisch 2; Gould 11; Moody 113). Due to this purpose, most traditional slave narratives focus heavily on the inhumane cruelty of enslavement to inspire compassion for the enslaved and moral outrage at slave traders and plantation owners in their readers.

To make slave narratives more appealing to its (mostly white) target audience in the British Empire and the US, their authors often wrote their

was once again framed through the eyes of the colonizers” and at that time, the museum failed to address the concerns voiced by African Canadian activists (Forni 199).

² Sarah Baartman (1770s-1815) was a Khoikhoi woman from a region that today belongs to South Africa. She was captured and brought to England in 1810 and exhibited in so-called freak shows. Between 1810 and 1812, Baartman appeared at different fairs in England and Ireland. In 1814, she was taken to Paris and put on display there, until her death in 1815. After her death, Baartman was dissected and parts of her body (among them, her genitalia) were conserved and displayed in the Musée de l'Homme in Paris. In 2002, Baartman's remains were repatriated and buried in South Africa. For more information, see Crais & Scully.

autobiographies in the style of already established genres such as “spiritual autobiography, the conversion narrative, the providential tale, criminal confession, Indian captivity narrative, sea adventure story, and the picaresque novel” (Gould 13). Although they worked within different literary genres, most traditional slave narratives followed certain conventions:

The prototypical text begins with a confession of ignorance as to the narrator’s age, circumstances of birth, and parentage, recounts the separation from family members and the proximity of a presumed (white) father, represents the unspeakable violence of masters, overseers, and slave breakers, and celebrates the achievements of literacy, mental fortitude, and finally successful escape and ostensible freedom in the north (Brown 4).

This is particularly true for slave narratives written by men, while women’s slave narratives often set their focus on the threat that enslavement poses to their propriety and their families as they “strove to arrest whites’ production of racist stereotypes of black women as primitive barbarians, beasts of burden, slave breeders, indulgent mummies, sex-hungry Jezebels [or] tragic mulattas” (Moody 113). Instead of those stereotypes, female authored traditional slave narratives “offered proof that in spite of the conditions bondage imposed on their lives, slave women nonetheless pursued and led meaningful, worthy lives, and they had the intelligence and skill to translate those lives into powerful rhetoric” (Moody 114). Moody further explains that formerly enslaved “women’s narratives often articulate how the biological factors of reproduction (viz., childbirth and motherhood) and heterosexual sex acts (viz., rape, breeding, and concubinage) distinguished women’s experiences of bondage from men’s” (118). As eight of the ten novels that I analyze in detail have been written by female authors, an awareness of traditional slave narratives by women will be helpful when investigating how neo-slave narratives handle question of gender and gendered forms of oppression.

After the official abolition of slavery (in 1834 in the British Empire and in 1865 in the United States), traditional slave narratives continued to be published in the United States, their focus shifting from abolition towards stories of progress emphasizing the new opportunities that the recently added thirteenth amendment afforded African Americans (Brown 5). In the 1930s, the Roosevelt administration employed researchers as part of the *Works Progress Administration* who interviewed more than two thousand formerly enslaved African Americans and recorded their stories (Brown 5). Afterwards, traditional slave narratives did not

attract much attention until the mid-1960s, when the American Civil Rights movement led to an increased awareness of and interest in African American history. As 18th and 19th century slave narratives attracted the scholarly attention of historians in that period of time, African American authors such as Margaret Walker or Paule Marshall used fiction to critically engage with the topic of African and African American enslavement (Smith 170). Their novels would later be known as the first neo-slave narratives. While the first traditional slave narratives originated from both the British Empire and the United States, the public interest in those accounts waned after abolition and did not increase until the appearance of the first British neo-slave narratives in the late 1980s. Thus, traditional slave narratives hold different positions in American and British literary history: while the genre constitutes the beginning of an African American literary tradition in the United States (Gates xiv), its status in the history of black British literature is marginal as the starting point of this tradition is often (mistakenly) located “after the Second World War, in the wake of the arrival of the *Empire Windrush*, the ship that in 1948 brought Jamaican immigrants to London and was therefore assumed to be the starting point of the black presence in Britain” (Ledent 17). Since I analyze American, British and Caribbean neo-slave narratives, this information is important for me in order to evaluate how the novels in question engage with their respective literary tradition.

The first written use of the term “neo-slave narrative” can be found in the transcript of a 1984 interview of scholar Reginald Martin with author Ishmael Reed who describes David Bradley’s 1982 novel *The Chaneyville Incident* as such (Babb 218). The term was later conceptualized and elaborated upon by Bernard Bell in *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition* (1987). First defined as “residually oral, modern narratives of escape from bondage to freedom,” Bell later employs it “to classify contemporary hybrid novels influenced by the structure and style of fables, legends, and slave narratives” (Bell 1987: 289; Bell 2004: 415). Bell’s designation became popular and was eventually taken up by Ashraf Rushdy in 1999. In *Neo-slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form*, Rushdy attributes the emergence of neo-slave narratives – which he defines as “contemporary novels that assume the form, adopt the conventions, and take on the first-person voice of the ante-bellum slave-narrative” – to the “intellectual and social conditions associated with the civil rights and Black Power movements” in

the 1960s (Rushdy 1999: 3). In time, the term has evolved into encompassing the novels of authors worldwide that engage with the topic of enslavement in general and continues to generate wide academic interest.

Just like the genre of neo-slave narratives has developed in time (e.g. from an exclusively US American genre to a transnational literary phenomenon from the 1980s onwards), the academic discourse on the genre has also changed. In a 2016 book chapter, Margo Natalie Crawford developed the concept of the post-neo-slave narrative which she distinguishes from the earlier notion of (particularly realist) neo-slave narratives by its “refusal to fill in the gaps:” instead adding previously untold stories about the experiences of enslaved individuals, post-neo-slave narratives “linger in the unknown” (71). Crawford clarifies that the “post” in post-neo-slave-narrative is not meant in the temporal sense, but rather pointing to a conceptual difference (71). In contrast to neo-slave narratives that work within established structures of representation, “post-neo-slave narratives pressure readers to [...] read slavery against received epistemologies” by – for example – refusing the traditional “from slavery to freedom” narrative pattern that is typical for neo-slave narratives (71). Instead, post-neo-slave narratives put emphasis on “the depths of the unknowability of the psychic hold of slavery” (74). While this project shares with Crawford the idea of “read[ing] slavery against received epistemologies”, I do not classify the ten novels that I analyze as post-neo-slave narratives, because they are not so much concerned with the potential “unknowability of the psychic hold of slavery”, but on the contrary work to make this psychic hold visible through the use of chronopolitical interventions. Instead of “linger[ing] in the unknown” those novels put forth alternative modes of knowledge production that are based on imagination and incite empathy in the readers.

This particularly applies to neo-slave narratives that deviate from the realist genre of historical novels about enslavement. From its inception onward, the neo-slave narrative genre has not only comprised realist novels, but also those with non-realist elements. Examples include Ishmael Reed’s 1976 novel *Flight to Canada* which features anachronistic elements or Frank Yerby’s 1979 novel *A Darkness at Ingraham’s Crest* in which the use of magic plays an important role (Dubey 779). Whereas realist neo-slave narratives in the form of historical novels reflect the emphasis on authenticity that dominated the traditional slave narrative, their speculative fiction counterparts offer unique opportunities to illuminate the afterlife

of slavery, as the “break from narrative realism can release African American [as well as other African diasporic] writers from established protocols of racial representation in literature, freeing them to invent unexpected new futures” (Dubey 779). Those neo-slave narratives then, do not only associate themselves with the tradition of eighteenth to nineteenth century-slave narratives, but also pay homage to Afrodiasporic traditions of speculative fiction writing which have often engaged with questions of racialized oppression and how to resist against it as seen in Sutton E. Griggs’s *Imperium in Imperio* (1899) or E. A. Johnson’s *Light Ahead for the Negro* (1904) (Babb 253): “In early black speculative fiction, fantasy and utopianism are used to create a venerable past, argue for respect in the present, and envision a better future for all members of the human race” (Babb 255). This tendency that Babb attributes to late 19th and early 20th century African American speculative fiction is – as I will argue – also present in Afrodiasporic neo-slave narratives that include non-realist elements. While historical novels of enslavement have the tendency to regard the topic as a past historical event, speculative fiction incarnations offer unique opportunities to illuminate the legacy of transatlantic enslavement, as the “break from narrative realism can release African American [as well as other African diasporic] writers from established protocols of racial representation in literature, freeing them to invent unexpected new futures” (Dubey 779). As such, speculative neo-slave narratives often point out potential repercussions of those events in present and future – and in some cases even question conventional ideas about temporality such as the existence of past, present, future as separate entities.

Thus, speculative neo-slave narratives tend to be “about more than enslavement. Novels within this genre use histories of slavery to query race, gender, sexuality, place, and to debate the degree to which past practices remain current” (Babb 218). Thus, neo-slave narratives explicitly link contemporary forms of anti-black violence to histories of enslavement and their ideological foundations. This idea of a continuity of anti-black violence has been conceptualized as the “afterlife of slavery” by cultural historian Saidiya Hartman who argues that “black lives are still imperiled and devalued” through racist discrimination in (for example) the judicial system, the education and healthcare sector and on the labor and housing market (Hartman 2007: 6). In her 2007 monograph *Lose Your Mother: A Journey*

Along the Atlantic Slave Route, Hartman explains how her engagement with her own family history shaped her view on contemporary African American life:

I wanted to engage the past, knowing that its perils and dangers still threatened and that even now lives hung in the balance. Slavery had established a measure of man and a ranking of life and worth that has yet to be undone. If slavery persists as an issue in the political life of black America, it is not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too long memory, but because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment. I, too, am the afterlife of slavery. (6)

Hartman's direct reference to the poem *I, too* that Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes published in 1926 can be read as an expression of disappointment with the progress that has been made (or rather not made) in the more than eighty years between the publication of Hughes' poem and Hartman's work. Whereas Hughes' poem expresses hope that the living conditions of African Americans will change for the better in the foreseeable future ("Tomorrow, I'll be at the table When company comes. Nobody'll dare Say to me, 'Eat in the kitchen,' Then. / Besides, They'll see how beautiful I am And be ashamed— / I, too, am America."), Hartman's book illustrates that "black lives are still imperiled and devalued," using racist discrimination in the education and healthcare sector and on the labor and housing market as examples. The term quickly entered the academic discourse of African American and Africana studies and is frequently used, not only but particularly by scholars identifying or identified as Afro-pessimists, see e.g. Dubey (not directly associated with Afro-pessimism) or Weinbaum. In this dissertation, I will employ Hartman's concept whenever I address the long-lasting consequences of the enslavement of Africans and their descendants. As this project shows, speculative neo-slave narratives often refer to structural racism which makes them well suited to explore questions concerning the afterlife of slavery.

Since the 1980s, neo-slave narratives have continuously received scholarly attention: in recent years, anglophone neo-slave narratives from outside the US have been discussed more frequently (Lysik, McCorkle, Muñoz-Valdivieso) and critics have started to apply the term neo-slave narrative not only to novels, but also to films and other works of visual art (Horton, Li, Wilker). Further topics widely

discussed are the ancestral presence in neo-slave narratives (Goyal, Milatovic, Patton) as well as approaches to neo-slave narratives from a queer studies perspective (Lewis, McCleese, Richardson). With a few exceptions such as Toni Morrison's Pulitzer Prize winning 1987 novel *Beloved*, academic criticism on neo-slave narratives has so far mainly focused on the realist representatives of the genre. Scholars who explicitly work on speculative neo-slave narratives include Sami Schalk whose 2018 monography *Bodyminds Reimagined* approaches speculative neo-slave narratives from a disability studies perspective and Michelle D. Commander who examines how speculative neo-slave narratives envision returns to Africa in her 2017 monography *Afro-Atlantic Flight: Speculative Returns and the Black Fantastic*. Among the critics who focus on speculative neo-slave narratives, there seems to be a consent that the temporal disruptions that frequently appear in the genre are "indications of a broader skepticism toward historiographical methods that stress the continual forward movement of time" (Salius 110). Despite this apparent consent, few publications have explicitly focused on the specific role of temporality in (speculative) neo-slave narratives. Whereas many scholars have employed concepts of haunting in order to make sense of how neo-slave narratives depict how "the past breaks into the present like a ghostly intruder, and the distance between then and now dissolves into a disorienting sense of simultaneity" (Dubey 789; haunting is also used in Duboin, Madsen, McCorkle, Moody, Vint 2007), I consider such an approach as too restrictive, particularly in the case of novels that question conventional notions of time as the idea of haunting presupposes a linear timeline.

Alternative methodologies that allow for a broader understanding of temporality have entered the academic discourse in recent years. Kristen Lillvis' 2017 monography *Posthuman Blackness and the Black Female Imagination* approaches both African American neo-slave narratives and contemporary Afrofuturist music from a perspective of posthuman blackness (a blend of posthumanism and black humanism, developed by Lillvis herself) concluding that "Afrofuturism's predictive, proleptive nature promotes not only liminal conceptions of time but also identity: as past, present, and future moments overlap, so do past, present, and future visions of blackness" (63). In contrast to her, Christine Montgomery employs the concept of pendulum time to read Arna Bontemps' 1936 (proto)neo-slave narrative *Black Thunder: Gabriel's Revolt:*

Virginia, 1800: “pendulum time oscillates between different times and spaces in enslaved communities to show how, even though Gabriel’s attempt for freedom is unrealized, the revolt itself does not fail because it inspires a collective awakening of consciousness and freedom” (141). Although this dissertation will neither use specifically posthumanism nor pendulum time for its analyses, I follow Lillvis’ and Montgomery’s line of thought insofar as I also focus on negotiations of temporality in neo-slave narratives and their effects. What sets my work apart from their approaches is its specific focus on Afrodiasporic (as opposed to exclusively African American) neo-slave narratives and how those novels question conventional notions of time in order to intervene in the afterlife of slavery and its potential futures. This project is more in line with Jennifer Terry’s exploration of Octavia E. Butler’s engagement with temporality “that sometimes works to disrupt received temporal regimes; probes how we experience, interpret, and shape time; allows new understanding of time and power; and indeed, offers its own theorization around such questions” (26). However, while Terry argues that such a “multi-layered, generative approach” to temporality is unique to Butler, I propose that a critical stance towards conventional notions of time is indeed a distinctive feature of many (if not most) contemporary speculative neo-slave narratives by a variety of authors.

I suggest that speculative neo-slave narratives employ temporal disruptions to draw attention to and make sense of the afterlife of slavery. I argue that this use of temporal disruptions enables speculative neo-slave narratives to not only reflect on the past, but to transform it for the purpose of envisioning different futures: either by using temporal disruptions to come to terms with the insidious trauma³ – that is the traumatization that marginalized people incur due to living in societies that constantly devalue and discriminate against them – of racialized enslavement and imagine a future free of this burden or by using those disruptions to deny closure, to raise awareness for continuities of anti-black violence and to demand a further engagement with both the history of racialized enslavement and its afterlife warning against a future in which such an engagement has not happened.

To be able to interpret those temporal disruptions in greater detail, I employ Kodwo Eshun’s concept of *chronopolitical interventions*: “By creating temporal complications and anachronistic episodes that disturb the linear time of progress,”

³ Cf. Root 240-241.

Eshun argues that revisionist historicities (and I suggest that this is also applicable to speculative neo-slave narratives) endeavor to “adjust the temporal logics that condemned black subjects to prehistory [and...] may be understood as a series of powerful competing futures that infiltrate the present at different rates” (297). Following this line of thought, media theorist tobias van veen explains that chronopolitical interventions can manifest as

the temporal production of counter-memories and counter-realities to combat corporate, whitewashed, or technocapitalist futures [... as well as] a historical recovery operation, in which erasures and evacuations of the unwanted, insurrectionary, or traumatic past are uncovered and put to use (van veen 2016: 80-81).

This dissertation examines speculative neo-slave narratives as a venue in which this temporal production can take place, both on the plot-level (e.g. through the inclusion of characters that transcend temporal boundaries) and through their formal narrative structure (e.g. by featuring non-chronological narrative modes). Building on both Eshun’s and van veen’s work, political scientists Lina Nasr El Hag Ali and A.T. Kingsmith consider chronopolitical interventions as “an alternative to the limitations of the linear past-present-futures terrain, [... which] emerges not only as a critique of the whitewashing of the past, but as an active generator of future narratives” (5). Their insights will be particularly useful for my analyses of speculative neo-slave narratives that question established notions of temporality such as the existence of past, present and future as separate entities.

Although Eshun’s article is very influential in the field of Afrofuturism, his concept of chronopolitical interventions was met with little critical response in other fields of research (particularly when compared to the other concepts he puts forth in this text, such as his idea of a “futures industry”). One of the few scholars from the field of literary studies who has repeatedly referenced chronopolitical interventions in her analyses of Afrofuturist texts is Lisa Yaszek (see Yaszek 2003/ 2005/ 2006/ 2015); this project builds on and expands her work as it seeks to operationalize the concept as a tool for examining temporal disruptions in speculative neo-slave narratives that explicitly engages with the political dimensions of temporality. These political dimensions concern particularly the question of what kinds of potential futures for Afrodiasporic people worldwide can be imagined and how (if at all) those futures will be still be influenced by slavery and its afterlife.

Starting from the premise that speculative neo-slave narratives work to represent transatlantic enslavement in a way that does not consider it a singular event in history but rather positions it in continuities of anti-black violence, this dissertation sets out to examine in which ways speculative neo-slave narratives negotiate the afterlife of slavery by adjusting the temporal logics of white Western heteropatriarchal hegemony. On that basis, I have developed the following guiding research questions: Which kinds of chronopolitical interventions tend to be used in speculative neo-slave narratives? How and to which effect are they employed? How does their use take up and influence notions of the afterlife of slavery? In how far does their particular inclusion of chronopolitical interventions reflect on the time period during which those novels were written? And what does their use of chronopolitical interventions imply about the futures imagined by speculative neo-slave narratives? These research questions will be explored in ten case studies by means of both close readings of selected passages as well as wide readings with diverse intertexts that are individually adjusted to each primary text. Following van veen’s insight that “[u]psetting received narratives of the past constitutes not just an intervention that deprograms the coordinates of the present, but reprograms the future [...] Sometimes, the best way to reimagine the future is to alter the past” (van veen 2016: 82), my corpus focuses on speculative neo-slave narratives that create counter-memories to established histories of enslavement. After sifting through a selection of more than thirty speculative neo-slave narratives, I narrowed down my preliminary corpus to novels written by Afrodiasporic authors that explicitly engage with questions of time in ways which challenge conventional notions of temporality. My final selection reflects different facets of chronopolitical interventions, including the crossing of temporal boundaries, alternate history, the character of the black technoscientific genius as embodying struggles for equality in Afrodiasporic past-future-presents, a critical engagement and potential subversion of capitalist concepts of time as well as Caribbean rhythmic time.

The first part “Transcending Temporal Boundaries” features two novels that put their contemporary female protagonists into the position of an enslaved African American in the antebellum United States: this happens through time travel in *Kindred* by Octavia E. Butler and through reincarnation in *Stigmata* by Phyllis A. Perry. As a result of the spatiotemporal transportation of their main characters, both neo-slave narratives turn their respective protagonists into a moral witness – a

survivor of a crime against humanity whose witnessing combines aspects of preferring criminal charges and expressing a lament for the dead who died as a consequence of the crime which the moral witness survived (Aleida Assmann 41-42, based on Avishai Margalit's concept as outlined in *The Ethics of Memory*). By physically experiencing the reality of their enslaved ancestors as contemporary protagonists, Dana in *Kindred* and Lizzie in *Stigmata* become moral witnesses who upon their return to their own (diegetic) present confront their social environment with their embodied testimony: Whereas Lizzie is ultimately able to communicate her experiences in a socially acceptable way through the production of art, Dana cannot find a way to share what has happened to her with anyone apart from her husband. Thus, both novels imply different visions for the future: while *Kindred* stresses the bleakness of a society that does not make room for commemorating the suffering of the enslaved, *Stigmata* has a slightly more hopeful outlook promoting visual arts as means of creating and sharing counter-memories.

For the second part "Alternate History as Afrofuturist Practice", I chose two neo-slave narratives that employ the genre of alternate history to imagine worlds without white Euro-American hegemony. *Lion's Blood* by Steven Barnes takes place in an alternative North America that is ruled by black African Muslims and tells the story of the unlikely friendship between the enslaved white Irish boy Aidan and Kai, the youngest son of the black Ethiopian plantation owner who has bought him. In the form of a coming-of-age story, *Lion's Blood* traces the personal development of both boys: in the end, plantation owner Kai becomes a sympathizer to the abolitionist movement and helps Aidan and his family to achieve their freedom. *Blonde Roots* by Bernardine Evaristo follows the story of 'whyte' English Doris (renamed Omorenomwara by her first slaveholders) from her abduction and enslavement by 'blak' Ambossans (the African inspired hegemonic group in the diegetic world) to her ultimately successful journey into freedom. The novel takes the form of historiographic metafiction⁴ thereby not only reversing the roles of enslaver and enslaved, but also questioning the foundations of historiography, as I will argue. Highlighting similarities and differences between both alternate history neo-slave narratives, the respective chapters will show how *Lion's Blood* points out

⁴ My use of this term follows Linda Hutcheon's definition of historiographic metafiction as "novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (5).

the inevitably biased nature of historiography and suggests interpersonal connections as a first step towards racial reconciliation, whereas *Blonde Roots* questions the validity and usefulness of any metanarratives in a postmodern way problematizing their identity-defining function.

The third part “Saved by Science” focuses on the representation of science and scientists in speculative neo-slave narratives. In Rivers Solomon’s *An Unkindness of Ghosts* a black enslaved protagonist who is an autodidactic scientist helps the enslaved population on the multi-generation spaceship where she is living with her medicinal knowledge. In Esi Edugyan’s *Washington Black*, formerly enslaved protagonist Wash experiences science as both empowering and simultaneously as an exploitative practice. I examine how *An Unkindness of Ghosts* and *Washington Black* engage with the trope of the black technoscientific genius of earlier Afrofuturist fiction. Whereas both novels emphasize the emancipatory potential of scientific knowledge without omitting the obstacles that a white supremacist society poses to black (aspiring) scientists, *An Unkindness of Ghosts* highlights how the black technoscientific genius can transform their whole community, while *Washington Black* is more interested in its protagonist’s individual journey and remains ultimately slightly more pessimistic about the revolutionary potential of the black technoscientific genius.

The fourth part “(Com)Modified Bodies” takes up the focus on science of the previous part and directs the readers’ attention to questions of genetic engineering and human enhancement. At the center of Tenea D. Johnson’s *R/Evolution* is African American Dr. Ezekiel Carter (another black technoscientific genius) who takes reparations activism to a biopolitical level by offering free genetic enhancements to poor African Americans hoping to offset the harm that structural racist discrimination causes. Whereas bioengineering is depicted as a potentially positive force for social change in *R/Evolution*, Stephanie Saulter’s *Gemsigns* features representations of people of color who are genetically modified without their consent to meet the demands of the labor market where bioengineering companies exploit them. Both *R/Evolution* and *Gemsigns* engage with questions of human enhancement through genetic engineering while explicitly connecting those considerations to the transatlantic enslavement of Africans and their Afrodiasporic descendants. Whereas *R/Evolution* suggests that genetic modifications can be used to compensate racist discrimination (but simultaneously complicates this simplified

notion), *Gemsigns* addresses the exceptional vulnerability of marginalized people to be commodified by technological progress instead of profiting from it.

In the fourth part “Rhythmic Time and Caribbean past-future-presents”, two speculative neo-slave narratives that engage with questions of Caribbean futurity take center stage. First, I analyze how Nalo Hopkinson’s *Midnight Robber* manages to disorient the readers’ temporal orientation by combining elements associated with past, future and present at each of its settings and I explain how the resulting disorientation opens up spaces for re-thinking historically established power relations. Next, I will show how the content and experimental aesthetics of Marcia Douglas’s *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* work to destabilize conventional notions of history and temporality. Arranging short chapters like tracks on mixtape, the novel jumps back and forth between diverse historical settings, memories and Rastafari inspired spirit worlds. Throughout both subchapters, I will use the concept of rhythmic time (based on the work of Wilson Harris) to make sense of how both novels connect Caribbean music, speech rhythms and landscapes to negotiations of temporality. While *Midnight Robber* imagines Caribbean inspired culture in the future and *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* engages explicitly with Jamaican history, both novels share unconventional narrative structures that work to critique the constructedness of linear temporalities and open up spaces for temporal negotiations inviting their readers to think about Caribbean pasts, futures and presents in new ways.

As this dissertation only examines ten novels in detail, my analysis of the use of chronopolitical interventions in speculative neo-slave narratives is by no means exhaustive, but rather conceived as a starting point for further research on the topic. The main corpus comprises a time span of almost forty years, with the first novel, *Kindred*, published in 1979 and the newest novel, *Washington Black*, published in 2018. All of the neo-slave narratives will be put into the context of their respective time of creation providing insights into the ways in which both Afrodiasporic attitudes towards and the general perception of histories of the enslavement of African people and their descendants in the Americas have changed in time. I argue that all ten novels reflect on their respective presents with regard to both the commemoration and medial representation of African/Afrodiasporic enslavement and the status of Afrodiasporic people in their contemporary societies. Additionally, I suggest that all ten authors also use the genre of the speculative neo-

slave narrative to think about potential futures which I will elaborate on in the corresponding analysis chapters.

2. Transcending Temporal Boundaries in Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred* (1979) and Phyllis Alesia Perry's *Stigmata* (1998)

1. Time Travel in Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred*

To examine how the incorporation of chronopolitical interventions enables speculative neo-slave narratives to not only reflect on the past but also negotiate its influence on the present and potential futures, I have chosen Octavia E. Butler's 1979 classic *Kindred* as my first case study due to the centrality of time travel to the plot and its explicit occupation with African American enslavement through its protagonist – who as I argue – is turned into a moral witness due to her personal experiences with and eventually as an enslaved plantation worker. *Kindred* tells the story of Dana, a 26-year-old African American woman living in 1970s California, who is inexplicably transported back to antebellum Maryland whenever her white ancestor and plantation master Rufus Weylin's life is in danger. During these trips, she is forced to share the fate of her ancestors and live the life of an enslaved African American. Dana repeatedly saves Weylin's life, and she is only able to return to her own time when her own life is at risk. In order to secure her own existence, Dana eventually involuntarily helps Rufus to rape her black ancestor Alice, whom Rufus drives into suicide afterward. After Alice's death, Rufus attempts to rape Dana, who kills him in self-defense, and thus regains her freedom and puts a stop to further time traveling.

In contrast to the kind of time travel that focuses on the mechanics of time travel and on the adventures of the brave time traveler (such as H.G. Wells' protagonist in *The Time Machine*), *Kindred* works in different ways: the exact mechanism of Dana's travels through time is never explained and the time travel destination does not provide her with opportunities for heroic deeds; instead, it constitutes an ultimate disempowerment for her.⁵ Ultimately unable to change her

⁵ While the traditional motif of time travel itself tends to reinforce conventional notions of temporality by treating past and present as spatiotemporally fixed destinations, *Kindred* evades this pitfall by merging past(s) and present(s) together in the protagonist's mind: the more Dana becomes aware of continuities of anti-black violence, the more difficult it becomes for her to orient herself temporally.

family's past, Dana can only bear witness to the atrocities inflicted on enslaved African Americans. Her return to 1970s California turns her into a moral witness – psychologically traumatized and physically scarred, Dana becomes a living proof for the cruelties that awaited black people in antebellum slave states. *Kindred* thus diverts the readers' attention away from intellectual musings about time travel technology and towards an emotional investment in Dana's personal story — a use of the science fiction trope of time travel which I investigate in this chapter. I have chosen the Grandfather Paradox and the Akan concept of Sankofa as two distinctive ways of thinking about time travel. While the Grandfather Paradox highlights the impossibility of changing the past, *Sankofa* centers the idea of achieving healing and empowerment through a return to the past. Both approaches will lead me to a reading of *Kindred* as a proto-Afro-pessimist text that emphasizes the continuity of anti-black-violence. My conclusion will evaluate the insights gained in the previous subchapters, particularly with regard to the protagonist's status as a moral witness, the novel's role in the (re)construction of cultural memory and its potential Afrofuturist implications.

Critics have repeatedly linked *Kindred* to questions of the cultural memory of African American enslavement: In 1986, Sandra Y. Govan positioned *Kindred* at “the junction where the historical novel, the slave narrative⁶ and science fiction meet,” lauding Butler as an author who renovates the historical novel (Govan 82). Further examples of scholarly works that have discussed *Kindred* as engaging in discourses of cultural memory include Missy Dehn Kubitschek's study *Claiming the Heritage* (1991) and Ashraf Rushdy's 1993 article “Families of Orphans: Relation and Disrelation in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*,” in which he argues that “Butler's orphan heroine shows us how an excavation of history can provide the orphan with a family — partially by relation and partially by disrelation” (Rushdy 1993: 155). Lisa Yaszek suggests that *Kindred* puts forward “a new mode of historical memory — one that, perhaps not surprisingly, both engages with and writes beyond the ending of its more conventional masculinist counterparts” (Yaszek 2003: 1063–64). However, when it comes to examining the role of time travel in *Kindred* most scholars avoid taking Dana's travels through time literally

⁶ Govan uses the term slave narrative to describe autobiographies by and biographies of enslaved or formerly enslaved black people that were published between 1703 and 1944 (80). In my chapter, I use the term traditional slave narrative for those texts.

and prefer to read them as symbolic representations. Eva-Sabine Zehelein, for instance, regards Dana's trips through time as "journeys of memory" and suggests that Dana's capacity for memory is her medium of transport (Zehelein 412). To Angelyn Mitchell, Dana's journey into the past is a "metaphoric Middle Passage" that transforms Dana from a free American citizen into a slave (Mitchell 43). Deborah Madsen connects Dana's time traveling to Sigmund Freud's concept of trauma as forced re-experience of the traumatic event and argues that "narrative techniques of time travel — taking the protagonist into the slave past — and haunting — bringing the past into the present — represent significant literary efforts to achieve a therapeutic witnessing of the traumatic history of slavery" (Madsen 70), while Marisa Parham claims that Dana's experiences in *Kindred* and their effects on the readers create "a memory over which one can now claim ownership, rememory" (Parham 1326). Sarah Eden Schiff reads *Kindred* as a "simultaneously fictional and metafictional attempt to make history and memory productively curative — to serve as both a recovery of repressed historical narratives and a recovery from repressed traumatic memories" (Schiff 108). Schiff regards the protagonist Dana and her ancestor Alice as "double consciousness"⁷ personified and argues that time travel offers

Dana the impossible opportunity to go back in time to the primal scene of the original trauma, before the consciousness doubled, before the self split, before the homely became unhomely, in order to be prepared for the traumatic moment in time and to defend herself against it. (Schiff 110)

The 'primal scene of the original trauma' is in this context antebellum enslavement in general and Rufus Weylin's rape of Alice in particular. While Dana can ultimately not evade enslavement, she can and does stop Rufus from raping her. These examples illustrate the tendency of critics to read time travel in *Kindred* as a metaphor — an inclination that is particularly evident in works that discuss the novel as African American literature.

In the last decade, however, alternative readings of time travel in *Kindred* have been put forth, which explicitly engage with the implicit future orientation of

⁷ The term "double consciousness" was coined by W.E.B. Du Bois in his 1903 work *The Souls of Black Folk*. He writes: "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, — an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (Du Bois 9-10).

the novel. Among them are Tiffany E. Barber, Kristen Lillvis, Alys Eve Weinbaum, Jennifer Terry and Sherryl Vint. Barber analyzes how *Kindred* uses “cyborg thematics and generic traits rooted in science fiction and fantasy as methods for imagining pasts, presents and, most importantly, alternative though not necessarily redemptive futures” (7). In contrast Barber who concludes that “*Kindred*’s narrative resists resolution” (17), Lillvis employs the concepts of liminal temporality and subjectivity derived from posthumanism to argue that “Butler’s temporal and subjective disturbances indicate not the inevitability of antiblack violence but the potential for black freedom” (91). Weinbaum reads *Kindred* as a critique of “sexual and reproductive slavery in neoliberalism” (Weinbaum 2013: 66) and argues that “Butler exposes historical continuities between the racialized and eugenic regime of the old dystopia and the neoliberal and governmental world” (50). Terry’s research focuses on the treatment of temporality in Butler’s work in general and puts *Kindred* into dialogue with Butler’s personal correspondence and her *Parable* duology concluding that “Butler’s engagement with time and movement in time stands as political, and as self-reflexively revealing the politics of time [emphasizing] the urgency and importance of interventions from the margins in time’s narrative” (45-46).

Vint contrasts *Kindred* with traditional depictions of time travel in science fiction in which “the emphasis is on control of the timeline, on ensuring that the dominance of one’s ‘kind’ persists into a future associated with progress” (Vint 2007: 243). She explains that this “can be associated with the Western paradigm of science as a relation to the world of dominance and mastery” (Vint 2007: 243). Vint attributes Butler’s different treatment of time travel to a specifically African American “relationship both to science and to the idea of the future” (Vint 2007: 243). She argues that “*Kindred*’s present-day setting can be understood as being in the future imagined by nineteenth-century slave narratives, a future in which slavery has ended [and that] *Kindred* focuses our attention on the fact that [this] future is not sufficiently different from the past [because] systemic racism persists in ways akin to the continuation of slavery” (Vint 2007: 243). In her article, Vint calls for “a rethinking of the relationship between African-American and fantastic⁸ literatures” (Vint 2007: 241) — a call that has been answered in the previous decade

⁸In this context, Vint uses “fantastic” as a generic term subsuming all non-realist works of fiction (241).

particularly by scholars working in the emerging field of black women's speculative fiction, such as Esther L. Jones (2015), Marie-Luise Loeffler (2012), and Venetria K. Patton (2013). My chapter engages with this line of thought on black women's speculative fiction.

To take a perspective on time travel in *Kindred* that takes both the concerns of African American and speculative fiction criticism into account, I divided my chapter into subchapters. My first subchapter will focus on the Grandfather Paradox: I will examine how this popular science fiction motif is employed and potentially subverted in *Kindred*. In my second subchapter, I will show how the Akan concept of Sankofa as healing by returning to the past is engaged in the novel. My third subchapter analyzes in how far the ending of *Kindred* can be read as conveying attitudes that have recently been subsumed under the paradigm of Afro-pessimism, before my conclusion evaluates my research results.

a. Illustrating the Inescapability of Historical Determinism through the Grandfather Paradox

After all... after all, what would have happened to me, to my mother's family, if I hadn't saved him? [...] His life could not depend on the actions of his unconceived descendant. No matter what I did, he would have to survive to father Hagar, or I could not exist. That made sense. But somehow, it didn't make enough sense to give me any comfort [...] If I was to live, if others were to live, he must live. I didn't dare test the paradox (Butler 27f.).

On her second trip to the past, when Dana finally realizes that Rufus is her ancestor, she immediately thinks of the grandfather paradox – a popular motif in science fiction literature and a well-known chronoclasm, “in which X goes back in time, kills his grandfather, thus prevents his own conception, making it impossible for him to go back in time and kill his grandfather, etc.” causing a logical contradiction (Gomel 335). The grandfather paradox and its implications have been debated by philosophers and physicists alike with results ranging from the conviction that time travel is logically impossible to various approaches to the solution such as the idea of a self-consistent universe or the theory of parallel universes as suggested by the many-worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics (Nahin 48). However, while Dana temporarily entertains the idea of a self-consistent universe, she does not “dare test the paradox” and thus finds herself in a strange dependency with her ancestor that culminates in Dana's involuntary

complicity in Rufus' rape of her female ancestor Alice (Butler 28). Whereas scholars such as Sherryl Vint claim that *Kindred*'s "concern is not with grandfather paradoxes, with securing the past, but rather with ensuring that the past is actually heard" (Vint 2007: 255) or that "Dana is not threatened by ontological destruction or in danger of causing a fantastic rift in space and time. [...] [T]he actual paradox she dares not test is that of her identity as a black American" (Robertson 374), I propose a different angle on this issue.

I argue that Butler consciously uses and subverts the conventional grandfather paradox to illustrate how slavery and its afterlife leave those affected by it devoid of any way out. Just like Nadine Fligel, I am certain that "Butler's introduction of the grandfather paradox to this slave's narrative is no mere playful moment of superficial self-awareness. *Kindred* plays with and against this paradox, turning it inside out" (Fligel 169f.). However, while Fligel asserts that "Dana's paradox is that she changes history in order to preserve it" (Fligel 177), I rather agree with Elana Gomel who suggests that "Dana is rendered impotent by the historical determinism" of slavery because of her positionality as a black woman in the antebellum era (Gomel 346). Although Dana tries to bring about changes by educating Rufus according to her own 20th century moral standards and by teaching some enslaved children on the plantation how to read, her interference does not have any perceivable effect neither in the novel's near future nor in its 1970s setting. In this respect, I agree with Jennifer Terry who observes that this "twisted take on the Grandfather Paradox [...] works to emphasize the cyclical, inherited nature of slavery's constitution of slaves and slaveholders, and its deterministic force within family units" (38). *Kindred* does not feature the dreaded butterfly effect that is often evoked in other time travel fiction in which time-travelers bring their superior knowledge and modern technological inventions to an earlier period often causing unforeseeable consequences in the future (Nahin 369). When Dana's husband Kevin suggests that Dana can use her 20th century knowledge to her advantage, Dana reminds him that African American survival in the antebellum era did not depend on cleverness alone:

[‘]Look, your ancestors survived that era – survived it with fewer advantages than you have. You're no less than they are.’

‘In a way I am.’

‘What way?’

‘Strength. Endurance. To survive, my ancestors had to put up with more than I ever could. Much more (Butler 45).

In fact, Dana’s knowledge of the future and her 20th century skills and attitudes prove to be rather harmful for her: The other enslaved African Americans on the Weylin plantation are prone to excluding Dana because of her “white” way of speaking, Rufus exploits Dana’s ability to read and write and Dana’s attempt to escape the plantation fails in spite of her theoretical knowledge about the Underground Railroad (also addressed in Levecq 177). The only historical information that Dana can use to her advantage is the fact that she is descended from Rufus’ daughter Hagar. Knowing this, Dana can finally escape both Rufus’ rape attempt and her arbitrary unforeseeable time travelling by stabbing Rufus to death. Through this ultimate act of resistance against her ancestor but by proxy also against the patriarchal white supremacist system of plantocracy, Dana regains her freedom, but must sacrifice her left arm to escape. By making the murder of one’s own ancestor the solution for Dana’s time travel dilemma, *Kindred* turns the grandfather paradox upside down violating its most important rule “Do not kill your grandfather!”. The death of the ancestor does not cause a logical rift in time but saves the protagonist from sexual enslavement.

This reversal of the conventional grandfather paradox gains even more weight when connected to African concepts of kinship as discussed in Patton’s *The Grasp That Reaches Beyond the Grave*, in which she examines novels that “are linked by the notion that life does not end with the grave [... suggesting that each of the analyzed] texts is illustrative of an African kinship system, in which ‘ancestors are still connected to their families, and continue to protect the living, to look after them and to act as their intermediaries” (Patton 9). While many African Americans think of Africans as their ancestors, Dana is intimately connected to her Anglo-American slaveholding ancestor Rufus, a fact that irritates her at first. Their kinship connection is so strong that it transcends space and time with Rufus being able to summon Dana from 1970s California to early 19th century Maryland whenever his life is in danger. However, in this case it is not the ancestor who protects his descendant, but vice versa: Dana completely loses control of her own life as she is unexpectedly transported back and forth in time. Instead of benefitting from her kinship with Rufus, Dana is both physically and psychologically harmed by it. While Afrofuturism tends to celebrate time travel because “the notion of

bending time erases the prism of race-based limitations that all too often lace the present and define the recent past” (Womack 154) and whereas Stella Setka reads Dana as an *ogbanje*, an Igbo “space and time-traveling telepath” (Setka 98), I argue that it is important to note that Dana herself has almost no influence whatsoever on her travels through time; it is Rufus who calls her to antebellum Maryland whenever his life is in danger and Dana has no choice but to obey: “There was nothing I could do. I had no control over anything” (Butler 94). Rufus’ power over Dana’s life is a logical continuation of his power over the lives of the enslaved plantation inhabitants. Just like Rufus is able to restrict the enslaved workers’ spatial mobility by selling them or refusing to write them passes, he also controls Dana’s temporal mobility. The only way Dana can temporarily escape from the past is her own fear of death. In the beginning, Dana does not dare to provoke threats to her life. It is only in her penultimate trip to the past that she travels back to her time by committing a suicide attempt, after Rufus is selling an enslaved friend of hers and hits her for reproaching him (Butler 193). The fact that practically dying in the past is Dana’s only means of return to her present illustrates how literal death is the only way to permanently escape the social death of enslavement. Staying alive means for Dana that she can be enslaved again and again.

While Patton focuses on the positive aspects of kinship relations with one’s ancestors, “[t]he relation of their ancestors to their living kinsmen has been described as ambivalent” in anthropological research (Kopytoff 314): “In general, ancestral benevolence is assured through propitiation and sacrifice; neglect is believed to bring about punishment” (ibid.). As an orphan, Dana has no relation to her family’s past whatsoever, apart from the family tree in an old bible (Butler 26). Even Dana’s connection to her living kin is problematic: Both Dana and her Anglo-American husband Kevin broke of relations with all their (contemporary) relatives after those rejected their choice of a partner with a different skin color (Butler 91f.). Yaszek reads this behavior as emblematic of “what we might call the romantic narrative of the Coca-Cola generation – a generation supposedly without ties to the bad old past of racial discrimination and inequality” (Yaszek 2002: 83). Dana’s (and Kevin’s) time travel journeys can be read as a corrective to their ignorance of the complexities of American (racialized) history. Both Dana and Kevin are physically scarred because of their trips to the past; the most prominent of those corporeal impediments is Dana’s loss of her left arm through which *Kindred* makes

visible the afterlife of slavery as “a present threat to agency as it forcefully testifies that racial and gendered prejudices perform immensely powerful attacks on the agency of people in the twentieth century” (Bast 60). The ways in which Dana’s agency is limited by these “racial and gendered prejudices” connects the two temporal levels of the novel which is made explicit in Dana’s obligation to write letters for Rufus and Kevin respectively; while Dana has no choice but to obey when Rufus wants her to manage his correspondence in antebellum Maryland, in 1970s California, Dana has the chance to fight for her husband Kevin’s acceptance of her refusal to write his letters and type his manuscripts – a service which he seems to take for granted. This points at the intricacies that Dana’s positionality as a black woman unfolds during her journeys through time that stands in sharp contrast to many science fictional time travel tales (whose protagonists are often white men).

Kindred substitutes the audacious white male time traveler of traditional science fiction who can change the world due to his superior knowledge with a black female heroine who is thrust into a time travel adventure against her will and whose attempts to change the past are thwarted by historical determinism. Thus, the novel replaces a teleological vision of continuous human progress with a depiction of humanity’s endless unscrupulous striving for power over each other which is symptomized by racism, sexism and capitalist exploitation.

b. *Sankofa* as the Socially Transformative Dimension of *Kindred*

As a concept, *Sankofa* originates from the Akan-speaking people of Ghana and the Ivory Coast and “in conventional translation means ‘go back and fetch it,’ ‘return to your past,’ and ‘it is not taboo to go back and retrieve what you have forgotten or lost’” (Temple 127). Internationally, various practices have emerged around *Sankofa* in the black diaspora — in education as a pedagogical approach (134–36), in Black Studies in connection with aspirations of historical recovery (140–41), or in black psychology and counseling (142–43). In this subchapter, I will depart from these uses of *Sankofa* and employ the concept as a specifically Afrocentric way of thinking about time travel. Although *Sankofa* is originally not concerned with time travel in the literal sense, it centers on the idea of achieving healing and empowerment through a return to the past (Schramm 200). Putting

Butler's *Kindred* in direct conversation with the Akan notion of *Sankofa*, I explore whether the element of time travel in the novel can be read as a literal representation of this concept concerning in particular how the protagonist is changed in the course of the novel due to her time travel experiences.

Both Temple and Schramm observe that the adoption of *Sankofa* in the African American context is connected to African enslavement as “the Diasporan practices created around *Sankofa* are responses to the Maafa”⁹ (Temple 128). According to Schramm “the past appears double-layered [to members of the African diaspora]: a time before the catastrophe [i.e. Maafa] is imagined that represents a harmonious and simultaneously grand Africa. The overcoming of the catastrophe is ultimately based on the recollection of this time” (Schramm 198). The idea of healing establishes the core of afrocentric *Sankofa* interpretations (Schramm 200). Using the example of Haile Gerima's 1993 film of the same name, Schramm illustrates how “the transformative power of the experience of enslavement and above all the consciousness of the empowerment of the enslaved in insisting on their own identity (as individuals and as Africans) are at the center of the politics of memory” in the African diasporic context; “Black identity is not understood solely as cultural essence, but instead as the result of historical processes, identifications and positionings: most importantly in opposition to enslavement” (Schramm 202). The concept of Sankofa in its African diasporic incarnation thus implies that healing can be achieved by mentally going back to the time of (and prior to) enslavement. In *Kindred*, Octavia E. Butler picks up on this healing notion of Sankofa; but instead of having her African American protagonist Dana go back in time mentally, she has her travel in time in her actual flesh and bones. The protagonist's embodied experience allows Dana to become a part of her enslaved ancestors' lives, through which she gains a deeper understanding of their lives, their tribulations, and their strategies of resistance.

Previous scholarship has alluded to the intersections between *Kindred* and *Sankofa*: Donadey states that *Kindred* “exemplif[ies] the [. . .] concept of *Sankofa* and “give[s] *Sankofa* a feminist perspective through [its] focus on women's issues

⁹ The term transatlantic slave trade has been criticized as trivializing the Black experience of slavery since “[t]he category trade tends to sanitize the high level of violence and mass murder that was inflicted on African peoples and societies” (Karenga). As an alternative, African Studies scholar Marimba Ani suggests the term “Maafa” – “a Kiswahili word for ‘disaster’ – as referring “to the enslavement of [...Black] people and to the sustained attempt to dehumanize” them (Ani).

and women's agency" (Donadey 77). Like Haile Gerima's eponymous film, *Kindred* teaches the history of transatlantic slavery and "how the past shaped and continues to shape the present" (Mitchell 52). Lisa Woolfork also discusses Butler's novel and Gerima's film together and points to the "bodily epistemology" that both pieces develop (Woolfork 2). In her dissertation, Maja Milatovic builds on Angelyn Mitchell's *The Freedom to Remember* and argues that *Sankofa* represents the "didactic dimension" of *Kindred* (Milatovic 97–98). However, none of these discussions examines the relationship between *Sankofa* and *Kindred* in greater detail through close readings of the novel; my chapter seeks to close this gap and examines how the concept of *Sankofa* helps to understand the motif of time travel in the novel.

The question of what Dana retrieves from the past results from my use of *Sankofa* as centering the idea of returning to the past in order to bring back something that has been lost. At first glance, it seems as if Dana is not healed but only harmed by her confrontation with the past. Thus, the first sentence of the novel focuses on Dana's losses: "I lost an arm on my last trip home. My left arm. And I lost about a year of my life and much of the comfort and security I had not valued until it was gone" (Butler 10). Dana's journeys through time, it seems, have left her severely unsettled, particularly in regard to her identity as an African American woman, her relationship to her Anglo-American husband, and her sense of home.

At the beginning of the novel, Dana's home is indubitably her and Kevin's new house in Altadena, California,¹⁰ in 1976. However, *Kindred* complicates this straightforward notion of home: The more often Dana travels to antebellum Maryland, the more alienated she becomes from her twentieth-century home. At the outset of the story, Dana and Kevin have just moved into their new house; they are still unpacking when Dana's first time travel incident occurs (Butler 13). After her first two trips, Dana is happy to be home again, but once she has made friends at the Weylin plantation, Dana cannot help but think of the Weylin's house as home, too, particularly after she has involuntarily left her husband in the past after her third trip. Alone at their new house in California, Dana feels disoriented, she suffers

¹⁰ As Donadey notes, California became part of the United States in 1850 and "was not a slave state" (48). Thus, California seems to be untainted with black enslavement. While there was no African American enslavement in California, the dehumanizing treatment of its local indigenous people is addressed and criticized in *Kindred* (Butler 82).

from the wounds of Tom Weylin's whipping and is plagued by memories that "have no place" in 1976 (Butler 96). On her next trip, Dana nolens volens feels as if she is "Home at last" and has to remind herself that the Weylin plantation is "a hostile place" (Butler 105). In front of Rufus, Dana still insists that 1970s California is her home, while he tries to convince her that she can feel safe on the plantation: "You'll be all right here. You're home" (Butler 119). Dana's sense of home has quickly become blurred and destabilized.

After their subsequent return to the 1970s, both Dana and Kevin feel alienated from their home and from their time: "The time, the year, was right, but the house just wasn't familiar enough. I felt as though I were losing my place here in my own time. Rufus's time was a sharper, stronger reality" (Butler 154). Both Dana and Kevin have come to think of the Weylin plantation as their home because they know that it would be the place of their reunion in antebellum Maryland (Butler 156). Dana's notion of home that is fixed to 1970s Altadena is thus destabilized in the course of the novel. Ashraf Rushdy notes that "'Home,' in *Kindred*, is more than a place; it signifies the liminal site where one can lose or reclaim a historically-defined modern self" and the more often Dana travels to antebellum Maryland, the more difficult it becomes for her to reclaim precisely her modern self (Rushdy 1993: 140): while she is only playing the role of a slave at first, Dana soon fully immerses herself in the past: "Once — God knows how long ago — I had worried that I was keeping too much distance between myself and this alien time. Now, there was no distance at all. When had I stopped acting?" (Butler 179). Dana's involuntary full immersion in her role as an enslaved woman in antebellum Maryland illustrates how the system of plantocracy inevitably devours all those who get caught in it.

The notion of *Sankofa* in the African diasporic context proposes that one can learn to cope with and eventually heal from the Maafa by returning to the past (cf. Schramm). But although Dana is transformed by her personal experience of enslavement, she does not feel empowered by her consciousness of her own African American identity. Rather, she regards her newly acquired "double consciousness," which gradually emerges through her trips to the past, as a burden. In fact, the reader only learns that Dana is African American on page 23 of the novel when eight-year-old Rufus tells Dana (on her second trip to the past) that his mother (who had seen

Dana on her first trip to the past) described her as “just some [n-word].”¹¹ At the beginning of the novel and in the interspersed flashbacks, Dana does not relate her personal problems such as her presumably failed career as a writer and the discrimination that she experiences on the labor market to her racialized identity. She dissociates herself from her African American aunt and uncle who appear old-fashioned to her with their “ideas [that] don’t have very much to do with what’s going on now”; her uncle’s disinheritance of her after her marriage, so that his property does not “fall into white hands,” seems greatly exaggerated to her (Butler 92-93). Dana regards any racist discrimination as an individual rather than as a structural problem. This attitude changes in the course of the novel, and, in the end, Dana’s lack of enthusiasm towards the festivities of the bicentenary of the United States echoes Frederic Douglass’ famous speech “What to the Slave is the 4th of July?” As H. A. Rushdy notes, because of her experiences in antebellum Maryland, “Dana [...] observes present social relations in terms of what she now knows of the slave history of America. She sees the connections between slavery and present street violence (33), rape (42), labor relations (52), sexual relations (97), wife beating (151), and apartheid (196)” (Rushdy 1993: 144). Dana’s journeys into the past have raised her awareness of racist and sexist social inequality in her socio-cultural environment. Dana’s changed outlook on life as a result of her trips into the past can thus be read in relation to the transformative power of *Sankofa* in which the (usually imaginary) re-experience of enslavement leads to a gain in knowledge and a heightened appreciation of the suffering that enslaved people endured and resisted against.

In *Kindred*, Dana’s past and present are connected through the use of time travel. As soon as Dana’s journeys through time begin, her identity as a contemporary citizen of the United States is destabilized and inextricably linked to her African American heritage with its history of dehumanization and oppression. This is further demonstrated through the use of anachrony in the structure of the novel: In the prologue, the reader is introduced to Dana right after her last trip to

¹¹ Due to its status as an extremely offensive racial slur, contemporary readers might be irritated by the frequent use of the n-word in *Kindred*’s historical antebellum setting, by both Anglo-American and enslaved and African American characters, respectively. While the Weylin family’s degrading treatment of black people leaves no doubt as to what we today would call their white supremacist attitude, the use of the n-word by the enslaved characters in the novel can be read either as a sign of internalized racism or as a reappropriation of the slur.

the past, the first chapter informs the reader about Dana's first time travel journey and the following chapters relate Dana's travels through time in chronological order. They are, however, interrupted by flashbacks of Dana's and Kevin's recent past. The epilogue shows how Dana and Kevin visit Maryland in the present in order to learn about what happened to the people they met in the past — except for a newspaper article advertising the sale of some of the enslaved people whom they have met on the plantation, Dana and Kevin do not find any official records, so that the fate of most of their friends remains unclear (211–13). The structure of the novel has been related to circular concepts of history. For example, Christine Levecq reads *Kindred* as “creating the space for the development of a speculative philosophy of history. This philosophy tends to be cyclical and sees the unfolding of history as an endless repetition of power struggles” (526). Marc Steinberg argues that this “cyclical, non-linear view of history is also a non-Western vision” while simultaneously conceding that “‘circular’ does not easily or precisely describe the structure of *Kindred*, for it also very much resembles a zigzag, a movement from present to slavery days [. . .] Time becomes a confused jumble that Dana somehow traverses” (472). The non-linear structure of *Kindred* hints at the idea that African American enslavement is not a phenomenon of a past that has been overcome, but a system that continues to have an impact on the lives of contemporary Americans in general and on race relations in particular.

Traditional slave narratives play an important role in the ways in which *Kindred* engages with actual historical accounts of black enslavement. Levecq, for instance, links “[t]he novel's engagement with history” to its “rewriting of its literary ancestor, the slave narrative” (Levecq 526). *Kindred* interacts with traditional slave narratives in multiple ways: On the one hand, *Kindred* takes up formal conventions of traditional slave narratives such as the presence of a homodiegetic first person narrator who relates their experiences as a slave that involve the inhumane treatment of enslaved people by their slaveholders as well as depictions of slave resistance and their quest for freedom that is ultimately successful. On the other hand, *Kindred* offers a distinctly twentieth-century perspective on slave narratives: when Dana witnesses the whipping of an enslaved person for the first time, she is so horrified that she can barely stop herself from vomiting in spite of having seen representations of such beatings in films and on TV (Butler 34) — reminding the readers that reading and *knowing about* the

atrocities of slavery is fundamentally different than actually witnessing and *knowing them* in person; or, as Sherryl Vint puts it, the “past is not accessible through history books, TV documentaries or other historical sources such as newspaper articles or slave narratives, but it has to be physically experienced in order to be understood” (Vint 2007: 244). Due to her personal encounters with violence against enslaved black human beings in antebellum Maryland, Dana regards her fiction and nonfiction books about slavery as completely inadequate; instead, she identifies with the accounts of WWII concentration camp survivors because those “[s]tories of beatings, starvation, filth, disease, torture, every possible degradation” seem to describe the suffering of enslaved people more aptly than the depictions “of happy darkies in tender loving bondage” that Dana encounters in novels such as *Gone with the Wind* (Butler 97). Reading Dana’s orientation towards stories of concentration camp survivors as an example of multidirectional memory allows me to move beyond discussions about the (in)appropriateness of Holocaust comparisons and towards a recognition of how the remembrance of one history does not automatically erase other histories from view but instead can be instrumentalized for making previously marginalized histories visible (Rothberg 3). In the 1970s, when *Kindred* was written, representations of African American enslavement from the point of view of the enslaved existed but were not commonly known; research into traditional slave narratives had already started to gain momentum within academia, but the general public was not usually exposed those autobiographies. In contrast to that, the living conditions in WWII concentration camps were already well known among the American public, not only through both non-fiction and fictionalized books on this topic, but also through public memorials and museums, such as the *Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust* which was established in 1961 or the bronze statue Holocaust memorial in Philadelphia that was installed in 1964. Thus, Dana’s comparison of the abuse directed at her in antebellum Maryland with the living conditions in concentration camps offers a connecting point that enables those readers who are not familiar with African American enslavement to better contextualize and understand the suffering of those affected by it in spite of the shortage of generally available depictions of enslaved African Americans that avoid trivializing their experiences.

Trying to compensate for the lack of medial representations of enslaved African Americans, Dana attempts to write down her time travel experiences, but

ultimately fails: “Once I sat down at my typewriter and tried to write about what had happened, made about six attempts before I gave up and threw them all away” (Butler 97). This can be related to “Dana recognizing that written and filmed historical representations of slavery are static and never fully convey slave experience” (Fulton 117). While *Kindred* acknowledges traditional slave narratives as a credible source of information about the living conditions of the enslaved, the novel also admits that there are certain limits to their ability to make the inhumanity of enslavement completely accessible to readers who have never made similar experiences themselves.

When Dana is in antebellum Maryland, however, traditional slave narratives acquire an almost mystic quality. While Dana knows for certain that Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, and Harriet Tubman exist(ed),¹² she is forced to burn the history books that mention their names, which she has brought with her to the past, so that she does not endanger their lives (Butler 116). Dana still tells the enslaved cook Sarah about successful slave escapes as conveyed through slave narratives:

She [i.e. Sarah] lowered her voice to a whisper. ‘You need to look at some of the [n-word] they catch and bring back,’ she said. ‘You need to see them – starving, ’bout naked, whipped, dragged, bit by dogs ... You need to see them.’
‘I’d rather see the others.’
‘What others?’
‘The ones who make it. The ones living in freedom now.’
‘If any do.’
‘They do.’
‘Some say they do. It’s like dying, though, and going to heaven. Nobody ever comes back to tell you about it.’ [...]
‘Sarah, I’ve seen books written by slaves who’ve run away and lived in the North.’

¹² Sojourner Truth (ca. 1797–1883), who survived about thirty years of enslavement, was an African American abolitionist and a women’s rights activist. She became famous for her speeches, most notably for “Ar’n’t I a Woman?” (1851). She also dictated her autobiography to her friend Olive Gilbert who published *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Northern Slave* in 1850 (Searcy 2007).

After twenty years of enslavement, African American Frederick Douglass (1818–1895) became an influential abolitionist and author. He wrote three autobiographies: *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845), *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881) (Ravi 2007).

Harriet Tubman (ca. 1820–1913), who survived about twenty-nine years of enslavement, was an African American abolitionist who assisted in the escape of more than 300 enslaved people through the network of secret routes and safe houses known as the Underground Railroad. Tubman’s friend Sarah H. Bradford published two biographies on her: *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman* (1869) and *Harriet Tubman, Moses of Her People* (1886) (Purdy 2007).

‘Books!’ She tried to sound contemptuous but sounded uncertain instead. She couldn’t read. Books could be awesome mysteries to her, or they could be dangerous time-wasting nonsense. It depended on her mood. Now her mood seemed to flicker between curiosity and fear. Fear won. ‘Foolishness!’ she said. (Butler 119f.)

Just like Dana, the reader of *Kindred* might know about Frederic Douglass and Harriet Tubman but will not witness any successful escape attempt in the novel itself. Instead, the reader is confronted with enslaved people who are severely punished for their acts of resistance. For example, after Alice and her husband Isaac are caught, Alice is brought back to the Weylin plantation “bloody, filthy, and barely alive” (Butler 120), while her husband’s ears are cut off before he is sold to Mississippi (Butler 123). After Alice’s second escape attempt, Rufus takes their common children away from her as punishment, which eventually leads to Alice’s suicide (Butler 201). When Nigel, an enslaved man on the plantation, tries to tell Dana about his failed escape, she goes “away from him not wanting to hear any more about running away — and being caught” (Butler 125). Eventually the readers experience Dana’s own (and only) escape attempt with her. Motivated by the search for her husband Kevin, whom she involuntarily left in antebellum Maryland on her previous trip, Dana takes the risk to sneak off the Weylin plantation at night. Due to the betrayal of another slave, Dana is caught almost immediately by Rufus and his father Tom Weylin and severely whipped as a punishment (Butler 144). This experience does not only injure Dana physically but also unsettles her mentally:

why was I so frightened now – frightened sick at the thought that sooner or later, I would have to run again?

I moaned and tried not to think about it. The pain of my body was enough for me to contend with. But now there was a question in my mind that had to be answered.

Would I really try again? Could I?

[...] I tried to get away from my thoughts, but they still came.

See how easily slaves are made? they said (Butler 145).

Dana fears that this episode has broken her spirit and she feels tempted to accept her fate as a slave, despite her own better knowledge. Her reading of history books and traditional slave narratives has not prepared Dana for the stark reality of enslavement. While successful slave escapees such as Frederic Douglass have a solid position in African American Studies and are gaining wider recognition by the general American public, the daily suffering of those who were not among the

lucky fugitives is barely present the public discourse on the remembrance of African American enslavement.

When *Kindred* was first published in 1979, media depictions of enslaved black people had often focused on the experiences of men — a prominent example of this tendency is Alex Haley’s 1976 novel *Roots* that was also adapted for TV a year later — whereas stories of enslaved women were still underrepresented (Ryan 114). *Kindred* addresses this gap by focusing on ordinary (mostly female) slaves and their strategies for survival. As Tim A. Ryan notes, “Butler’s text emphasizes the importance of pragmatic everyday resistance over both servile accommodation and the grand militant gestures of previous slave heroes” (Ryan 143). Whereas radical acts of resistance such as Denmark Vesey’s historic plot¹³ or Isaac Jackson’s violent defense of his wife Alice against Rufus’ rape attempt end with the hero’s execution or his mutilation and sale, the resistant attitude of the enslaved women Alice, Sarah, and Carrie proves to be more persistent. Dana’s personal encounter with their strategies of resistance is the key to her (potentially *Sankofan*) transformation.

Sarah the cook stands out as the unofficial head of the enslaved population on the Weylin plantation. She had a sexual relationship with Tom Weylin’s father-in-law (of which the novel suggests that it might have been based on mutual consent) who promised to free her in his will but broke his promise (Butler 124). Afterwards three of her four children were sold to cover for Margaret Weylin’s expenses (Butler 62, 81). Sarah’s remaining daughter Carrie is mute, which might be one reason why she could stay with her mother.¹⁴ Initially, Dana is very critical towards Sarah’s apparent submissiveness:

She had done the safe thing – had accepted a life of slavery because she was afraid. She was the kind of woman who might have been called ‘mammy’ in some other household. She was the kind of woman who would be held in

¹³ Denmark Vesey (ca. 1767-1822) purchased his freedom after more than thirty years of enslavement and afterwards organized a conspiracy with the objective of starting a slave insurrection in Charleston (South Carolina) in July 1822. Vesey’s plan failed due to the betrayal of two enslaved men and he and his co-conspirators were sentenced to death and executed on July 3, 1822 (Wharton). Vesey’s plot is mentioned twice in *Kindred*. First, in a conversation between Dana and Rufus, in which Rufus convinces Dana to burn the history books that she has brought to antebellum Maryland. Rufus explains that his father would consider Dana “to be another Denmark Vesey”, if he found those books (Butler 117). Second, in a conversation between Dana and Kevin, in which Kevin tells Dana how Vesey’s plot “scared the hell out of a lot of white people” (Butler 156).

¹⁴ The other reason is presumably Tom Weylin’s plan to give Sarah a motivation to stay at the plantation and behave herself by keeping Carrie close (Butler 138).

contempt during the militant nineteen sixties. The house-[n-word], the handkerchief-head, the female Uncle Tom – the frightened powerless woman who had already lost all she could stand to lose, and who knew as little about the freedom of the North as she knew about the hereafter. I looked down on her myself for a while. Moral superiority. Here was someone even less courageous than I was. That comforted me somehow (Butler 120).

The first part of this passage features internal focalization through Dana at the beginning of her acquaintance with Sarah. In the final three sentences however, the focalization shifts to external when Dana as a narrator re-evaluates and comments on her earlier impression of Sarah. In the course of the novel, Dana has become more familiar with Sarah and has learned to respect her careful resistance, such as her insults towards Margaret Weylin or her well-meant pieces of advice for other enslaved people on the plantation (Butler 81). Sarah's daughter¹⁵ Carrie is exploited as a means to keep "first her mother, and now her husband in line with no effort at all on Weylin's part" (Butler 138). But she is also an important part of the enslaved community on the Weylin plantation communicating through a sign language that she invented herself: Carrie supports and consoles Dana on several occasions and attempts to learn how to read (Butler 64, 107, 88). She also manages to marry Nigel, an enslaved man on the plantation, whom she has chosen for herself (Butler 110). There is, however, no happy ending for Sarah's and Carrie's family, for after the Weylin plantation has been burned down — presumably to cover up Dana's murder of Rufus — Sarah and all of Carrie's children are sold and Carrie's fate remains unclear (Butler 213).

In contrast to Sarah and Carrie, Alice Greenwood was born free, but later enslaved after her attempt to flee with her enslaved husband Isaac. After her enslavement and her subsequent abuse as Rufus's (primarily sex) slave, Alice puts up resistance against Rufus Weylin and by extension against the system of plantocracy as well. While Alice appears "quietly tolerant" on the outside, she actually wants him dead: "She forgave him nothing, forgot nothing, hated him as deeply as she had loved Isaac" (Butler 138, 146). Although Rufus succeeds in taking possession of Alice's body, she refuses to give him what he is longing for:

¹⁵ Although Tom Weylin's father-in-law was not Carrie's father, her light skin would indicate that Carrie's father was a white man — however, this issue is never explained in the novel (Butler 108, 124). Sarah herself is also light skinned which might hint at Sarah's mixed parentage (possibly a white man raping an enslaved woman) (Butler 62).

her love. Despite her hate for Rufus, Alice is using the advantages that her status as the master's mistress involve such as a better treatment by the overseer, but she also must bear the resentment of other slaves (Butler 148, 169). Another way in which Alice takes action is by naming her children who Rufus fathered and giving them the names of biblical slaves Joseph and Hagar.¹⁶ As she notes, "[i]n the Bible, people might be slaves for a while, but they didn't have to stay slaves" (Butler 189). Alice loves her children and endures Rufus' treatment of her out of love for them. When Rufus pretends to have sold Joseph and Hagar as a punishment for Alice's flight attempt, she does not see any reason to continue to live and commits suicide, a final act of reclaiming power over her own life (Butler 199). The fact that *Kindred* does not provide any of the enslaved women in the narrative with a happy ending confirms Ryan's thesis that "Butler's novel [...] refuses to idealize the stoic endurance and quiet resistance of African American women in slavery" (Ryan 143). I agree with Ryan's observation that *Kindred* "acknowledges the potential of the slave community but is pessimistic about its agency and autonomy in practice" (Ryan 140). This proposition can be further substantiated by examining Dana's strategies of resistance.

Although Dana's agency is severely limited in antebellum Maryland, she seeks ways to rebel against slavocracy. Dana teaches some of the enslaved people on the Weylin plantation how to read in the knowledge that this could result in severe physical punishment and possibly sale of herself and the children she teaches (Butler 82). After Alice's enslaved husband Isaac almost beats Rufus to death, Dana facilitates the escape of the couple despite the danger that this action poses to her own family line (Butler 101–102). When Dana finds out that Rufus has not posted her letters to Kevin, she even tries to escape to be reunited with her husband (Butler 139). On her fifth trip to antebellum Maryland, Dana prevents Rufus' father Tom Weylin from ever beating her again because she threatens to stop helping Rufus if

¹⁶ In the Bible, Israelite Joseph is sold into slavery by his jealous brothers and is brought to Egypt (Genesis 37:28). There he manages to win the pharaoh's trust by interpreting his dreams and rises to power (Genesis 41:39).

The Egyptian Hagar serves the Israelite couple Abraham and Sara as a slave. Due to Sara's infertility, Hagar is forced to have a child with Abraham. During her pregnancy, Hagar is mistreated by jealous Sara and flees into the desert where she is told to return to Abraham and Sara by an angel. Hagar has a son called Ishmael (Genesis 16). After Sara has finally given birth to her own child Isaac, she throws out Hagar and Ishmael. Hagar and Ishmael almost die in the desert but are eventually saved by God (Genesis 21:1-21). The story of Hagar is very popular in African American culture and a reoccurring motif in African American art and literature; Hagar also figures prominently in womanist theology (Williams 2).

he did (Butler 163). Dana also attempts to commit suicide after Rufus has hit her and sold away some of her friends — although Dana’s act of cutting her wrists endangers her own life, she is willing to take the risk in order to (temporarily) escape from Rufus and return to the 1970s (Butler 193). Despite Dana’s commitment to help other enslaved people on the plantation as best as she can, her closeness to Rufus also fuels mistrust against her in the slave community (Butler 193). When field slave Sam confronts Dana with the other enslaved people’s skepticism, she emphasizes the need to reach a compromise between apparent submission to the Weylin family and working towards an improvement of the living conditions of the enslaved population because her ability to help the people on the plantation is dependent on Rufus’ favor:

He gave me a long searching look. ‘You want to be with that white man [i.e. Rufus], girl?’
‘If I were anywhere else, no black child on the place would be learning anything.’
‘That ain’t what I mean.’
‘Yes it is. It’s all part of the same thing.’
‘Some folks say ...’
‘Hold on.’ I was suddenly angry. ‘I don’t want to hear what “some folks” say. “Some folks” let Fowler drive them into the fields every day and work them like mules.’
‘Let him ...?’
‘Let him! They do it to keep the skin on their backs and breath in their bodies. Well, they’re not the only ones who have to do things they don’t like to stay alive and whole (Butler 193).

Dana’s insistence on the need to make personal sacrifices in order to survive is a motif that is also found in traditional slave narratives as DoVeanna S. Fulton notes. She links Dana’s statement to “Harriet Jacobs’s¹⁷ belief that ‘the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others’” and suggests that “[b]y witnessing the totality of slavery, Dana’s twentieth-century concepts [...] undergo a radical reconfiguration to account for experiences previously unknown and untold” (Fulton 118). As Ryan elaborates, moreover, “Butler’s novel [...] expose[s]

¹⁷ Harriet Jacobs (1813–1897), who survived twenty years of enslavement, was an African American abolitionist and author. She is famous for her autobiographical novel *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* which was first published under the pseudonym Linda Brent in 1861 (Culkin). While the connection between *Kindred* and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* seems to be evident from a twenty-first century perspective, it should be noted that the authenticity of Harriet Jacobs’ slave narrative was still unproven when *Kindred* was published in 1979 (Miletic 262). This could be a reason, why Harriet Jacobs is not explicitly mentioned in *Kindred* (in contrast to other African American abolitionists such as Frederic Douglass or Sojourner Truth) (ibid.).

and [...] challenge[s] the masculinism of modern black discourses about slavery [...] rejects the notion that slaves were *either* militant rebels [...] on one hand, *or* docile accommodationists [...] on the other” (Ryan 142). Whereas I generally agree with Ryan’s observation, I argue that *Kindred* is much more interested in refuting stereotypes surrounding black women, a point in which I agree with Sarah Wood’s comment that the novel queries “contemporary and historical stereotypes of black women by collapsing the historical boundaries that attempt to demarcate their supposedly separate and distinct ideological spheres” (Wood 91). I have already hinted at this during my earlier analysis of the characters of Alice, Sarah and Carrie in the novel who defy simple notions of victimhood through their specific technics of resistance.

Kindred also addresses present misconceptions about slave resistance explicitly through a conversation between Dana and Kevin in the 1970s setting: when Kevin and Dana discuss whether it might be best if Dana murdered Rufus, Dana uses the consequences of Rufus’ death — namely the uncertainty of the fate of every enslaved person on the plantation — as an argument against killing him (Butler 198). Kevin initially does not seem to realize that an enslaved person whose slaveholder is dead is not free but will be passed on to the next of kin as property — a condition that could not only apply to the enslaved friends that Dana has made on the Weylin plantation but also to herself.

In spite of Dana’s presumably superior twentieth-century knowledge, her travels through time do not enable her to arrive in antebellum Maryland like a knight in shining armor and free her enslaved ancestors. Instead, her positionality as a black woman in early-nineteenth-century Maryland completely disempowers her to the point of being forced to act like an enslaved person to facilitate her survival. While Dana’s journeys into the past do not heal her in the sense that *Sankofa* suggests, Dana gains a sound understanding of as well as a higher appreciation for the suffering of her enslaved ancestors. Learning first-hand how limited the opportunities for enslaved women’s resistance were, Dana’s initial disdain for presumably submissive slaves — as exemplified by her first impression of Sarah — changes into respect for the sacrifices that her ancestors had to make in order to survive. Dana’s return to the past has transformed her views of American history as well as her outlook on life. Although her journeys have left Dana wiser than before,

she is not healed by her personal confrontation with African American enslavement, but instead struggles to cope with her newly won insights.

In *Kindred*, Butler physically sends her protagonists back to the antebellum era where she witnesses and eventually interacts in the everyday struggles of enslaved women and their efforts to preserve some dignity while she faces sexual harassment, rape, and the disruption of their families. By drawing attention to this issue, the novel provides a critique of media that privilege an Anglo-American and/or male point of view about African American enslavement and provides a distinctly black and female alternative vision. *Kindred* complicates the idea of *Sankofa* by revealing Dana's investment in the past to be more complex than a simplistic matter of give (i.e., invest your time to mentally go back to the antebellum American South) and take (i.e., emerge from your mental journey as a healed and wiser person). While Dana is learning from the past, she is not healed, but physically and mentally harmed. Due to Dana's position as an enslaved black woman in antebellum Maryland, her agency is severely limited during her time travel journeys: instead of becoming an agent of change, Dana ends up reproducing the past that has shaped her existence in the novel's narrated present — a paradoxical condition that might irritate readers at first but could also inspire them to question how their present behavior reproduces past injustices. Thus, while *Sankofa* might not be the best suited concept to describe Dana's literal and figurative journey in the novel, it can explain the impact that *Kindred* can have on its readers: if the author succeeds in her explicitly stated intent “to make people feel the past as well as understand the facts of it to understand it (the slavery experience) in [their] skin, in [their] mind, in [their] emotions” (Weston n.pag.), *Kindred* leaves room for a socially transformative interpretation of the novel by increasing the readers' awareness of the legacies of African American enslavement in the United States.

c. *Kindred* as a Proto-Afro-Pessimist text

Although Dana does not achieve healing through her journeys to the past as the concept of *Sankofa* suggests, I argue that Dana's time travel experience fundamentally changes the character's perception of her contemporary world akin to what James M. Jones and Jordan B. Leitner describe as “the Sankofa Effect”. In their study on “Divergent Effects of Thinking About the Past for Blacks and

Whites”, these psychologists contend that “when racism is made salient, [...] Blacks, compared to Whites are more likely to *assimilate* negative past experiences of racial injustice to the present and perceive it as more prevalent. Whites, on the other hand, are more likely to *contrast* past racial injustice with the present and perceive the present as less unjust“ (Jones/Leitner 2014).¹⁸ While the significance of this study is rather limited due to its restricted scope, its premise is indicative of general tendencies concerning the prevalent attitude towards racialized differences in the perception of the past: African Americans tend to be perceived as “a people of long memory” (Fabre 6) and the process of coming to terms with the past of African American enslavement is largely relegated to the African American community.

This idea is also reflected in *Kindred*: it is African American protagonist Dana who is forced to travel back in time and who must cope with her burdensome family history. Although her Anglo-American husband Kevin voluntarily joins her on one of her trips, he can maintain a certain distance between the events in Dana’s (but also his nation’s) past and himself. Because of his ethnicity and his gender, Kevin is enjoying much more freedom than Dana in antebellum Maryland. In fact, he regards his trip into the past as a chance for intellectual growth – in contrast to Dana who needs to focus on her mere survival:

‘This could be a great time to live in,’ Kevin said once. ‘I keep thinking what an experience it would be to stay in it – go West and watch the building of the country, see how much of the Old West mythology is true.’
‘West,’ I said bitterly. ‘That’s where they’re doing it to the Indians instead of the blacks!’ (Butler 82).

When Kevin expresses his surprise at how well the enslaved people are treated, Dana reminds him that his insight as an Anglo-American guest on the Weylin plantation is very limited:

‘[...] Nobody calls you out to see the whippings.’
‘How many whippings?’
‘One that I’ve seen. One too goddamn many!’
‘One is too many, yes, but still, this place isn’t what I would have imagined. No overseer. No more work than the people can manage ...’
‘... no decent housing,’ I cut in. ‘Dirt floors to sleep on, food so inadequate they’d all be sick if they didn’t keep gardens in what’s supposed to be their leisure time and steal from the cookhouse when Sarah lets them. And no

¹⁸ Jones and Leitner tested this hypothesis with a group of 712 introductory psychology students who self-identified as either black or white (Jones/Leitner 205).

rights and the possibility of being mistreated or sold away from their families for any reason – or no reason. Kevin, you don't have to beat people to treat them brutally' (83).

This quote from the novel draws attention to less visible forms of violence against the enslaved (lack of “decent housing,” limited access to nourishing food and the constant threat of gratuitous violence and separation from their families) while simultaneously inviting readers to examine in how far these forms of anti-black violence still persist in their contemporary environment, albeit in different practices such as racist discrimination on the labor and housing market or police brutality.

However, after Kevin is forced to spend five years in the past, he changes as well. He looks much older and has “a jagged scar across his forehead” that he obtained (by his own account) when white people in the South found out that he helped enslaved workers to escape and chased him out of town (Butler 149/ 156). After his return to 1970s California, Kevin experiences difficulties in readjusting to the modern world and is still emotionally affected by the atrocities against enslaved people that he has apparently witnessed (Butler 156). It is important note though, that Kevin undertook this trip into the past by choice (even though he did not expect to be stuck in the antebellum South without Dana) and that his gender in combination with his ethnicity comes with certain privileges such as complete freedom of movement, access to profitable jobs and the opportunity to play any of the roles that were available to Anglo-Americans in the United States of the 19th century.

As stated in the previous subchapters, *Kindred* features both depictions of atrocities inflicted upon African Americans and of the survival strategies and forms of resistance that enslaved black workers invented. What *Kindred* does not mention however, is the Civil War. While the importance that is attributed to African American enslavement in forms of cultural memory of the Civil War differs greatly, public acts of its remembrance have often occurred in connection with the Civil War (Adkins 2ff.). Remembering enslavement as part of/ important factor in the Civil War shifts the focus away from the almost 250 years lasting enslavement of Africans and their descendants on the territory of the present-day United States and towards its abolition with the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1865 thereby emphasizing the accomplishments of Anglo-American men, particularly those of Union soldiers fighting to free the enslaved and of

President Abraham Lincoln. By setting Dana's time travel journeys in the antebellum period, *Kindred* contradicts

stereotypes that fixed the history of slavery exclusively to the master narrative of the Civil War; that connected it to the history of cotton, the black belt, and Afro-Christianity and to contemporary notions of race, which were read back into the past; that denied historical contingency and scorned historical agency" (Berlin 1262).

Kindred focuses instead on the everyday lives of ordinary enslaved individuals, on the sacrifices that they had to make to survive and on their strategies of resistance – in this narrative, abolitionist Anglo-Americans make no appearance (apart from Dana's husband Kevin who apparently engages in Underground Railroad activities during his involuntary sojourn in antebellum Maryland). Thus, *Kindred* anticipates "a history in which slavery was made and remade by men and women on their own terms, if rarely to their own liking" (Berlin 1262) – keeping the difficult balance between taking the agency of the enslaved into account without trivializing their suffering.

Christina K. Adkins notes that "the memories narrated by slaves and their descendants have often been marginalized by the Civil War interpretations of white Americans", an observation that is also present in *Kindred*, when Dana dismisses *Gone with the Wind* and "its version of happy darkies in tender loving bondage" (Adkins 2, Butler 98). Official historical records often prove to be insufficient regarding African American family histories as *Kindred* conveys by narrating Dana's search for information on her enslaved friends whom she left behind on the Weylin plantation after her ultimate trip:

The only clue we found – more than a clue, really – was an old newspaper article – a notice that Mr Rufus Weylin had been killed when his house caught fire and was partially destroyed. And in later papers, notice of the sale of the slaves from Mr Rufus Weylin's estate. These slaves were listed by their first names with their approximate ages and their skills given. All three of Nigel's sons were listed, but Nigel and Carrie were not. Sarah was listed, but Joe and Hagar were not. Everyone else was listed. Everyone (Butler 211).

Dana realizes that her own liberation comes at the cost of her fellows' family lives. While her murder of Rufus in self-defense allows Dana to keep her self-respect and to be free of further time travelling, it also leads to the disruption of enslaved families as exemplified by the mentioning of Sarah, Carrie, Nigel and their sons.

This realization leaves Dana profoundly disillusioned, as her conversation with Kevin shows:

[‘]It’s over,’ he said. ‘There’s nothing you can do to change any of it now.’
‘I know.’ I drew a deep breath. ‘I wonder whether the children were allowed to stay together – maybe stay with Sarah.’

‘You’ve looked,’ he said. ‘And you’ve found no records. You’ll probably never know.’

I touched the scar Tom Weylin’s boot had left on my face, touched my empty left sleeve. ‘I know,’ I repeated. ‘Why did I even want to come here. You’d think I would have had enough of the past.’ (Butler 214)

While some scholars interpret Dana’s second “I know” positively, for example as the emergence “of a new mode of historical memory — one that, perhaps not surprisingly, both engages with and writes beyond the ending of its more conventional masculinist counterparts” (Yaszek 2003: 1063f.), I read it as an expression of resignation: Through the lack of information about Joe’s and Hagar’s fate, Dana becomes aware of the billions of enslaved people’s life stories that are irretrievably lost to us now. By touching her empty left sleeve, Dana reminds the reader of her amputation – a mutilation that I interpret as a visualization of the ways in which the afterlife of slavery continues to damage black lives. This can be read as an anticipation of Afro-pessimist thinking. Afro-pessimist scholars such as Frank B. Wilderson III argue that “Blackness and Slaveness are inextricably bound in such a way that whereas Slaveness can be disimbricated from Blackness, Blackness cannot exist as other than Slaveness” (Wilderson 2016). Working on the premise that blackness is a technology originally developed for the purpose of justifying the enslavement of people of African descent by people of European descent (cf. Womack 27), Afro-Pessimists created the concept of antiblackness, i.e. “the notion that the construction of blacks as nonhuman structures the status of all other racial groups” (Ray et al. 3).

Dana is experiencing this through her time travels: in antebellum Maryland, she learns what it is like to live in a world in which blackness literally equals slaveness. While free blacks in the antebellum era exist *de iure*, *de facto* they have no enforceable rights whatsoever and can be enslaved at any time. This is illustrated by the patrollers’ harassing treatment of Alice’s mother on Dana’s second trip, Alice’s enslavement due to her choice to stay with her escapee husband and by stories of Anglo-Americans who “had caught a free black, tore up his papers, and

sold him to a trader” (Butler 115). While Dana on her first trips to antebellum Maryland still believes that only “[p]aperless blacks were fair game for any white,” she soon revises this attitude as she learns that any African American must live in constant fear of violent racist attacks (Butler 32). At her first meeting with Alice’s mother, Dana introduces herself as “I’m free, born free, intending to stay free” (Butler 35) – however, Dana’s freedom is soon revealed to be merely an illusion: just like her ancestors before her, Dana has to respond to Rufus’ calls and is forced to obey him as long as he is alive. Even her escapes to the modern world through her fear for her own life are only temporary and the possibility of being transported back to antebellum Maryland at any given time casts a shadow over Dana’s 1970s life while the scars on her face and her back – results of Tom Weylin’s punishments – remind her that “[a] slave was a slave. Anything could be done to her” (Butler 210).

In the course of the novel, Dana is depicted as beginning to see the continuity of anti-black violence; her previous careless view on life and her optimism concerning race relations in the United States are shattered – instead of regarding racist positions as an individual problem, Dana starts to consider racism as an institutionalized societal problem. This realization, however, does not inspire Dana to become an activist but to withdraw from public life into the private sphere. In fact, political, scientific and cultural institutions are shown to be complicit in the promotion of amnesia concerning African American enslavement, exemplified in the novel by the Maryland Historical Society that is based in “a converted early mansion” and cannot provide Dana with any information concerning her African American ancestors (Butler 213).

Tiffany E. Barber develops the concept of “transgressive disfigurement” to describe how the permanent loss of Dana’s arm is employed to “defy reparative constructions of black female subjectivity” and to “demand a reconsideration of conceptions of healing, freedom, resistance, and agency” (7-8). As Dana “is not restored to wholeness” (15) by the end of the novel, Barber argues that *Kindred* “resists resolution” (17) instead privileging “fragmentation and rupture” (16) as a more accurate representation of the conditions of black femininity. *Kindred*’s refusal to turn African American enslavement into something that can be coped with and processed emotionally is reminiscent of Afro-pessimist discourse which sets its focus on “a critique of the constitutive role of anti-blackness for United

States civil society” (Weier 420). Afro-pessimists trace the invention of blackness back to the transatlantic trade with enslaved Africans and argue that – because of this history – “Blackness as a racialized category remains the object of gratuitous, constituent violence” (Hartman et al. 10).

This constant threat of “gratuitous, constituent violence” is also depicted in *Kindred*: in its antebellum setting, each and every black character – not matter if enslaved or free – can become a victim of physical and/or sexualized abuse at any time. Examples for this include the scene which Dana witnesses near the home of Alice’s mother on her second trip to the past: while patrollers capture and whip Alice’s enslaved father, one of them attempts to rape Alice’s free mother who – after defending herself – is knocked unconscious (33). Although the 1970s setting of the novel does not feature any explicit acts of violence against black characters, the novel reminds its readers that racist discrimination still exists and has harmful consequences for black people worldwide: Dana identifies the present-day white supremacist hate group Ku Klux Klan as a successor of the slave hunting patrollers who she encounters in antebellum Maryland (33); she regards the South African apartheid regime as rooted in the same ideological foundation (i.e. white supremacy) as the antebellum enslavement of black people (196); and Dana remembers how her mother’s car once broke down in an American small town and “[t]hree people called the police on her while she was waiting for [...Dana’s] uncle to get her” as she was perceived as a “[s]uspicious character” due to her skin color in spite of her small size (93). Employing an Afro-pessimist approach allows me to regard those incidents within the framework of institutionalized anti-black violence. Afro-pessimists regard “the structural relation between Blackness and Humanity as an irreconcilable encounter, an antagonism” with Civil society depending on Black Social Death to construct and confirm their own humanity (Wilderson). As long as this is the case, they argue, African Americans remain excluded from humanity, since Civil society cannot accept blacks as human without endangering their own existence. Thus, for Afro-pessimists, there is no hope of racialized reconciliation.

Kindred however is not that radical: while some scholars such as Angelyn Mitchell suggest that Dana’s and Kevin’s happy interracial marriage “can be read as a metaphor for how America can be healed,” namely by “integrated collective engagement and coalition building across the color line” (Mitchell 70f.), I would go further and argue that *Kindred* challenges the very concept of race/racialization

itself. By showing that Dana has both Anglo- and African American ancestors, the novel dispels illusions of essentialized racial purity and – as Sarah Eden Schiff puts it – “is therefore interested in kindred across racial divides, implying that part of the experience of (un)homeliness is to recognize blackness in whiteness and vice versa” (Schiff 128). A comparison of the relationship of Dana’s ancestors Alice and Rufus which is based on the rape of the former by the latter with the consensual romantic relationship between Dana and Kevin illustrates how racialized power imbalances shape interpersonal relationships. In antebellum Maryland, the legality of racialized enslavement allows Rufus to wield absolute power over Alice: even before she is enslaved, Rufus’ status as a white male plantation owner enables him to impose his will on Alice. When her husband Isaac defends Alice against Rufus’ rape attempt, Isaac and Alice are the ones who are liable to prosecution, whereas Rufus does not face any further negative consequences as a result of his act (apart from Dana reproaching him). Rufus’s power over her increases further after Alice’s enslavement when he can abuse her as he sees fit without any concerns for propriety. In contrast to that, Dana’s and Kevin’s relationship is based on mutual consent, but also reflects the racialized and gendered inequalities present in their contemporary society. Although Dana and Kevin are equally qualified for the job that their employment agency assigns them to, Kevin is employed as a foreman while Dana is hired as an auxiliary. Both Kevin and Dana are writers, but it seems to be easier for Kevin to get his stories published than it is for Dana. In their shared house, Dana is responsible for doing the chores, as illustrated in the section in which Dana unpacks their packing cases whilst Kevin has retreated into his office. Dana is acutely aware of this power imbalance and opposes unreasonable demands of Kevin such as his request of her typing his manuscripts; although Kevin reacts annoyed at first, he eventually accepts and understands her refusal. Thus, the comparison of Alice and Rufus with Dana and Kevin both highlights improvements in interracial interpersonal relationships such as a more equal power balance as well as continuities in anti-black and misogynist oppression.

d. Denying Closure by Making the Afterlife of Slavery Visible

At a time when “slavery was excluded from public presentations of American history,” *Kindred* anticipates the late 20th century resurgence of a public

interest in African American enslavement and addresses “the dual theme of imposition and resistance” that would later shape the discourse on the cultural memory of the enslavement of Africans and their descendants (Berlin 1257/1264). In this chapter, I have traced how the chronopolitical intervention of time travel is used *Kindred*. The novel’s employment of the grandfather paradox illustrates Dana’s powerlessness: to ensure her survival in the 1970s, Dana must serve her male Anglo-American ancestor Rufus Weylin like an enslaved worker and become an accomplice in his rape of her female ancestor Alice Greenwood/Jackson. Dana can only regain her freedom after she has killed Rufus. My analysis of *Sankofa* in *Kindred* demonstrated that the novel contradicts the idea of *Sankofa* that an examination of “the experience of enslavement” can be ultimately empowering for members of the African diaspora (Schramm 198). Thus, the suffering of the novel’s protagonist does not have any positive effect on her life, it does not leave her empowered, but disabled and unsettled instead – which can be read as an anticipation of Afro-pessimism.

Through revealing Dana’s ancestry as based on the rape of an enslaved African American by her Anglo-American slaveholder, *Kindred* intervenes in the negotiation of the afterlife of slavery on multiple levels: First, Dana’s mixed ancestry contradicts notions of essentialized racial purity and shows that the histories of African and Anglo-Americans cannot be regarded separately but are inevitably intertwined – thus, coming to terms with the ways in which the enslavement of Africans and their descendants has shaped American society is no task that should be undertaken by African Americans alone, but instead needs to be addressed by Anglo-Americans as well. Second, by focusing on the everyday struggles of ordinary enslaved women, *Kindred* draws attention to the particular living conditions of those women which differed significantly from those of their male counterparts and which were under-represented in the public discourse of the late 1970s and early 1980s. By adding the dimension of gender(ed) differences to discourses on racialized enslavement, *Kindred* also draws attention to the gender(ed) dimensions of the afterlife of slavery which often manifest themselves in access to reproductive rights and discrimination on the labor market. Third, by explicitly referring to traditional slave narratives and taking up some of their features, *Kindred* also emphasizes the importance of those biographies as sources of information about enslaved lives.

The chronopolitical intervention of time travel plays a special role in this process: it does not only provide the means to directly confront Dana with her family's past, but also serves to highlight consistencies in racist and/ or sexist violence. By sending a modern, confident young woman from the 20th century into antebellum Maryland, *Kindred* invites readers to identify with the protagonist which is further reinforced by the intradiegetic first-person narration and focalization. In contrast to the other neo-slave narratives that I will analyze in this dissertation which feature multiperspectivity, *Kindred's* exclusive focus on protagonist Dana offers a limited perspective (albeit one that was under-represented at its time of publication), which however has the potential to facilitate the readers' identification with Dana and their possible emotional involvement in her learning and personal development process. Reading Dana as a moral witness enables me to unfold further interpretative dimensions: her condition of being torn between antebellum Maryland and 1970s California turns Dana into a survivor of a historical crime against humanity. Dana verbally – and through her scars also physically – bears witness to the atrocities committed on antebellum plantations in the Southern United States. While she is unable to press actual criminal charges against the offenders who abused her (due to the large timespan that has passed for ordinary people), Dana fulfills the second function of the moral witness which is lamenting those who died as enslaved people and did not survive long enough to see the official abolition of slavery in the United States. As Dana keeps her experiences a secret to everyone except for her husband Kevin, the diegetic world of the novel does not provide her with a secondary witness who is willing to acknowledge her testimony. This role is transferred to the readers of *Kindred*: The novel asks them to engage with this period of American history through forms of political responsibility and cultures of memory which emphasize empathy and solidarity with the victims of historical African and African American enslavement while simultaneously inviting the readers to recognize the legacies of this particular crime against humanity which I have introduced using Saidiya Hartman's concept of the afterlife of slavery.

I conclude that the use of the chronopolitical intervention of time travel in *Kindred* serves the purpose of demanding an ongoing engagement with the afterlife of slavery: by denying any form of closure to Dana through her permanent physical impairment as well as to the readers by refusing to answer any questions concerning

the fate of the enslaved people whom Dana had to leave on the Weylin plantation, the novel both draws attention to the fragmentary historiographical documentation of the lives of enslaved black Americans and simultaneously points to the ways in which racist and sexist discrimination continues to impact the lives of African American women.

2. Reincarnation in Phyllis Alesia Perry's *Stigmata*

Phyllis Alesia Perry's 1998 debut novel *Stigmata* focuses on African American teenager Elizabeth 'Lizzie' DuBose who relives her enslaved ancestor Ayo's experiences. After inheriting Ayo's diary as well as a quilt made by her maternal grandmother Grace – which features pictures that tell the story of Lizzie's ancestors – Lizzie experiences visions from the past in which Ayo is supplanted by herself. During those visions, Lizzie looks as if she is in trance for the outside world. Whenever Ayo suffers violence, the scars that those actions left on her ancestor's body also mysteriously appear on Lizzie's body. The inexplicable nature of those wounds leads to Lizzie's submission into several psychiatric hospitals where her visions are dismissed as hallucinations and her scars are interpreted as a result of self-harm. However, due to Lizzie's commitment to exploring the lives of her ancestors further and telling their stories through art, she can eventually find peace.

The ways in which *Stigmata* disrupts conventional notions of temporality have been described as haunting (Dubey, Duboin, Passalacqua), ancestral disturbance (Patton 56), multiple subjectivity (Nunes 159), or possession (June, Long). My chapter departs from these readings and proposes that Lizzie's ability to physically experience traumatic incidents from her ancestor Ayo's life turns her into a moral witness – a survivor of a crime against humanity who confronts her social environment with her embodied testimony. However, such a testimony can only be successful if it is acknowledged by a secondary witness. I argue that the willingness of potential secondary witnesses is dependent upon their attitudes towards temporal disjunctions and temporality. This chapter suggests that there are three such perspectives present in *Stigmata* that either consider the temporal disorder in the novel as a manifested symptom of mental illness or as supernatural experience or as reincarnation. I argue that by employing Lizzie's ancestors as characters who are able to move across temporal boundaries, the novel draws on

concepts of time that transcend established views of time as linear and that it has the potential to make its readers question their presupposition of the status of past and present as two entirely separate entities.

This is also reflected in the structure of the novel that features three intertwined narrative strands. The first chapter and every second one after that inform the readers about the events after Lizzie's hospital discharge in June 1994; the second chapter and every second one after that tell the story of Lizzie's supernatural experiences beginning at Lizzie's inheritance of her grandmother's quilt and Ayo's diary in April 1974. Both narrative strands employ Lizzie as first-person narrator and only focalizer, leaving open the possibility of reading Lizzie as an unreliable narrator.¹⁹ Interspersed are extracts from Ayo's (unpublished) diary that was written by Ayo's daughter Joy between 1898 and 1900 in which illiterate Ayo narrates certain events from her life with a strong focus on her enslavement in the mid-1840s. Thus, the readers are thrown back and forth between different time frames mirroring Lizzie's movements between her own life as well as Ayo's and her grandmother Grace's lifetimes. Lizzie describes her journeys as follows: "I move and the world is still. I go so fast, through this life and the next and the next, that they [i.e. other people] can't keep up with me" (Perry 202). Lizzie must undertake those journeys alone; she cannot take another person with her as only her mind moves between times while her body remains in her present. Lizzie's movements through time are not chronological and zigzag anywhere between the lifetimes of Ayo and Grace from the 1840s to the 1950s. They also include Lizzie reliving Grace's memories of entering Ayo's memories, thus blurring the boundaries between Lizzie's, Grace's and Ayo's lives.

In her diary, Ayo explains her sense of time as circular:²⁰ "We are forever. Here at the bottom of heaven we live in the circle. We back and gone and back

¹⁹ Since Lizzie serves as intra- and homodiegetic narrator and only focalizer of the novel, the readers are told the whole story from only Lizzie's point of view. While in the public discourse on the novel, some readers have chosen to regard Lizzie as an unreliable narrator, the overall consensus in academic discourse is that Lizzie is a reliable narrator – a position that I tend to agree with on account of the internal coherence of the storytelling. However, the novel leaves open the possibility of regarding Lizzie as an unreliable narrator, if one takes her parents' and her doctors' side and considers Lizzie's supposedly supernatural experiences as symptoms of a mental illness.

²⁰ I acknowledge that the idea of African time as cyclical has been instrumentalized by colonial science to mark African people as "other" and "primitive" (Huehls 111). *Stigmata*, I argue, seeks to reclaim cyclical time from this imperial history and advocates for a sense of temporal continuity between pre-colonial African past and contemporary African American present.

again” (Perry 7). This concept of time as circular is incorporated into *Stigmata* through the way in which Lizzie’s two narrative strands are brought together at the end of the novel: The last entry of the strand that tells the story of Lizzie’s inheritance and institutionalization precludes the first entry of the other narrative strand that narrates the events after Lizzie’s hospital discharge. Thus, the currently last chapter of the novel describes the occurrences that lead to Lizzie’s eventual discharge from the psychiatric hospital that is narrated in the currently first chapter of the novel. While Lizzie is experiencing the visions, her mind is moving along the circle of time in which enslaved past and (supposedly) free present are not separate but overlap until they cease to exist as distinct entities and merge. Lizzie and her ancestors Ayo and Grace are drifting along the circle of time – slipping into and out of the lives of each other – all of them sharing Lizzie’s present-day body on which Ayo’s wounds of enslavement leave their marks.

So far, the novel has attracted little critical attention. Most scholars dealing with the novel focus on its engagement with the intergenerational trauma of African American enslavement (Bellamy 45; Duboin 301; Long 461; Milatovic 207; Passalacqua 159; Setka 47; Sievers 135). Their work has led to valuable insights concerning the ways in which the novel engages with questions of the cultural memory of enslavement but has not explicitly addressed questions regarding the treatment of temporality in *Stigmata*. A different approach is employed by Pamela B. June and Venetria K. Patton who trace the ancestral presence in the novel. Pamela B. June sets her focus on the interpersonal relationships between the female characters in the novel regarding the reclaiming of Lizzie’s African matrilineage as the central concern of the novel (June 47). Venetria K. Patton places the character of Ayo at the center of her examination and suggests that Ayo “disturbs her descendants with her memories to ensure that she and her story of enslavement are not forgotten and that she is the one who determines the meaning of her experience” (Patton 57). Patton reads those “ancestral disturbances [...] as a means to rewrite the legacy of slavery” (Patton 58). She also draws on African philosophy by connecting the ideas presented in *Stigmata* to Kongo cosmology (Patton 71) – an approach to which my third subchapter will respond and build on by employing a Yoruba concept of reincarnation in order to open up new interpretative dimensions for the novel.

Erin Salius examines the influence of Catholicism in the novel, providing some useful background information for my second subchapter. Sami Schalk approaches the novel from a disability studies perspective and argues that *Stigmata* “has the potential to deconstruct able-mindedness, revealing how this (dis)ability concept is deeply dependent on racial and gendered norms” (62). Schalk’s insights will be addressed in detail in my first subchapter. As Lisa Woolfork notes, Lizzie’s “wounds lack a stable meaning” and are “subject to interpretation” (62) – while previous research has used primarily context-oriented ways to read Lizzie’s condition, my interpretative approach analyzes how authorities within the novel interpret the phenomenon in question. I argue that the novel offers three distinct perspectives on Lizzie’s condition: First, her doctors who dismiss the visions as hallucinations and interpret her scars as result of self-harm; second, Catholic priest Father Tom who sees parallels between Lizzie and Catholic Stigmatics; and third, ipadawaye, the Yoruba concept of reincarnation, triggered by subtle references to Yoruba culture in the text. I suggest that all three of those perspectives are based on different perceptions of time thus positioning negotiations of temporality at the center of my analysis.

This chapter is divided into four subchapters out of which three are dedicated to the narrative authorities that I have identified: the first one is concerned with the ways in which psychiatrists in the novel treat Lizzie’s condition. I will outline how Lizzie’s memories of enslavement are systematically dismissed as hallucinations and pathologized and connect this to information on real-life sexist and racist discrimination in the American healthcare sector. Based on close readings of extracts from the novel that concern Lizzie’s diagnosis as mentally ill, I will examine which role Lizzie’s gender, age and ethnicity play in this process and relate my results to medical studies suggesting that African Americans tend to be misdiagnosed by psychologists.

The second subchapter will look at *Stigmata* by relating aspects of the story to concepts found in mainstream Catholicism in the Western world, inspired by the narrative presence of a Catholic priest. The title of the novel invokes the Christian notion of stigmata, i.e. wounds that are usually caused by a deep identification with Jesus (or another saint). Father Tom Jay, a Catholic priest who visits the psychiatric hospital in the novel explains to Lizzie that Stigmatics were often and continue to be dismissed as frauds or mentally ill people when they are in fact having a

supernatural spiritual experience – this provides Lizzie with an alternative explanation for her suffering that is not mental illness and is her first step towards her hospital discharge. This subchapter will examine the role that Christianity in general and Catholicism in particular play in Lizzie’s rehabilitation.

The third subchapter will employ an African concept in order to achieve a reading that explores previously neglected potential meanings of the novel. Triggered by subtle references to Yoruba culture in the text, I will highlight similarities between Yoruba ideas of reincarnation and the story of the novel. I will explore connections between the novel and the Yoruba concept of *ipadawaye*, i.e. the belief that a dead ancestor is re-born in the children of their family. Although Ayo, the name of Lizzie’s ancestor, is a strong indicator of her Yoruba heritage, references to Yoruba culture and spirituality have only sparsely appeared in the scholarly discussion on *Stigmata* (Setka 134, Tettenborn 104). This subchapter will outline how the Yoruba concept of *ipadawaye* can be used to explain what is happening to Lizzie; thus, *ipadawaye* provides a logical explanation for Lizzie’s supernatural experiences that is unfortunately unavailable to the protagonist at first since Lizzie’s connection to her ancestor’s homeland is severed through Ayo’s enslavement and the loss of ancestral knowledge during the generation change. Ayo’s attempt to prevent this loss of knowledge and ensure her descendants’ remembrance through inhabiting their bodies fails with her granddaughter Grace who conceals any traces of Ayo in her life and ultimately leaves her family to cover up Ayo’s influence on her, as Grace fears to be regarded as mentally ill when she admits to sharing a body with her deceased ancestor. At first, Ayo’s possession of Lizzie is similarly unsuccessful as Lizzie is committed to a psychiatric hospital because of Ayo’s influence. However, in the course of the novel, Lizzie learns to understand Ayo and her need to be remembered leading to Lizzie’s intent to make Ayo’s story public through her art.

The final subchapter will bring together and evaluate the research results of the previous sections. Lizzie’s journey ultimately develops a healing quality for the protagonist, as she eventually learns to cope with the presence of Ayo and Grace in her life and thus recovers kinship relations that were previously inaccessible for her. This is made particularly visible the emotional scene in which Lizzie’s mother can finally re-unite with her own mother Grace who now resides in Lizzie’s body. While Ayo’s presence is a constant reminder of Lizzie’s heritage as a descendant of an

enslaved African woman, the continued existence of Ayo and Grace within Lizzie's body also enables the two deceased women to witness how the living conditions of African Americans have changed for the better which is made clear through Grace's comments on Lizzie's life that differs sharply from her own experiences in segregated Alabama.

a. Pathologization as a Result of an Exclusively Linear Understanding of Time

In this subchapter, I will outline how Lizzie's condition is interpreted as a mental illness by both Lizzie's parents and the great number of (mainly) Anglo-American psychiatrists who treat Lizzie with talking therapy, psychotropic drugs as well as occupational therapy. Following Sami Schalk's insight that *Stigmata* focuses "on critiquing the social construction of able-mindedness and the practices of the psychiatric medical-industrial complex" (Schalk 2018: 61), this subchapter argues that Lizzie's pathologization is rooted in her doctor's rationalized, linear understanding of temporality that does not allow for time transcending experiences such as reincarnation. Within her doctors' rational worldview, Lizzie harming herself is the only logical explanation for her wounds.

As her visions of Ayo's and Grace's lives become more and more intense, an unsettled twenty-year-old Lizzie confides in her father, who is a trained doctor. Dr. John Daniel DuBose dismisses Lizzie's visions as "dreams," her movements when she is in trance while under the influence of Ayo or Grace are described as "crazy sleepwalking" and the pain that Lizzie experiences during her visions is considered "psychosomatic" (Perry 100-101). Dr. DuBose entrusts Lizzie's therapy to his friend Dr. Daniels, a psychiatrist. Dr. Daniels is the first of a long line of psychiatrists who treat Lizzie and just like her future therapists, he does not take Lizzie seriously. His bias is clear from the very beginning of their conversation which he starts with the statement: "You've been having bad dreams, I hear" referring to Lizzie's father who "finds those images disturbing" (Perry 103). Instead of letting Lizzie tell her own version of the events, Dr. Daniels relies on the authority of his male adult colleague to make sense of what is happening to Lizzie. Dr. Daniels' limited appreciation of Lizzie becomes apparent when he continuously interrupts his patient during their first therapy session. After Lizzie has told Dr.

Daniels about Ayo's diary, he "looks vaguely smug, satisfied" as he interprets Lizzie's visions as the "glorified dreams" of a "fanciful, imaginative little girl" explaining: "It doesn't matter that your dream wasn't exactly like a scene in the diary. Reading about your African ancestor obviously put you in a certain frame of mind. We're all much more highly suggestible than we like to think" (Perry 105, 137). Dr. Daniel's use of phrases such as "It doesn't matter" and "obviously" shows that he has made up his mind about Lizzie's condition and that he is not willing to let anything that Lizzie says change his opinion – not even when shown the scars that Lizzie's journeys through time have left on her body (Perry 138).

Through Dr. Daniels' interpretation, Ayo's unpublished diary is thus turned from an authentic, informative historical document into a medium with youth-endangering contents that potentially corrupts impressionable young readers – an opinion shared by Lizzie's mother Sarah who subsequently hides the diary in order to protect her daughter, not understanding that the "diary is just the key [...]. The diary. The quilt. Just the keys that unlock the door to what you call the past", as Lizzie's aunt Eva eventually explains to Lizzie (Perry 118). While Lizzie's first vision occurs right after she has read Ayo's diary for the first time, she continues to relive Ayo's and Grace's memories even when isolated in psychiatric hospitals with no access to the diary, as both Ayo's and Grace's personalities have taken up permanent residence in Lizzie's body. Although the mysterious appearance of new scars on Lizzie's body – which occurs in spite of Lizzie's hands being tied to her bed – slightly irritates the hospital staff, the psychiatrists never take into consideration that Lizzie's experiences are anything other than "a rather elaborate delusion" (Perry 3). All of her doctors call her visions simply "dreams" and are convinced that Lizzie is hurting herself. While she is at a clinic in Montgomery, Lizzie resorts to silence and does not speak at all for two years: "I create space inside all that chatter for all the lifetimes I didn't know I had" (Perry 157). Lizzie relates her own silence to Ayo's employment of silence as a strategy of resistance:

Once she [i.e. Ayo] got whacked on the head because she refused to answer a question from the mistress. It was a personal question, and heaven knows, there wasn't nothing to own but your private loves and hates and white people wanted those too. They wanted to own the unknowable (Perry 165).

Lizzie's doctors take possession of her unknowable experiences by positioning them in a Western scientific explanatory model ignoring everything that does not

fit into their interpretative patterns as the following example from the novel shows. Confronted with the inexplicable healing of Lizzie's wounds, her male Anglo-American psychiatrist Dr. Cremrick is perplexed: "Those scars look [...] a few years old, I'd say. Now I know you were bleeding down there in the garden just a week ago. What is going on with you, Elizabeth?" (Perry 177). As a result of Dr. Cremrick's bafflement, Lizzie's psychotropic medication is reduced which could be read as an admission of misdiagnosis or at least as a sign that he has started to question his diagnosis of Lizzie as mentally ill; this does however not result in Lizzie's discharge. Instead, Lizzie's parents have her transferred to a different hospital as they are dissatisfied with Lizzie's lack of progress towards healing. Five years later at another psychiatric hospital, Lizzie offers to show her scars of Ayo's whipping to her female Anglo-American therapist Dr. Brun. Although she is told that this "isn't necessary" (Perry 203), Lizzie decides to confront the psychiatrist with her scars anyway commenting: "Sad thing is [...] what you're looking at was rather commonplace back then. Scars like these [...] I'm just a typical nineteenth-century [n-word]²¹ with an extraordinary gift. The gift of memory" (Perry 204). Through the scars of Ayo's enslavement that appear on Lizzie's back and wrist, her body is turned into a medium of memory – however, Dr. Brun's interpretation of those wounds is shaped by her expectation to find further evidence of Lizzie's assumed mental illness.

While the scars are an unambiguous proof of Lizzie's suffering, the wounds themselves offer no explicit explanation as to whom afflicted them on her; they remain subject to interpretation. Although her doctors such as Dr. Brun are surprised and profoundly disturbed by the continuing appearance of new wounds on Lizzie's body (even when she is bound to her bed), their worldview does not allow for any other explanation than Lizzie harming herself. While they concede that the past can have an influence on a person's mental well-being, this includes only the recent past of the person at hand. Realizing that her doctors' linear understanding of temporality does not allow for things such as reincarnation, Lizzie makes up a "story of redemption and restored mental health" in order to facilitate

²¹ I read Lizzie's use of the "n-word" as a conscious provocation to her Anglo-American psychiatrist – an attempt to make the doctor aware of her potentially unconscious racial bias. While the use of the n-word has become a taboo in US mainstream society, the underlying ideological foundation of white supremacist attitudes remains unchanged – a condition that Lizzie is criticizing here.

her hospital discharge. The psychiatrist who is responsible for her discharge in June 1994 is the male African American Dr. Harper. Although Lizzie sympathizes with him and feels physically attracted to him, she also secretly disparages him thinking “Ah hah. I fooled you” as she leaves his office and the hospital (Perry 6). From her doctors’ perspective, their treatment of Lizzie was successful: her body shows no new wounds and Lizzie herself admits that her visions were merely delusions (although focalizer Lizzie reveals to the readers that this is just a convenient lie).

There are however also characters who believe in the authenticity of Lizzie’s supernatural experiences: Among them are Mrs. Corday – a fellow patient whom Lizzie meets at a psychiatric clinic and who can see Grace and Ayo when Lizzie relives their memories – and Lizzie’s cousin Ruth. Ruth visits Lizzie at the hospital and comments on the socially constructed nature of able-mindedness by saying that “[s]anity [...] is a mutual agreement between folks trying to control their world” (Perry 192). She substantiates her claim by referring to the ways in which constructions of mental illness have been abused to oppress women in the past: “Men used to lock women up in asylums because the woman wanted to wear trousers or because they decided they didn’t want to be good Christian matrons anymore. The definitions of sanity change every day” (ibid.). Ruth’s awareness of the mental health as a social construct leads to Lizzie opening up to her about the events that led to her institutionalization to which Ruth reacts with compassion and the acknowledgement of Lizzie’s supernatural experiences.

Lizzie’s doctors’ perception of her is not only influenced by her gender, but also by her ethnicity. Although the novel does not feature any explicitly racist expressions by Lizzie’s doctors, the informed reader will know that the relation between African Americans and the US mental health system has often been problematic due to the entanglement of the discipline of psychiatry with politics: this starts with the antebellum assumption that enslaved African Americans were too primitive to develop what was then called insanity, continues with the idea that emancipation overstrained the presumably simple minds of former enslaved workers and caused mental diseases in the first half of the twentieth century to the fact that – from the mid-twentieth century onwards – “African Americans are assigned more severe psychiatric diagnoses and overdiagnosed for schizophrenia” (Jarvis; Carten 132). While Alma J. Carten attributes the misdiagnosis of African Americans to factors such as “bias of the psychological testing, the interview

situation, predisposition of the clinician and institutional racism” (132), Jonathan Metzl examines the intentional political abuse of psychiatry in his 2009 monograph *The Protest Psychosis*, in which he shows how African American civil rights activists in the 1960s were systematically diagnosed as schizophrenic and forcefully committed to a Michigan psychiatric hospital (Metzl). Although Lizzie is not a militant civil rights activist, her insistence on remembering her family’s slave heritage contradicts US mainstream society’s ideas of African American enslavement as overcome while her focus on Ayo’s bodily suffering attests to the harsh realities of enslavement that tend to get sanitized or skipped in public perception. This tendency to sanitize enslavement in public memory is not limited to Anglo-Americans, but also affects African Americans who would rather forego any “unwanted reminder of a nightmarish past” (Berlin 1256) – an attitude that is represented in *Stigmata* through the characters of Lizzie’s parents, Dr. John and Sarah DuBose.

In her 2018 monograph, Sami Schalk focuses on the inextricable connection between ableism, racism and sexism within the social construction of able-mindedness and argues that *Stigmata* endeavors to “critique the psychiatric medical-industrial complex and its frequent pathologizing denial of how experiences of oppression can have a material, nonmetaphorical impact on the bodyminds of people of color, women, trans-people, gender-nonconforming people, and disabled people” (Schalk 2018: 62-63). When trying to describe this “material, non-metaphorical impact,” Maria Root’s concept of insidious trauma – that is the traumatization that marginalized people can incur due to living in societies that constantly devalue and discriminate against them – comes to mind (Root). Reading Lizzie’s condition as a physical manifestation of insidious trauma enables me to take larger societal factors into account and acknowledge the debilitating effects that Lizzie experiences without further pathologizing her.

It also accounts for how, after Lizzie’s hospital discharge in 1994, her life is still affected by her presumed mental illness that not only influences her parents’ behavior towards her, but also her status in the small-town community in which she grew up and to which Lizzie returns. Tuskegee²² is described as “the kind of town

²² The town of Tuskegee brings to mind the medical scandal of the Tuskegee syphilis experiment. Between 1932 and 1972 the effects of untreated syphilis were studied on about 500 mostly impoverished and uneducated African American men in Macon County, Alabama. The trial

where people don't change much" (Perry 27). As a doctor, Lizzie's father is a respected member of the local black community and Lizzie's condition seems to be widely known in Tuskegee: a year after her return to her hometown, Lizzie remarks: "I guess people are getting used to seeing me around. I imagine their conversations about me: 'If she crazy, she sho' don't show it'" (Perry 63). Despite the community's apparent acceptance, Lizzie experiences exclusion from social activities: at a high school reunion picnic, Lizzie's narrates how the host's wife "grasps [her] shoulders with both hands, greeting [her] and holding [her] off at the same time" and how "[n]o one has come near [her] in the past half hour" (Perry 76-77). This behavior can be related to Erving Goffman's concept of stigmatization as outlined in his 1964 monograph *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Goffman defines a stigma as follows:

While a stranger is present before us, evidence can arise of his possessing an attribute that makes him different from others in the category of persons available for him to be, and of a less desirable kind-- in the extreme, a person who is quite thoroughly bad, or dangerous, or weak. He is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one. Such an attribute is a stigma, especially when its discrediting effect is very extensive (Goffman 12-13).

Lizzie's stigma is her presumed mental illness: although this stigma is not visible from the outside (except from the scars on her wrists), the small size of the black community in Tuskegee has resulted in Lizzie's condition being universal knowledge. It is the fear of this kind of stigmatization that resulted in Lizzie's grandmother Grace's leaving of Tuskegee and her family after Ayo's influence on her life had become too powerful to hide (Perry 123). Despite Lizzie's success in re-establishing harmonic connections to her family members (to her mother in particular) and in starting a romantic relationship to Anthony Paul, Lizzie eventually decides to leave Tuskegee for Atlanta and its anonymity. Sami Schalk explains how the labelling of Lizzie as mentally disabled by her social environment works to keep her entangled in the psychiatric medical-industrial complex (75): whenever Lizzie shows emotions such as anger (that would be considered normal

participants were not informed about their disease and how they could avoid infecting others. Although effective medication for syphilis became available in the 1940s, it was not used to treat the participants. While the experiment itself is never mentioned in the novel, the informed reader might link the pathologization of Lizzie to the history of medical experimentation on African Americans.

for those who are not classified as mentally disabled), those will be regarded as further evidence of Lizzie's emotional instability (ibid.). However, the novel also suggests a solution to that problem: art. While Lizzie's expression of emotions and telling of her ancestors' stories is frowned upon, her creation of art that does the same is supported and appreciated.

This analysis has shown how Lizzie's condition is pathologized, first by her father and afterwards by a number of (predominantly) Anglo-American psychiatrists – their disrespect for Lizzie is mainly related to her status as a young woman. However, the Anglo-American psychiatrists' disregard of Lizzie's explanations could also be attributed to her ethnicity as my contextualization of the story with the history of the relationship between the US mental health system and African Americans indicated. This subchapter has outlined how Lizzie's insistence on remembering her enslaved ancestors' suffering is repressed and how her isolation at psychiatric hospitals only comes to an end after she denies her supernatural experiences and pretends to accept her doctors' diagnosis and by extension to conform to their seemingly rational, Western worldview. Despite her presumed recovery, Lizzie is stigmatized because of her assumed mental illness and faces social exclusion in her hometown. Although she has escaped from the isolation of psychiatric clinics, Lizzie is still completely alone in her endeavor to understand and make public Ayo's story. When Lizzie tries to talk to her boyfriend Anthony Paul about her experiences with reincarnation, he is skeptical at first and though supportive of Lizzie, he also expresses concern about his ability to cope with Lizzie's mind travels: "oh, shit, this is too deep" (Perry 183). In the end, Lizzie decides that she will profit from moving to a big city such as Atlanta where nobody knows her story, accepting the failure of her romantic relationship with Anthony Paul. Lizzie's visions that have brought her closer to her ancestors' past and her own family history have simultaneously resulted in her social isolation in the present.

This subchapter concludes with the observation that *Stigmata* draws its readers' attention towards processes of pathologizing behavior that is deemed socially undesirable. By portraying Lizzie's psychiatrists in an unfavorable light, the readers immediately sympathize with Lizzie, while the first-person narration of the novel contributes to the readers' view of Lizzie's mental condition as potentially not pathological. As a moral witness, Lizzie does not find a secondary witness

within the psychiatric community as the doctors in question cannot move beyond their internalized notion of time as linear progressive. The next subchapter will analyze Lizzie's encounter with Catholicism through the character of Father Tom Jay. The novel contrasts the healing powers of psychiatry with those of faith and casts a more favorable light on pastoral care than on psychiatric medicine as I will show in the following subchapter.

b. Spiritual Concepts of Time as Facilitating the Healing Process

After Lizzie has accepted that her psychiatrists will never believe and understand her and that it is probable that she will spend the rest of her life in psychiatric hospitals, an encounter with Catholic priest Father Tom Jay changes her outlook on life. Although Lizzie went to a Catholic school, she does not consider herself religious. However, when Father Tom starts a conversation with her, Lizzie shows an interest in him (Perry 207). In contrast to Lizzie's psychiatrists, Father Tom is genuinely interested in hearing Lizzie's story (Perry 211). After Lizzie has told Father Tom about her supernatural experiences, the priest interprets her wounds as stigmata (Perry 213). In Christian theology, the term stigmata describes "physical manifestations of divine grace, often in the form of the wounds of Jesus Christ" (Ganzevoort 20). Ganzevoort links the concept of stigmata to traumatic experiences by noting "that many of these saints developing stigmata were in fact themselves in one way or another marginalized and possibly traumatized" (20). Although Ganzevoort's insights appear to pathologize Stigmatics, his positionality is that of a theologian and not that of a psychiatrist; in his article, he regards stigmata as a "metaphor for exploring the interaction of trauma and identity" (19). While my reading of the novel takes Lizzie's wounds as stigmata literally, Ganzevoort's insights concerning spiritual responses to trauma can still be applied to *Stigmata*. Ganzevoort describes two different ways of responding to traumatic events: either resistance against the identity threatening force of trauma or acceptance of the traumatic event as constitutive of one's identity leading to the re-interpretation of "scars as identity markers" which I argue describes the development of Lizzie's relation to her scars quite aptly (Ganzevoort 23).

These observations can be considered useful to trace Lizzie's journey in the novel: after her first visions, Lizzie is ashamed of her inexplicable experiences and

tries to keep them a secret as long as she can, thus resisting against the identity threatening force of trauma. During her time in psychiatric hospitals, Lizzie slowly learns to accept Ayo's (and Grace's) influence on her life paving the way for posttraumatic growth that "includes increased appreciation for life in general, more meaningful interpersonal relationships, an increased sense of personal strength, changed priorities, and a richer existential and spiritual life" (Ganzevoort 25). Lizzie certainly gains an increased sense of personal strength after her hospital discharge: "I guess psychotherapy, psychiatry and long-term residential treatment really cured me of something. Cured me of fear. Made me live with every part of myself every day. Cured me of the certainty that I was lost" (Perry 46f.). This quote illustrates how Lizzie has gained a new self-awareness during her institutionalization – though not because of the medical treatment she received there, but because of her own willingness to work through her condition by herself. Lizzie, Grace and Ayo continue to co-exist in Lizzie's body as independent personalities,²³ a fact that Lizzie has learned to make peace with, but that continues to impede her interpersonal relationships; Lizzie's boyfriend Anthony Paul is overstrained with her condition: "You're making this too much work, Lizzie. I gotta deal with this reincarnation junk. That's keeping me up nights [...] Why is everything so damned complicated with you?" (Perry 223). There are hints in the novel that Lizzie's and Anthony Paul's romantic relationship ultimately fails as Lizzie is planning to move to Atlanta, Georgia, in July 1996 thereby leaving Anthony Paul behind in her hometown of Tuskegee, Alabama (Perry 222).

In the meantime, Grace intends to reconnect with her daughter Sarah (i.e. Lizzie's mother) through Lizzie's body, but Sarah at first refuses to believe that Grace reincarnated through Lizzie (Perry 55). Only at the end of the novel, Sarah understands that Grace is present in Lizzie's body and eventually mother and daughter reconnect paving the way for reconciling not just Grace and her daughter Sarah, but also Sarah and her daughter Lizzie (Perry 230). Lizzie's recovery process is set in motion by her exposure to the concept of stigmata. It is only after Father Tom Jay has offered stigmata as an explanation for what is happening to her that

²³ A psychiatrist might describe this condition as a dissociative identity disorder, which is often associated with severely traumatized patients. However, this chapter is critical of pathologizing Lizzie's experiences which is why I will not go into detail concerning dissociative identity disorder and what this diagnosis might mean for the protagonist of the novel and my estimation of the novel in general.

Lizzie begins to see her condition not merely as a burden, but as a chance for personal growth.

In contrast to Lizzie's doctors, Father Tom's understanding of temporality is not limited to a strictly linear view of time but is instead rooted in his faith. Erin Salius has traced Father Tom's attitudes towards temporality back to Saint Augustine of Hippo's autobiography *Confessions* in which the early Christian theologian outlines his idea of time as disordered and intrinsically unknowable to humanity (cf. Salius 126-27). It is his openness for the existence of temporal disjunctions that leads to Father Tom's belief that Lizzie is not mentally ill but having a genuine supernatural experience thus becoming a secondary witness to Lizzie's moral witnessing. As a result of his non-pathologizing view on Lizzie's condition, Father Tom encourages Lizzie to regard her institutionalization in psychiatric hospitals not as an imprisonment, but rather as a chance for personal reflection similar to the space that monasteries offer thereby changing her outlook on life. Moreover, he is the person who suggests to Lizzie that communicating her experiences through art might help her to cope with her intergenerational trauma. The important role that Father Tom (and the concept of stigmata) play in the development of the plotline is illustrated in the title of the novel.

However, those readers who expect elements of spiritual autobiography in the novel will be disappointed. Considering the significant impact that "the longstanding tradition of spiritual autobiography" had on the slave narratives of the eighteenth century (Pierce 92), I suggest reading *Stigmata* as engaging this particular tradition in a playful way. While it might seem at first glance as if the novel continues to employ Christian religion and its representatives as legitimizing the black protagonist's experiences, my analysis complicates that simple point of view. In contrast to Erin Salius who argues that understanding Father Tom as representative of not just Christianity in general, but Catholicism in particular, is central to make sense of the "larger narrative" of the novel (124), I argue that the use of Catholic influences in the novel is just a means to an end. I suggest that Father Tom serves merely as a MacGuffin – a plot device whose only function is to give Lizzie a nudge in the right direction towards healing. When confronted with doubts concerning whether her wounds might be regarded as stigmata, Lizzie responds: "it's the same MO as stigmata, you see. A mysterious physical trauma. I wasn't praying when it happened, though. I was remembering. Remembering

something unbelievably traumatic” (214). This quote makes clear that Lizzie is less interested in the specific religious context of stigmata, but rather adapts the concept in ways that are useful for her. Although Lizzie does not become religious in the course of the novel, Father Tom’s suggestion that her wounds might be stigmata allows her to overcome her own doubts concerning her mental health as well as internalized attitudes of time as linearly progressive. This second dimension of temporality that is present in the novel thus provides an alternative to the normalized perception of time that is embodied by Lizzie’s doctors in the novel.

By relating the concept of stigmata to Lizzie’s condition, Father Tom provides an alternative, yet established explanatory model for Lizzie’s experiences and thus delivers her from her self-imposed isolation. Lizzie willingly accepts the explanation of stigmata, relieved that “[t]here’s a precedent [...] There’s a word for what happened to me” (Perry 217).²⁴ I suggest to understand the way in which Lizzie relates to the concept of stigmata without becoming Catholic as an instance of multidirectional memory. Multidirectional memory describes how an established way of publicly remembering historical events (in this case, the suffering of so-called saints) works to enable different modes of articulation that do not put them in competition with histories of violence against other marginalized people (in this case, African Americans), but instead serve to highlight similarities between different histories of oppression and can help to bring so far neglected histories to public attention, possibly resulting in an enhanced public recognition of them. The veneration of Stigmatics as saints provides Lizzie with a template of how the suffering of deceased people can be publicly remembered and recognized. As visual art is an established means to publicly represent saints, Lizzie turns to painting:

On the white-primed canvas, I draw a swirl of red, a hurricane with a small dark eye, a doorway [...] A dark, naked shape drifts toward the vortex. The red spiral moves, rises to meet it. Small legs and arms fly out in a confused jumble, needing something solid but finding nothing to cling to [...] I take up another brush to paint a gray ship and a brown girl standing at the rail (Perry 234-235).

²⁴ Although the name of the specific case of Stigmata which Father Tom uses to explain the concept to Lizzie is never explicitly mentioned in the novel, the information given – “a devoted monk” who “was practically considered a saint, a healer” and whose “case is well documented with photographs” (Perry 213f.) – suggests that Saint Padre Pio of Pietrelcina is the Stigmatic in question (cf. Salius 125). Padre Pio was an Italian twentieth-century Capuchin monk who became famous for “for his Christlike suffering, supernatural visions, and stigmata, as well the poverty-alleviation projects he carried out” (Di Giovine 481). However, as Padre Pio’s name is not explicitly mentioned in *Stigmata*, I will not go into further details here.

Just like traditional paintings of saints often feature scenes of their martyrdom, Lizzie's first picture engages with a foundational moment of Ayo's life, i.e. her experience of the Middle Passage. Interspersed between the description of Lizzie's painting process are sentences given in italics that narrate how Lizzie's grandmother Grace tells her romantic partner Martin about Ayo's Middle Passage where she witnesses how another abducted African boy is thrown overboard into the Atlantic Ocean. In contrast to Grace who can only share this story with one other person, Lizzie's artistic portrayal of the incident has the potential to reach a wider audience. Apart from painting, Lizzie also uses the medium of the quilt to tell the stories of her ancestors. Her grandmother Grace created an appliqué quilt outlining Ayo's autobiography and together with her mother Sarah, Lizzie continues this project by making a quilt that features pictures of Grace's life. In so doing, she reconnects to traditions of quilting in the African American community which can be traced back to the nineteenth century when enslaved women such as Harriet Powers used quilts as a medium of storytelling combining African (Dahomey, in the case of Powers) textile traditions with Euro-American techniques, often depicting religious motifs (Chouard 110). Just like African American quilts incorporate African influences, *Stigmata* also refers to African (in this case, Yoruba) concepts of time and reincarnation, as I argue in the following subchapter.

c. Reading Lizzie's Condition as *Ipadawaye* (Yoruba Concept of Reincarnation)

In this subchapter, I will present a reading of Lizzie's condition that employs a Yoruba concept of reincarnation as explanation for what is happening to her. Although *Stigmata* does not tell its readers from which region in Africa Lizzie's ancestor Ayo originally is, there are certain clues that suggest her Yoruba heritage. On that basis, this subchapter connects the novel to Yoruba concepts of temporality in general and specifically to the idea of reincarnation known as *ipadawaye*, i.e. a dead ancestor who is reborn into their own family. While other scholars have loosely connected *Stigmata* to Yoruba culture (Setka 134, Tettenborn 104), this chapter goes into more detail explaining my reasoning behind identifying Ayo as Yoruba and linking the plot of *Stigmata* to both Yoruba spirituality and scarification practices.

Although *Stigmata* does not explicitly identify Ayo as Yoruba, there are certain hints in the novel that indicate her Yoruba heritage. My starting point for exploring Ayo's African origins is her first name. Ayo's daughter Joy quotes her mother in the first diary entry of December 26th, 1898: "Bessie aint my name she said. My name Ayo [...] My name mean happiness she say. Joy" (Perry 7). Ayo is a popular Yoruba women's name meaning joy (Olúwáfẹmi Ìkòtún 76). Another hint at Ayo's Yoruba heritage are the descriptions of Ayo's mother and her profession in the novel: The readers never learn her name, but Ayo's mother is portrayed as "a master dyer" selling her "beautiful dyed cloth" at markets (Perry 25, 50). In one of her visions, Lizzie sees Ayo as a girl, "dressed in the blue cotton cloth, decorated with lively patterns in white, her head wrapped in matching fabric" (Perry 143). When Ayo arrives in North America, she realizes that she has managed to bring a piece of "[b]eautiful blue cloth" with her (Perry 132). This piece of blue cloth is handed down from generation to generation until finally Lizzie integrates it into her memorial quilt²⁵ in 1996 describing it as a "link to the past" (Perry 229f.). The blue cloth can be interpreted as a reference to the traditional Yoruba textile art of *Adire*, a specific way of dyeing cloth with indigo (Areo/ Kalilu) – a practice to which *Stigmata* refers explicitly: "It's that indigo dye, beaten right into the cloth [...] Our [i.e. Ayo's] mother made this" (Perry 143). Simultaneously, the cloth works as a symbolic point of connection between Ayo's African homeland (I assume that to be Yorubaland) and the lives of her descendants in the United States.

Another indicator for Ayo's Yoruba heritage is her circular world view: "the Yoruba conceive of the past as accessible and essential as a model for the present. They believe that persons live, depart, and are reborn" (Drewal et al. 14). *Stigmata* repeatedly refers to a non-Western circular model of time – Ayo explains to her daughter Joy that "[h]ere at the bottom of heaven we live in the circle. We back and gone and back again" (Perry 7). After her hospital discharge, Lizzie tells her mother that "the world seems to move in circles" (Perry 93). This circular world view is also reflected in the structure of novel as already explained in the introduction. The Yoruba cosmos is split into two realms: "*aye* (the visible, tangible world of the living) and *orun* (the invisible, spiritual realm of the ancestors, gods and spirits" (Drewal et al. 14). The two realms are interconnected and people in *aye* can contact

²⁵ For a comprehensive overview of African American quilting traditions, see Chouard.

gods, spirits and ancestors in *orun* through certain rituals (ibid.). Ancestors can re-enter *aye* either through temporary possession of a medium during the *egungun* ceremony or through reincarnation (ibid.).

In contrast to the regions conventionally designated as the Western world, in which the belief in reincarnation is traditionally not widespread, it was quite common for Yoruba to believe in reincarnation prior to the increasing influence of Christianity and Islam in what is today known as Nigeria (Osanyinbi/Falana). One variation of their belief in reincarnation is *ipadawaye*, i.e. the idea that a dead ancestor is reborn into their own family. The prerequisites for *ipadawaye* are that the person in question has died a natural death after leading a decent life and that he or she has direct descendants (Osanyinbi/Falana 62). While the novel does not give any details on Ayo's death, Joy's diary entry on April 12th, 1899 suggests that Ayo died happily of old age: "Mama say I wont be here to see another. Another what Mama I say. Spring she say. Dont say so, Mama. Its all right she say and she got this smile on her face" (Perry 49). The reincarnation of ancestors within their family is interpreted "as a result of the love they have for their family members or for the world" (Osanyinbi/Falana 63). In *Stigmata*, this seems to be true for Lizzie's grandmother Grace who longs to be reunited with her daughter Sarah whom she abandoned during her first life:

The circle is complete and my daughter [i.e. Sarah] sits across from me [i.e. Grace inhabiting Lizzie's body] with the gap finally closed. 'I used to beg God to send you back to me,' she [i.e. Sarah] says trembling. 'I came as soon as I could' (Perry 230).

Ayo's motivation seems to differ from Grace's though. Osanyinbi and Falana explain that "[w]henver somebody died after a life of much suffering [...], the corpse was usually addressed as follows: In the next life, make sure you change your destiny" (Osanyinbi/Falana 63). Ayo seems to have come back to change her destiny, but also to make sure that her fate (and the fate of enslaved Africans in general) is not forgotten as Ayo's diary entry illustrates: "I am Ayo. I remember. This is for whose bones lay sleepin in the heart of mother ocean for those who tomorrows I never knew who groaned and died in that dark damp aside a me. You rite this daughter for me and for them" (Perry 6-7). This quote shows that Ayo understands the preservation of knowledge as her ethical duty: by telling her story, Ayo draws attention to the suffering of abducted and enslaved Africans, not only

for her own sake, but also to raise awareness for those stories that became irretrievably lost with the deaths of the parties concerned. Corinne Duboin suggests that as a survivor of the Middle Passage, Ayo “grapples with a sense of guilt and wishes to honor and commemorate her lost companions” and that her “compulsive need to share her memories” is a result of that (291). This sense of survivor’s guilt is later transferred to Grace and Lizzie who later learn to come to terms with it through remembering Ayo’s Middle Passage: whereas Grace tells her romantic partner Martin about how a boy is thrown off the slave ship looking “as if he were giving a prayer of thanks,” Lizzie immortalizes the nameless boy in a painting thus wrenching his story back from the abyss of forgetting (234).

Although *Stigmata* prioritizes and valorizes non-textual media of memory such as oral storytelling, quilting and painting, it also acknowledges the importance of written documents, in particular that of traditional slave narratives. Aware of the prominent position that written text occupies in the regions conventionally designated as the Western world, illiterate Ayo enlists the help of her daughter Joy to make sure that her story is preserved in a medium that will stand the test of time. Joy writes down the words exactly as Ayo dictates them to her, thus making it easier for the reader to imagine Ayo actually telling her story. Whereas the diary entries record Ayo’s life chronologically from her abduction to her enslavement and eventually her emancipation, Lizzie does not relive the memories in this order, but instead is affected by particularly traumatic experiences such as Ayo’s Middle Passage or her first whipping at the hands of her slaveholder Mrs. Ward more than once. In this manner, *Stigmata* disrupts the linear enslavement-escape-freedom structure that is typical for 18th and 19th century slave narratives and shifts the focus away from the ultimately successful journey towards freedom and towards the intensity of the suffering that is experienced along the way. Decades later, the diary then functions as a means to trigger Ayo’s memories in Grace (and Lizzie after her) and provides them with a tentative guide to their ancestor’s life. The presence of Ayo inside of Grace and later Lizzie reminds them of the fact that they are descendants of enslaved Africans and provides them with a living link to their family history that would otherwise be inaccessible: “Ayo is there, reminding us who we are. And we can’t stop the sea from rolling beneath us and we can’t stop the fear. The chains go over our skin, no matter how much we holler” (Perry 57). This quote makes explicit that Ayo’s abduction and enslavement continues to have an impact on the

lives of her descendants and their identities: in spite of the years that have passed between Ayo's Middle Passage and their lifetimes, Grace and Lizzie can still feel her dread and despair; the Middle Passage has become an event that transcends time and space and unites its original victims with their descendants through their common feelings of fear and powerlessness.

According to Osanyinbi and Falana, a reborn ancestor can be identified through family resemblance i.e. the child shares physical and /or mental features with the ancestor in question and/ or through memory transfer i.e. "children who could recount real life experiences of their ancestors with astonishing details, yet had no first hand access to the stories of such ancestors" (62). The second mode of identification applies to Lizzie's case, as she explains to her first psychiatrist: "But when I had that first... dream... it was about something not in the diary. Even later, after I'd read the whole thing, I never saw that scene described" (Perry 104). This not only concerns Ayo's memories, but also to Grace's recollections: in order to prove to Sarah that Grace in fact resides within her body, Lizzie recounts an incident from Sarah's childhood where only Sarah herself and Sarah's parents were present which has the desired effect and enables Sarah to reconnect with her estranged mother. Osanyinbi and Falana also describe how children who are believed to be reincarnated ancestors are given special names because of this status; while Lizzie does not have a traditional Yoruba name, her first name Elizabeth connects her to Ayo's American name Bessie, whereas Lizzie's second name Joyce links her to Ayo's Yoruba name meaning joy.

Reading Ayo as Yoruba also opens up a new interpretative dimension of the scars that Lizzie's visions leave on her body. Connecting Lizzie's scars to traditional Yoruba practices of scarification allows me to read the marks not only as symbols for the continuity of anti-black violence, but also as markers of family affiliation. Scholar Abimbola Adedokun explains that among the Yoruba "[l]ess than two centuries ago, marking the body and the face was a cultural necessity [since...] [t]he body was used as a map on which family histories and cognitive symbols were drawn" (Adedokun 67). She elaborates that those bodily markers functioned to re-unite families "who would potentially be lost to slave raiding or scattered by war" (ibid.). While Lizzie's scars cannot unite her family at first (in fact, they create conflicts between family members), they are certainly successful in memorializing Ayo's suffering. Viewed from this perspective, the perception of

Ayo's practice of scarring Lizzie's skin is also changed: rather than perceiving it as an unnecessary cruelty just like Lizzie's cousin Ruth does in the novel ("I'm sorry they hurt you [...] I don't know why they have to do that," 193), the informed reader can regard the scarification as a mnemonic practice and community-building process as Lizzie learns to do in the course of the novel ("So I won't forget again," 193). Since Lizzie's scars are not Yoruba-specific, this community-building goes beyond ethnicized affiliations and encompasses African (American) people of different origins united through their shared histories of survival in the face of enslavement and suffering.

Just like only selected family members of Lizzie's family immediately understand the meaning of her scars, only those readers familiar with Yoruba culture will pick up on the references to Yoruba spirituality. As a result, they can make sense of Lizzie's condition as *ipadawaye* and recognize Lizzie as the reincarnation of Ayo and Grace while others (including Lizzie herself at first) are puzzled by it. By providing the readers with clues that can eventually lead them to the insight that Ayo was/is Yoruba and reincarnated in Lizzie, the novel offers a satisfying solution to the dilemma concerning Lizzie's identity for those readers who are willing to do further research or are already acquainted with Yoruba spirituality.

d. Conflating Dimensions of Temporality through Art

By leaving it open whether Lizzie is a reliable or unreliable narrator, *Stigmata* positions three perceptions of her condition and their accompanying perspectives of temporality alongside each other leaving it to the readers to decide which point of view to take: the readers are free to regard protagonist Lizzie as mentally ill just like the doctors in *Stigmata* do; they can elevate Lizzie's experiences to a genuine spiritual experience in the same way that Father Tom does; or they can try to find alternative approaches to Lizzie's condition as I have demonstrated employing the Yoruba reincarnation concept of *ipadawaye*. Since the novel does not provide a simple, clear explanation, the occurrences in *Stigmata* stay open to various interpretations. It is this openness through which *Stigmata* disturbs established notions of temporality and invites readers to question their own temporal assumptions possibly enabling them to imagine alternative temporalities.

Although the novel emphasizes Lizzie's suffering that is made worse by how her environment reacts to it, the end of *Stigmata* strikes a more optimistic note as Lizzie finds a way through which she can express her alternative perception of reality in a socially acceptable way (i.e. through visual art). Thus, the novel presents visual art as a medium for conveying experiences that contradict conventional, linear understandings of temporality without risking pathologization. As art is depicted to operate outside the confines of normalized able-mindedness, artistic practice can open up spaces for the expression of unconventional perceptions of reality and as such foster empathy with the affected artist as well as initiating a process of healing and self-awareness. The novel exemplifies how this transformative power of art can work in practice through the reconciliation scene between Lizzie, her mother Sarah and Sarah's mother Grace (230). From her institutionalization onwards, Sarah has regarded her daughter as mentally ill; however, after the both of them work together on a quilt telling the story of Sarah's mother Grace, Sarah slowly overcomes her initial resistance and eventually accepts that Grace resides in Lizzie's body. Grace's reincarnation through Lizzie enables mother and daughter to have a clarifying conversation that in turn helps both of them to cope with the fact that Grace left her family when Sarah was still a child for fear of them pathologizing her reliving of her ancestor's memories. As such the reconciliation between Grace and Sarah gives the reincarnation that is experienced as mostly harmful by Lizzie throughout most of the novel a positive spin: Her suffering is not meaningless but can improve the lives of others.

This feel-good moment happens in the penultimate chapter of the novel and is followed by a more ambiguous chapter in which Lizzie starts to paint her memories while institutionalized. Its final sentence, "I take up another brush to paint a gray ship and a brown girl standing at the rail" (235), has been read as either foreshadowing "that all might not be well at the end" (Sievers 138) or as "suggest[ing] alternative modes of emotional and psychic healing available to black women outside the traditional confines of the psychiatric system" (Schalk 2018: 77). In this final scene of the novel, all three dimensions of temporality that I have previously identified concur in Lizzie's visual representation of Ayo's Middle Passage: from her doctors' perspective, Lizzie's painting signals a step towards working through her trauma, whereas a Catholic viewpoint could regard the work of art as way of honoring a martyr who is able to communicate across temporal

boundaries by means of stigmata. Similarly, from a Yoruba-inspired perspective, Lizzie's act of telling Ayo's story through art is a way of honoring her ancestor and strengthening their ancestral bond.

Thus, Lizzie's act of painting Ayo's story brings the three different dimensions of temporality present in the novel into accord: this final act of bridging the gaps between the linear rationalized understanding of time embodied by the doctors, the acceptance of the intrinsically unknowable nature of time represented by Catholic priest Father Tom and the temporal boundaries transcending possibility of reincarnation exemplified by my reading of Ayo as characteristic for the Yoruba concept of *ipadawaye* leads me to interpret the ending of the novel in a hopeful way as it points to the potential of the medium of art to resolve conflicts between different understandings of temporality and with it different attitudes towards life. As the ending of the novel explains how Lizzie eventually manages to regain control over her own life by giving space to Ayo and Grace in her present life through visual art, it might also be read as an allegorical suggestion for American society to make room for the stories of enslaved Africans and African Americans in the public sphere.

3. Conclusion: Creating Moral Witnesses through the Use of Temporal Disruptions

The preceding analyses of Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred* and Phyllis Alesia Perry's *Stigmata* have shown how both authors turn their protagonists into moral witnesses by putting them into the position of an enslaved black woman in the antebellum United States. Dana and Lizzie struggle with physically experiencing their enslaved ancestors' reality as they are forced to live through history without any chance to change it. Apart from this historical determinism that produces inevitable suffering, Dana's and Lizzie's journeys are lonely: Although Dana takes her husband Kevin with her into antebellum Maryland, his experience of the past is extremely different from Dana's because of his positionality as an Anglo-American man. Dana's situation is aggravated by her inability to share what has happened to her with anyone beside her husband for fear of being considered mentally instable. This fear seems to be justified when looking at how Lizzie's story unfolds after she reveals to her family that she is having visions of her ancestors' lives: at first, Lizzie's visions are dismissed as products of her overactive imagination and later, when Lizzie's body begins to show the scars that life as an enslaved woman left on her ancestor's body, she is committed to a psychiatric hospital. Lizzie has to spend fourteen years forcibly institutionalized and is only discharged after she pretends to have harmed herself and made up the reincarnation story as an excuse. Understanding that simply telling other people verbally about her experiences will not have the desired effect, she learns to express what is happening to her through visual art.

Linking Dana's and Lizzie's stories to the concept of the moral witness enables me to evaluate the potential impact of their experiences and its implications for the futures imagined by both novels. Following Avishai Margalit, Aleida Assmann defines the moral witness as a survivor of a crime against humanity whose witnessing combines aspects of preferring criminal charges and expressing a lament for the dead who died as a consequence of the crime which the moral witness survived (Assmann 41-42). The status of the moral witness needs to be recognized by a secondary witness – Assmann uses the example of Holocaust survivors who need a society that is willing to acknowledge their testimonies and that in turn retrospectively engages with their traumatic pasts through forms of political

responsibility and cultures of memory which emphasize empathy and solidarity with those victims (42-43). She continues to elaborate on Margalit's concept of the moral witness by mentioning three aspects that Margalit specifically stressed: first, the embodied truth of the testimony; second, the construction of a moral authority; third, the truth mission of the witness (44). As the moral witness experiences the crime against humanity firsthand, it gets inscribed onto their body, hence the term "embodied truth." Even if the witness remains (verbally) silent, the scars on their body are giving testimony (44). The second point refers to the secondary witness that the moral witness needs – by giving testimony, the moral witness performatively and interactively creates a moral society that did not exist beforehand (45). The truth mission of the moral witness is explained as understanding the remembering of the crimes against humanity in question as an ethical duty and as conscious resistance against attempts of perpetrator groups to make people forget what happened (46).

Through the speculative elements of time travel and reincarnation respectively, *Kindred* and *Stigmata* manage to create a moral witness of a crime against humanity which happened so long ago that its last actual survivors died decades before the writing of *Kindred* in the 1970s. While both Dana and Lizzie certainly express a lament for the dead (Dana does so at the end of the novel, when she tries and fails to find historical sources about the fate of the enslaved friends she left behind on the Weylin plantation; Lizzie does so through her artistic practice), the issue of preferring criminal charges is complicated by the temporal distance between them and the culprits in question. It is even more problematic in Dana's case since she is herself a descendant of Rufus, the eventual antagonist of the novel, and unwillingly becomes his accomplice in the rape of Alice Greenwood. Although Dana eventually kills Rufus in self-defense, she has become complicit in his crimes to a certain extent before. In the case of Lizzie, the preferring of criminal charges also seems to be impossible, since Lizzie knows the faces of the people who victimized Ayo but not their names and due to the time span that has passed all of the culprits are already deceased in the novel's 1970s to 1990s setting. I suggest considering the function of the moral witness with regard to preferring criminal charges in a broader sense: rather than using their testimonies to prosecute individual culprits, both novels criticize the systems that enabled those crimes against humanity. Instead of bringing individuals who profited from racialized

enslavement to justice, the novels are more interested in uncovering and pressing charges against their underlying ideology of white supremacy shifting the focus from individual to collective responsibility.

Another core issue of the moral witness is the presence of a secondary witness, a society that is willing to acknowledge the moral witnesses' testimonies and that in turn retrospectively engages with their traumatic pasts through forms of political responsibility and cultures of memory which emphasize empathy and solidarity with those victims (Assmann 42-43). This proves to be particularly difficult for Dana and Lizzie, as their transcendence of temporal boundaries by supernatural means impacts their credibility in a negative way. Although Dana's husband Kevin can confirm the authenticity of her claims, she chooses to remain silent because she is sure that other people will doubt her sanity when she tells them the truth. Dana's concerns are legitimate as Lizzie's story illustrates. When sharing her supernatural experiences, Lizzie is pathologized and eventually institutionalized, her testimony is not acknowledged as such. Despite the marks that their encounters with historical enslavement left on Dana's and Lizzie's bodies which are consistent with the idea of an "embodied truth" of the moral witness (Assmann 44), those scars remain open to interpretation. They provide clear evidence of Dana's and Lizzie's suffering, but do not give any indication of who is responsible for them. As a result, both Dana's and Lizzie's scars are misinterpreted: in the case of Dana, her social environment reads the marks as an outcome of domestic violence; in Lizzie's case, the wounds are assumed to be self-inflicted.

It is only after Lizzie discovers that visual art provides her with a means to communicate what has happened to her in a way that is socially acceptable. While *Stigmata* does not reveal how Lizzie's story continues after leaving Tuskegee for Atlanta, it is imaginable that her work as an artist has the potential to inspire the aforementioned forms of political responsibility and cultures of memory. This ties in with the construction of a moral authority and the "truth mission" of the moral witness (Assmann 44-46). Through her art, Lizzie has the chance to create a moral society willing to acknowledge her testimony that did not exist beforehand (Assmann 45). By remaining silent, Dana fails to do so.

Both Dana and Lizzie share the truth mission of the moral witness: They understand the remembering of their ancestors' suffering as an ethical duty and as conscious resistance against attempts to make people forget what happened

(Assmann 46). In *Kindred*, this is made clear in two instances: first, when Dana peruses the fiction and nonfiction books about slavery at her home and realizes that they are completely inadequate representations of the lives of enslaved African Americans; subsequently, she tries to create a more accurate account, but ultimately fails to put her experiences into words. Second, the final scene of the novel, in which Dana and Kevin research the fates of the enslaved people left behind on the Weylin plantation, illustrates the lack of official historical records concerning African American history. By revealing these inadequacies, *Kindred* draws attention to the importance of preserving and uncovering histories of marginalized groups that tend to be neglected in mainstream historiography. In a similar manner, *Stigmata* presents not official historical documents, but personal items as credible sources for African American history. Apart from Lizzie's direct access to Ayo's memories through her visions, she uses Ayo's diary and Grace's story quilt narrating important events from Ayo's life to learn about her ancestors' lives. By shifting the focus from official historical records to art as a means to impart historical knowledge, *Stigmata* revalues the importance of cultural artifacts created by enslaved African Americans as historical sources. This is not only true for works of visual art, but also for the genre of the traditional slave narrative.

Kindred and *Stigmata* engage with traditional slave narratives in different ways: While *Kindred* acknowledges traditional slave narratives as a credible source of information about the living conditions of the enslaved, the novel also admits that there are certain limits to their ability to make the inhumanity of enslavement completely accessible to readers who have never made similar experiences themselves. In antebellum Maryland, Dana's knowledge about traditional slave narratives does not help her, but instead makes her feel inadequate: "Nothing in my education or knowledge of the future had helped me to escape. Yet in a few years an illiterate runaway named Harriet Tubman would make nineteen trips into this country and lead three hundred fugitives to freedom. What had I done wrong?" (145). This fraught relationship with traditional slave narratives is also reflected in the structure of *Kindred*: Instead of following the pattern of enslavement-escape-freedom, the novel depicts Dana's journey not as linearly progressive, but as zigzagging between those three statuses illustrating the precariousness of Dana's freedom. While most of the plotline of *Kindred* is told chronologically with only the occasional flashback, *Stigmata* abandons a chronological narration in favor of

multiple narrative strands. By abandoning the enslavement-escape-freedom structure of traditional slave narratives, neo-slave narratives such as *Kindred* and *Stigmata* complicate simple narratives of progress and illustrate the precariousness and limits of the freedom that African Americans have achieved in the United States. Dana feels free in 1970s California, but only as long as she does not engage with her family's history. Lizzie is free in 1970s Alabama, but only as long as she does not remember her ancestors' suffering. As soon as they start exploring their respective families' histories, Dana and Lizzie become aware of the limits of their own freedom and the price their ancestors were forced to pay to enable it.

Learning about their ancestors' lives raises Dana's and Lizzie's awareness of not only the lack public spaces for remembrance of African American enslavement, but also draws their attention to continuities of anti-black and misogynoir²⁶ violence. In Dana's case, this is made clear when her social environment assumes that her wounds (which she sustained in antebellum Maryland) are the result of her husband abusing her, a logical continuation of interracialized partnerships based on the white male partner's dominance over his black female partner, a moderate modern version of Dana's Anglo-American ancestor Rufus' relationship with her enslaved black ancestor Alice. In Lizzie's case, her institutionalization can be traced to societal patterns that pathologize unwanted social behavior in both women and black people.

Both *Kindred* and *Stigmata* address questions concerning the afterlife of slavery which center round reproductive rights and bodily autonomy in *Kindred* and around discourses about mental health in *Stigmata*. Reading the physical wounds that are inflicted on Dana and Lizzie allegorically as manifestations of anti-black violence caused by white supremacy makes clear how both novels differ in their endings and implied outlook on the future of their protagonists. Whereas Dana loses her arm permanently because of her supernatural experiences, Lizzie's injuries leave scars that do not constantly affect her physical abilities. Thus, while both Dana's and Lizzie's bodies are marked by their experiences of enslavement, Dana's injuries limit her future movements in a way that Lizzie's scars do not which

²⁶ Coined by Moya Bailey and Trudy in 2008, “[m]isogynoir describes the anti-Black racist misogyny that Black women experience” (cf. Bailey/Trudy). As a concept, misogynoir encompasses “both an historical anti-Black misogyny and a problematic intraracial gender dynamic” (ibid.).

leads me to read *Kindred*'s ending as more pessimistic than *Stigmata*'s. I suggest reading *Kindred*'s ending in which Dana is left with the loss of an arm and the inability to communicate what has happened to her as indicative of the attitude that as long as African American enslavement is not publicly addressed, it continues to harm African Americans. In contrast to that, *Stigmata* proposes the medium of visual art as a way through which experiences of enslaved African Americans and the afterlife of slavery can be communicated. Although Lizzie is not cured by the end of the novel, her artistic practice helps her to cope with her experiences in so far that she learns to live with her ancestral bonds with Ayo and Grace and manages to control their influence over her life.

While the previous two analyses have focused on neo-slave narratives in which characters transcend temporal boundaries and are thereby turned into moral witnesses, the following two case studies are concerned with neo-slave narratives that employ the genre of alternate history in order to address questions regarding the afterlife of slavery.

3. Alternate History as Afrofuturist Practice in Steven Barnes' *Lion's Blood* (2003) and Bernardine Evaristo's *Blonde Roots* (2007)

1. Reversing History in Steven Barnes' *Lion's Blood* (2003)

What if the first African Muslims who entered the North American continent had come as conquerors and colonizers and not as enslaved people?²⁷ This question is at the heart of Steven Barnes' world-building in his 2003 novel *Lion's Blood*. As a coming-of-age story the novel features an unlikely friendship between Kai ibn Jallaleddin ibn Rashid, a black aristocratic Muslim slaveholder of Ethiopian descent and his white Irish enslaved companion Aidan O'Dere. Instead of simply reversing the racialized makeup of oppressor/oppressed, the novel attempts to make the reversal plausible by explaining how this new world order has come into being through a diegetic history lesson and a timeline in the epilogue. Points of divergence include Socrates leaving Athens for Alexandria instead of being poisoned, Alexander the Great becoming pharaoh and Carthage winning the Punic Wars. While it might be surprising to learn that white European historical characters are cast in the role of creating a world that is supposedly non-Eurocentric, the author states in an interview that "using established tropes and images, then constructing [his] own literary edifice with them, [he] was able to build a bridge from the ordinary experience of white Americans to the experience of black Americans, and simultaneously create a work where black Americans could read for the first time about a world in which they were the winners" (Beatty, np).

A map at the beginning of the novel introduces the readers to the fictional world of *Lion's Blood*: in the South, where Mexico is in our world, we find "Azteca," a region ruled by the Aztecs who were not colonized by the Spanish and instead flourished until the nineteenth century in which the novel is set. The African colony of Bilalistan is divided into four provinces, Azania, New Alexandria, New Djibouti and Wichita. They are located in the south-east of the map encompassing real-world Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee and the south-east of Arkansas,

²⁷ While some scholars argue that Africans travelled to the Americas prior to its colonization by Europeans, the first verifiable black Muslim who entered North America is Esteban de Dorantes (alias "Estevanico") (Gordon 183). After he was enslaved in Portuguese-controlled Morocco in 1522, his Spanish owner Andrés Dorantes de Carranza took him on the so-called Narváez expedition to the Southwest region of North America in 1527 (Gordon 183). For more information on enslaved African Muslims in the US, see Turner.

Missouri and Texas, respectively. In our timeline, those states formed the



Confederate States of America which eventually led to the American Civil War; thus, the map already hints at the significance of racialized enslavement for its plot and predicts the development of an armed conflict. North of Bilalistan is Vineland,

a Viking colony, that is located in the areas of real-world Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, the parts of Ontario that are south of the Saint Lawrence river, as well as Maine and the north of New Hampshire, Vermont and New York, respectively. Within the alternate timeline of the novel, the Vikings are the dominant ethnic group in Northern Europe who have established trade relations with Egyptians and Ethiopians and provide them with abducted white people for enslavement. Their North American settlement echoes real-world history as evidence for ancient Viking settlements in Newfoundland has been discovered (Langmoen 1082). Another ethnic group that is present on the novel's North American continent are the Chinese who have settled on its west coast (where real-world California is). Although they do not play a role for the plot of *Lion's Blood*, their presence on the map contributes to the readers' perception of this fictional North America as ethnically diverse. The rest of North America, called "the Nations," is ruled by various indigenous people with a few "disputed territories" on their border to Bilalistan. In contrast to real-world North America in 1863, indigenous people in the timeline of novel have managed to remain in control of large parts of North America, although they are pushed back farther west through the expansion policy of both the African colonists and the Aztecs. Thus, the map not only redraws spatial borders, but also blurs the readers' temporal assumptions by mixing occurrences from different parts of American history (the Viking settlements of about 1000 AD, the Aztec empire of 1428–1521, the Confederate States of America 1861–1865 and the arrival of the first Chinese immigrants who settled on the American west coast in 1820) on one map.

What constitutes the chronopolitical intervention in *Lion's Blood*, then is not only the alternative timeline that Barnes creates for the novel, but also the ways in which real-world history resonates within this timeline. Examples for this include the novel's Immortal Empress of Abyssinia as doppelgänger for real-world Queen Victoria, the presence of historical figure Shaka Zulu in the novel's North America or the naming of the Islamic North American colony after Bilal ibn Rabah who (in both our timeline and the novel's) was a companion of Islamic prophet Muhammad.²⁸ Here, the Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory is useful

²⁸ Bilal ibn Rabah was an Ethiopian slave who converted to Islam against the will of his owner and joined Islamic prophet Muhammad who declared him the first muezzin (Curtis 663-664). The story of Bilal resonates well within the African American Muslim community – some African

to show how the novels employs references to well-known historical events and figures as a means to foster empathy with the protagonists and their real-life counterparts by proxy. The first subchapter will examine those and more resonances of real-world historical figures and events.

The second subchapter will focus on a topic which I have also addressed in the previous chapters which is the depiction of specifically female experiences of enslavement. Although the protagonists of *Lion's Blood* are male, there is also a female character who serves as focalizer: Sophia De Moroc, a biracial²⁹ woman who is first introduced as Kai's sex slave. In the beginning, Sophia entertains hopes of Kai freeing her; however, in the course of the novel, she falls in love with Aidan and is allowed to marry him. Afterwards, Sophia is separated from her husband as payment for a lost bet and subsequently abused by Kai's uncle Malik ibn Rashid al Kushi, until she is finally freed after his death at the end of the novel. I will analyze Sophia's story by putting it in a conversation with traditional slave narratives written by women. Furthermore, the character of Sophia illustrates that the alternative world of *Lion's Blood* is scarcely different from the real world when it comes to the status of women which will be explored in detail in the respective subchapter by putting Sophia in conversation with the other female characters in the novel.

Both of these aspects have so far only been marginally addressed in existent criticism of *Lion's Blood*: Juan Elices considers the novel and its sequel *Zulu Heart* "as key examples of postcolonial alternate history" and argues that the novel's setting "lays bare the incongruities underlying slavery, racism and exclusion due to racial differences, while proposing a context in which these gaps are eventually bridged and dissolved" (Elices 48). David Lambert connects *Lion's Blood* to the public discourse on reparations in the US (Lambert). Isiah Lavender reads the role reversal of *Lion's Blood* as "a device used to show how all of humanity is essentially the same in its desires for freedom and the ability to oppress" (Lavender 80). Although all three critics remark on the temporal disturbances in the novel insofar as they note the alternative timeline and the use of both Gregorian and Islamic

American Muslims use the designation "Bilalian" to describe themselves in ethno-religious terms; for more information see Curtis.

²⁹ Some non-academic reviewers have read Sophia as conforming to the "tragic mulatta" stereotype, an estimation which my reading will call into question.

calendar throughout the novel, they do not address the ways in which the novel complicates its readers' temporal orientation by putting images associated with different time periods alongside each other: while the novel is officially set between 1863 (1279 according to Islamic calendar) and 1873 (1290 according to Islamic calendar), *Lion's Blood's* depiction of Ireland is reminiscent of real world early medieval Ireland whereas the political struggles of Bilalistan as a colony of Abyssinia contain parallels to the colonial history of the United States while the attitude of the black Muslim and non-Muslim African groups towards the Aztecs present in North America mirrors those of Spanish conquistadors.

a. Making the Entanglement of Historiography with Political Ideologies Visible

Lion's Blood begins with introducing the readers to the Irish O'Dere family. Although the date given is 1863 (AD), the O'Dere's way of life in their crannog³⁰ is more reminiscent of real-world medieval times than of the second half of the nineteenth century: most families in their village seem to work in the agricultural sector and there is no hint of industrialization. Their simple, but idyllic life is interrupted by a Viking attack during which family father Mahon O'Dere is killed, while his wife Deirdre and his children Nessa and Aidan are abducted and enslaved. Raids by Vikings that led to the enslavement of Irish people were a common occurrence in real world Ireland between 795 and 1200 AD (cf. Holman, particularly pages 23-44). So far, the story does not seem to be set in an alternate world, but rather misdated. However, this impression changes when the Vikings' ship lands in al-Andalus. While the real world "Iberian Peninsula under Moorish control between the years 711 and 1492" is also known as al-Andalus, the relations between their inhabitants and the Vikings were shaped by armed conflicts instead of peaceful trade as exemplified by repeated Viking raids on Lisbon and Seville.³¹ From al-Andalus, Deirdre and her children are transported to Northern American via the Middle Passage. The journey is described from Aidan's point of view and

³⁰ A crannog is a "type of habitation built on an island, partly natural, partly man-made, in a lake (usually a small and sheltered one)." Crannogs are exclusive to the British Isles and most of them were built in the 6th and 7th centuries, but they fell out of use until the end of the 16th century ("Crannóg").

³¹ "al-Andalus" in *The American Heritage(R) Dictionary of the English Language*

substantively resembles depictions of the Middle Passage and the conditions in slave ships in traditional slave narratives:

They were crushed in like salted fish in a barrel, barely room to breathe or move, and the screams and moans were almost as bad as the lack of room [...] Darkness deeper than night reigned absolute. Already the air grew heavy and hot, almost like breathing mud. The narrow shelves were so tightly packed [...] There was no room to sit up. There were probably a hundred eighty captives crushed into a space that would have been grueling for sixty (40-42).

This description echoes depictions of the Middle Passage in traditional slave narratives, such *Slavery Illustrated, in the Histories of Zangara and Maquama, Two Negroes Stolen From Africa and Sold Into Slavery. Related by Themselves*:

We were taken down some steps, and made to creep into a large low place between two floors, so near together that I could not by any means sit upright. More and more of the poor trembling wretched Negroes were brought down and crowded in, till we had only just room to lie in rows close to each other. The place was almost dark, and soon became so hot and close that we could scarcely breathe. When our floor was full, we heard them bringing others, to lie in the same way on the floor above us. Sighs and groans were all that were uttered among us, but from above we soon heard the appalling shrieks and cries of women and children (10).

When comparing both accounts, certain parallels are observable: both focalizers emphasize the lack of space, the darkness and the hot barely breathable air in the hold of the slave ship as well as the “screams and moans” and “shrieks and cries,” respectively, that attest to the suffering of the fellow captives. The focus on the sensory impressions of the focalizers serves to make it easier for the readers to imagine the living conditions on slave ships and thus empathize with the focalizers.

However, due to Aidan’s Irish descent, his description also evokes images of the so-called coffin ships which transported refugees from the Great Irish Famine to the Americas in the 1840s; because of poor hygienic conditions and overcrowding many passengers did not survive the journey hence the nickname coffin ships.³² Aidan then works simultaneously as a white stand-in for real-world enslaved Africans and as a reminder of the actual history of Irish immigration to

³² Humanitarian Stephen “De Vere described a famine ship voyage to a House of Commons Select Committee in 1847:

Hundreds of poor people, men, women and children, of all ages, from the drivelling idiot of ninety to the babe just born, huddled together without light, without air, wallowing in filth and breathing a fetid atmosphere ... living without food or medicine, dying without the voice of spiritual consolation, and buried in the depths without the rites of the church” (“Coffin ship”).

North America: his witnessing of the suffering, illness and death of his fellow countrymen on the transatlantic vessel shares characteristics with both historical events. By associating the Atlantic crossings of nineteenth century Irish immigrants and sixteenth to nineteenth century enslaved Africans with each other, the novel invites its readers to rethink the importance of marginalized peoples' (enforced) work for the American economy. As a result, *Lion's Blood* also risks perpetuating the myth of Irish slaves which is the result of a "reluctance to differentiate between indentured servitude and perpetual chattel slavery" and which has been employed by white supremacist groups to invalidate African Americans' demands for equality (Hogan et al. 21).

However, employing the concept of multidirectional memory can be helpful to go beyond the idea of Irish American and African American history as competing with each other for attention and towards (in this case) Irish American history reinforcing a public awareness of African American history. As the first eight chapters of *Lion's Blood* that narrate Aidan's life before enslavement, his abduction, his Middle Passage and his eventual sale at the slave market of Bilalistan strongly resemble traditional slave narratives, the novel affirms the status of slave narratives as credible sources of information about the lives of the enslaved. This part of the novel then uses Aidan's story not only to entertain, but also to mediate knowledge about the living conditions of actual historical enslaved Africans. This might be considered problematic insofar as the novel employs a fictional white character to foster empathy with real-world black people – a narrative strategy that could be read as contributing to the invisibility of the suffering of enslaved Africans and as presuming that a white speaker is necessary to make these kinds of stories heard. While I recognize the problematic nature of the representation of black suffering through a white protagonist, my analytical approach that employs the concept of multidirectional memory focuses on the mutually reinforcing potential that this narrative strategy of combining two different marginalized identities in one character can unfold: Aidan's status as an Irish person encourages readers to draw connections between the histories of oppression that connect African American and Irish history, not in the sense of approaching their suffering in a comparative way, but rather as pointing out mechanisms of repression and finding commonalities in the ways in which the American economy has exploited marginalized people as resources.

As soon as Aidan and his family arrive in North America, it becomes clear that their living conditions resemble those of enslaved Africans rather than those of Irish indentured servants: All three members of the O'Dere family are sold at a slave auction. Instead of signing fixed-term contracts as indentured servants would do, it is made clear that they are supposed to serve their slaveholders for the rest of their lives. Aidan and his mother are bought by Oko, a representative of Kai's home the Dar Kush plantation, while Aidan's sister Nessa is sold to another buyer – a black woman who has exclusively bought girls which leads Aidan (and the readers) to suspect that she will be exploited in a brothel. Thus, the novel addresses both the potentially traumatic separation of families due to their enslavement as well as gendered forms of exploitation. Aidan's and Deirdre's journey ends at the plantation Dar Kush where they settle in the so-called Ghost Town – the quarter of the enslaved people. The plantation seems to work exactly like its historical counterpart: it is owned by a wealthy member of the societal elite (called by the Islamic honorific title of the Wakil) who uses overseers to control the large number of enslaved and disenfranchised workers. Planters and overseers who injure or kill enslaved workers face no legal consequences. As the story progresses, Aidan and the readers learn that plantation owner Abu Ali is considered too lenient by other planters who oppose his habit of allowing his enslaved workers to keep their own names and religion.

By casting an Irish character in the role of the enslaved protagonist, *Lion's Blood* urges its readers to recall the Anti-Irish discrimination that Catholic Irish Americans faced in the mid-nineteenth century illustrating that even supposedly homogenous racialized categories have their internal hierarchies which can also change in time. Historian David R. Roediger explains that

[i]mpoverished, possessing few skills that they could use to rapidly improve their position in society, and subject to harsh prejudices and social and economic discrimination, Irish immigrants in northern cities, such as New York and Philadelphia, often lived among free African Americans, whose social situation was similar (Roediger 162).

Roediger then continues to describe how the relationship between African Americans and Irish Americans changed in time:

Gradually, however, through a distribution of political power and economic opportunity that greatly favored the Irish, [... the] Irish had begun to be admitted into the ranks of American white people, with the psychological and practical privileges that came with being white" (ibid.).

This part of Irish American history illustrates that racialized identities are not perpetually fixed but subject to constant change which is brought about by both internal (social stratification within the racialized group) and external factors (relationship to the dominant group as well as other marginalized groups or legislation concerning immigration and workers' rights). By referring to Irish American history, *Lion's Blood* draws the readers' attention to the constructedness of racialized identities that is not ahistorical but continually changing while simultaneously broaching the issue of internal dividing lines between supposedly homogenous racialized groups.

This also applies to the dominant racialized group in the world of *Lion's Blood*: Although all black people enjoy a higher social status than white people, the leading groups in Barnes' fictional universe are Muslim Ethiopians and Egyptians. This choice of Ethiopians and Egyptians as dominant ethnicities is not surprising considering their elevated status in afrocentric thought. Ethiopia is commonly regarded as the place of origin of the first modern humans. During its three thousand years old history, Ethiopia has managed to retain its independence (apart from the Italian occupation from 1936-41) and was one of two African nations not to be colonized during the so-called Scramble for Africa in the 19th century (the other being Liberia). Afrocentric scholars such as Cheikh Anta Diop regard ancient Egyptians as the first black originally African advanced civilization. Mainstream historians and Egyptologists tend to disagree with ascribing modern racialized identities to ancient cultures (cf. Brace et al. 26). What has come to be known as the Ancient Egyptian race controversy (i.e. the aforementioned discussion about the racialized identities of ancient Egyptians) is also addressed in *Lion's Blood*: In a history lesson with his Yoruba teacher Babatunde, Kai is confused about the ethnicity of historical personality Alexander the Great (or rather Pharaoh Haaibre Setepenamen, as he is known in the alternative world of the novel). His teacher explains that

Men create history to suit themselves. [...] As your people marched out of Africa to conquer the world, they burned old images and created new ones, as men have always done, and the Great Pharaoh became a black man. The evidence is there, if you choose to look for it, if you are unafraid to question the common wisdom (140).

This example is reminiscent of the aforementioned real-world discussions about the ethnicity of Egyptian pharaohs: Thus, the novel takes a critical stance on the entanglement of historiography with ideological positions. In the appendix of the novel, readers find a timeline that outlines the history of the diegetic world in which the point of divergence situated in 400 BC when (white) ancient Greek philosopher Socrates escapes from his death sentence to Egypt where his arrival heralds a phase of cultural and intellectual growth. This emphasis on an ancient Greek philosopher as pivotal for the story's Muslim African supremacy is particularly surprising considering the disputed status that Greek philosophy holds in Afrocentric historical discourse, with works such as Martin Bernal's controversial *Black Athena* arguing that ancient Greek civilization was only made possible through the influence of ancient Egyptians and Phoenicians. By combining elements from both Eurocentric history (history as influenced by great men such as Socrates or Alexander the Great) and Afrocentric historical revision (the ancient Egyptians and Ethiopians as advanced civilizations) without explicitly taking sides for one of those positions, *Lion's Blood* emphasizes the entanglement of historiography with potentially racist ideological implications and invites readers to question their own bias concerning historical developments.

While aristocratic Egyptians and Ethiopians are the dominant social groups in the fictional world of *Lion's Blood*, Muslims from other African ethnicities such as Yoruba or Igbo are not as privileged and are often employed as teachers or overseers in Bilalistan.³³ This echoes the differences that existed in real-world nineteenth century North America, with white immigrants from certain ethnicized-religious backgrounds (such as white Protestants from England) gaining predominance over those from other ethnicized-religious origins (such as white Catholics from Germany, Ireland or Italy or Jewish people, see Conzen et al. 83). Non-Muslim black people such as the Zulus in the novel tend to be disparaged by the Muslim elites, unless they are needed as an ally in armed conflicts. In the novel, a fictional version of the historical military leader and founder of the Zulu empire Shaka Zulu, whose lifetime is moved forward about fifty years and who is

³³ In the real-world USA, African "Muslim slaves often occupied leadership roles in the jobs that slaves performed on plantations in the American South" due to their frequently high level of education and literacy in Arabic (Turner 32). This allusion to actual history once again illustrates that social stratification exists between supposedly homogenous racialized groups.

transplanted from South Africa to North America, illustrates the internal boundaries between the black people of Bilalistan. Kai's father Abu Ali approaches Shaka Zulu in order to enlist his help in the impending war against the Aztecs.

In the diegetic world of *Lion's Blood*, the Aztecs rule over (what we would today call) Mexico and are keen on expanding their territory. Kai encounters Aztecs for the first time in the small town of Ababa where his father and brother protect four Aztecs from an angry mob (243-245). The Aztecs had entered Ababa seeking to lease land and were attacked by racist villagers until Abu Ali and his oldest son Ali killed the assailants. In this scene, the Aztecs in question are victims of racism and their plight provides an opportunity to affirm Abu Ali's character as a just protector of the law. However, the relationship between Bilalistan and the Aztecs changes when the latter conquer a place of Pilgrimage, the Mosque of the Fathers, "where the men who founded and explored [Bilalistan] died two hundred years" prior (463). After their siege of the Mosque of the Fathers, Kai perceives them as "cannibal Aztec butchers" and abandons his previous pacifist tendencies to join the fight (462). The idea of Aztecs as cannibals is mentioned repeatedly in *Lion's Blood*, but always as rumors and none of the characters in the novel has ever seen this happening in person (ten, thirteen, thirty-two, fifty-five, sixty-two, sixty-three, sixty-five). During the negotiation of a truce agreement, Aztec king Cuahutomac demands that Bilalistan's "slaves must be turned over to us, for sacrifice to great Quetzalcoatl," however, it remains unclear whether the human sacrifice ceremony would include cannibalism (520). Whether real-world Aztecs practiced cannibalism (and if so, to which extent) also remains subject to debate as the scarce historical

sources are exceedingly difficult to interpret. The eyewitness accounts (of which there are only two) were recorded in documents intended to justify their own acts of unprovoked war against the Aztecs. All of the other accounts are based on retrospective hearsay or come from Western interpretations of native books (codices) recording mythological or possibly metaphoric information (Aldana).

Thus, the novel references colonial discursive practices of vilifying indigenous opponents by associating them with cannibalism. The presence of Cuahutomac plays an important role in this respect as his name is reminiscent of the real-world final Aztec emperor Cuauhtémoc (c. 1495-1525) who led the resistance against Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés.

After his capture, he resisted torture at the hands of the Spanish treasurer Julián de Alderete by refusing to disclose the location of the Aztec treasure. He was baptized Fernando Cortés Alvarado Cuauhtemotzin Huitzilíhuitl, and appointed figurehead over the Indians of Tenochtitlan, but later hanged from a ceibal tree in February 1525, on the dubious charge of having plotted against Cortés (Christopher Fulton a 5-6).

In the nineteenth century, Cuauhtémoc became “a symbol of Mexico’s triumph over foreign intervention and [...] national unity” (Christopher Fulton a 21), while in newer times

tensions exist between the government’s use of the figure to sustain a nationalist ideology and the adoption of the symbol by dissidents and champions of subordinated groups [...] which result in the figure of Cuauhtémoc] now associated with an array of disjointed and often contradictory hopes and sentiments [...] through which it is continually reinterpreted and transformed (Christopher Fulton b 43).

In contrast to his Aztec subjects who are characterized as “barbarian” (Barnes 110) and as “demons” (329), *Lion’s Blood’s* Cuahutomac is portrayed as a sensible statesman whose “Arabic is excellent” and who represents people who “want merely the land that belongs to [them...] and the guarantee of peace for a generation” (519). By stating that he seeks to reclaim territory that was his to begin with, the novel changes the readers’ perception of the diegetic Aztecs: they are turned from greedy colonizers into indigenous people resisting colonization. This shifts again when Cuahutomac outlines his conditions for a truce: He is willing to let the black officers and foot soldiers leave unharmed, if allowed to kill their white slaves in a religious ritual – thus, confirming some of the prejudices held by the population of Bilalistan (520). When meeting Cuahutomac for the first time, Kai recognizes him as one of the Aztecs whom his father helped in Ababa. Cuahutomac enquires about Kai’s father and expresses his condolences after learning about Abu Ali’s death. In contrast to their first encounter, the tables have turned and Cuahutomac’s army outnumbers the soldiers from Bilalistan. The character of Cuahutomac disrupts the novel’s stereotypical portray of the Aztecs to a certain extent. Cuahutomac humanizes the Aztecs and his rational behavior stands in stark contrast to Shaka Zulu’s conduct.

Against the threat of the Aztecs, Abu Ali seeks Shaka Zulu’s support. Kai’s father recognizes the advantages of siding with Shaka Zulu against the Aztecs, although he is repelled by the Zulu chief’s adherence to nature worship, his

penchant for alcoholic beverages and above all, his ruthless and violent behavior. Abu Ali regards Shaka as “an animal,” but simultaneously acknowledges that he is “a fierce and valuable ally” (77). When Kai meets Shaka Zulu in person, the chapters focalized by Kai present the readers with Shaka as a stereotypical evil villain who does not hesitate to kill even his own men if they disappoint him. Throughout the novel, Shaka is compared to animals: He is described as “lean and muscular as a desert lion” (76) with a “hawkish smile” (78) on the face of his “leonine head” (309) who is like “a jolly bear” when he is happy not merely laughing but “bark[ing] laughter” (80) and “roar[ing]” (85). On horseback, Shaka is “a giant of a man who rode like a centaur” (254). Shaka encourages this perception of himself; this is illustrated by an anecdote from a former war with the Aztecs that he tells to Kai and his family: “We were men no longer, we were lions, mad with blood, hungry for more, in that red place all men should experience once in their lives” (264-265). Kai is not impressed, remarking that “the awful Shaka lived for war” (85). The tensions between Kai and Shaka climax during the war against the Aztecs as Shaka kills Kai’s brother Ali for objecting to the chief’s harsh treatment of the enslaved soldiers which leads to Kai slaying Shaka to avenge his brother’s death. Although it might be surprising for readers to have a novel by an African American author building upon and reiterating colonial perspectives on Shaka Zulu such as Nathaniel Isaac’s 1836 *Travels and Adventures in Eastern Africa*,³⁴ this characterization of the Zulu chief is effective insofar as it points out the importance of conflicts and power struggles within racialized groups, particularly in Shaka’s death by Kai’s hand. Considering how much the novel exaggerates Shaka’s villainy, one is also tempted to read his portrayal as a parody of colonial representations of Shaka Zulu. This becomes even more clear when comparing Shaka to the second antagonist of the novel, Kai’s uncle Malik, who is “more warrior than statesman” (77) and “both loved and feared” by Kai (83).

In the first half of the novel, Malik is portrayed as Kai’s combat trainer who tries to inspire his nephew to become a skilled warrior; the Kai’s relationship to his uncle is marked by his admiration of Malik’s skills but also skepticism concerning his violent fits of temper and his eagerness to engage in war-like activities. In the second half of *Lion’s Blood*, Malik is turned into an antagonist after his acquisition

³⁴ For more information on Nathaniel Isaac’s narrative and its influence on the perception of Shaka Zulu, see Wylie.

of Aidan's wife Sophia. After this plot point, Malik is also compared to animals (although less often than Shaka Zulu): when raping Sophia, Malik's fingers turn into "claws" and the noises he makes during the assault are described as "grunt[s]" (375). As this passage is focalized by Sophia, these comparisons emphasize the animalistic nature of his rape and serve to highlight Sophia's plight. Malik's animalistic transformation also arises in hazardous situations: Attacked by enslaved insurgents, "Malik snarled, a wolf at bay" and "scuttled like a crab" (397). However, unlike Shaka Zulu who is constantly associated to animals throughout the novel, the comparisons in Malik's case are always tied to a certain situative behavior (fight or rape) in which he appears threatening to the people around him (leaders of the slave insurrection or Sophia). Thus, even though Shaka Zulu and Malik are often explicitly compared to each other (page 85: "His uncle and the awful Shaka lived for war." Page 435: "Your uncle walked his own path, a path he shared with men like Shaka. Malik was consumed by the sword." Page 495: "Kai saw in his face, a thing that was closer to death than life, an abyss that certain warriors found within themselves, leaving them standing forever on its uncertain edge. Men like Shaka. Like Malik."), Malik's family members frequently excuse his behavior biologizing Malik's cruelty by attributing it to "the lion in his blood" (435) and justifying Malik's repeated sexual assaults of Sophia with his grief for his recently deceased wife, whereas Shaka Zulu is simply regarded as "mad" (514).

The difference between Shaka Zulu and Malik becomes particularly clear in the depiction of their respective deaths. The killing of Shaka is shown as an act of restorative justice: After Shaka Zulu has killed Kai's brother Ali for criticizing him, the Zulu chief starts "to laugh, roaring from deep in his stomach, head thrown back, overwhelmed by cruel mirth" which leads Kai to stab him to death (507). When Shaka dies, "[n]o sound emerged, only a flood of crimson as he dropped to the earth" (ibid.). The silence that Shaka's death leaves hints at the volatility of his legacy: after Shaka's demise, the novel mentions him only once, referring to him as "brutally shrewd" and "mad" (514). In *Lion's Blood*, it is not Shaka's tactic that is based on sacrificing enslaved soldiers whom he deems expendable which turns out to be the promising way to winning the war with the Aztecs, but Kai's approach to unite both free and enslaved soldiers. Motivating enslaved soldiers by promising to free their offspring in their stead in case of their death at the battlefield, Kai's capacity for empathy with the enslaved is one the keys to his success. In contrast to

Shaka's final moments, Malik's death has a certain bittersweet aftertaste: before his fight at the end of which Kai will kill him, Malik "took his nephew's shoulders and kissed his forehead. 'Good-bye,' he said" (570). After the fight is over and Malik is about to die, focalizer Kai observes that "Malik's face held no more anger, no more pain. It was soft, and proud" (580). With his last words, Malik asks Kai to care for his daughter and tells him "how proud" his father would be of him (ibid.). Thus, in spite of his despicable treatment of Sophia, Malik's final moments present the readers with a family man who maintains an affectionate relationship to his relatives.

Lion's Blood engages with temporality mainly through its questioning of historiography and rewriting of history: whether it is disorienting readers' temporal perception by remixing different historical periods (medieval Europe, colonial North America, pre-colonial Central America) or combining Eurocentric with Afrocentric historiographical traditions without entirely committing to either, the novel's treatment of historiography puts an emphasis on the instrumentalization of historico-political discourse. As illustrated with the above-mentioned diegetic history lesson, historiography is shown to be always entangled with the conscious and unconscious ideological positions of the historiographer. Through its embedding of references to real-world history, *Lion's Blood* encourages its readers to research historical occurrences and figures and draw comparisons between actual historical sources, historiography and the novel. By changing only selected historical events and leaving key factors the same (Irish as marginalized people, Aztecs as conquerors and potential cannibals, Egyptians and Ethiopians as dominant African ethnicized groups), *Lion's Blood* makes it easier for its readers to imagine themselves in its alternate history, but also runs the risk of perpetuating stereotypes. The novel reduces this risk in multiple ways: through multiperspectivity, through the disruption of stereotypes and through parody. In most chapters of the novel, either Aidan or Kai serve as focalizers which enables the readers to experience the story from the points of view of both an enslaved person and a nobleman. So, when Kai thinks that the "servant's life was good, an easier, simpler one than that demanded of the noble class, full of obligations and choices [...] servants were lucky," he appears naïve and privileged to the readers who have just read about Aidan's brutal enslavement a few chapters prior. The disruption of stereotypes becomes clear when looking at the portrayal of the Aztecs

in the novel which shifts throughout the plot: first introduced as threat to Bilalistan and its ambitions for expansion, Kai's (and the readers') image of the Aztecs changes when he witnesses how they are attacked by a racist mob providing Kai's father with an opportunity for heroism when he protects the group of Aztecs by killing the assailants. After Aztecs occupy a Muslim place of Pilgrimage, they are once again perceived as savage cannibals – a view that is complicated through Kai's meeting with Cuahutomac as outlined above. Another strategy that *Lion's Blood* uses is the referencing of imperialist stereotype in such an exaggerated manner that it turns into parody as shown with the character of Shaka Zulu whose depiction as a prototypical villain stands in stark contrast to the more complex characterization of the novel's second antagonist, Malik.

b. Drawing Attention to Female Experiences of Enslavement

Born free, biracial Sophia De Moroc was sold into slavery to cover her father's debts. Her storyline in *Lion's Blood* can be split into four phases: First, Sophia enters the novel as Kai's enslaved concubine. Second, after her marriage to (also enslaved) Aidan, Sophia's status changes from privileged courtesan to ordinary enslaved domestic worker. Third, after Kai's father Abu Ali loses Sophia in a bet to his brother Malik, she is transferred away from her husband and forced to serve her new slaveholder (primarily as an enslaved wet nurse and nanny, but also as a sex slave). Fourth, after Aidan has earned his freedom in the war against the Aztecs, he frees his wife from Malik's plantation with the help of Kai. This quick overview already hints at the limitations that Sophia faces not only because of her status as an enslaved worker, but also particularly because of her gender. Throughout her whole storyline, Sophia's status is determined by men: first by her father who sells her into slavery and afterwards by the men who buy and own her. In the patriarchal plantocracy setting of *Lion's Blood*, Sophia's freedom of choice is limited to how she endures the (mis)treatment directed at her. As a biracial character, Sophia also provides a counter-model to the clear black and white binary between the two protagonists Kai and Aidan.

Sophia enters the story of *Lion's Blood* on Kai's nineteenth birthday, as Abu Ali's gift to his son. Making a grand entrance in a coach of "lacquered ebony, [...] certainly too ornate for use by any Muslim warrior," eighteen years old Sophia

appears to focalizer Kai as “a sight to steal a man’s breath:” She has dark hair and pale skin, her eyes are perceived as “deeper and darker” than the night, her lips are described as “full and African” and her nose is “more broad and sensuous than any of the poor thin-blooded Irish girls” (217-19). When she first enters Kai’s birthday party, Sophia does not talk herself, but is introduced to Kai by his father. Only after Sophia finds herself alone with Kai in his bedroom, she starts talking and her exotified exterior is accompanied by her “heavily accented,” yet “perfect Arabic” language skills that sound to Kai “as sweet as syrup” (219). The description of Sophia from Kai’s point of view is reminiscent of Orientalist stereotypes of hypersexualized belly-dancing seductresses; however, this superficial first impression of Sophia is challenged in the following chapter which – focalized by herself – informs the readers about the conditions of Sophia’s enslavement and her hopes for the future. Sold into slavery by her father at age thirteen, Andalusian Sophia was subjected to indoctrination at Dar Hudu, Alexandria’s house of submission where she was raped and informed that her only chance at freedom is fulfilling all of her slaveholder’s wishes (222). Sophia hopes to convince Kai to free her; however, the readers learn from the chapters focalized by Kai that he has no intention to do so (223/231). As Kai’s concubine, Sophia occupies a precarious position on Dar Kush which she describes as “neither fish nor fowl, neither free nor slave” (249): Sophia is more privileged than the other enslaved women on the plantation as she has her own bedroom in the master’s house and her only job is to keep Kai entertained which leads to her being “viewed with suspicion and resentment by the women at the Wakil’s residence” (ibid.). Simultaneously Sophia is also excluded from the companionship of the free women such as Kai’s family members because of her low social rank (ibid.). Sophia’s disenfranchised status is frequently brought to her mind when Kai is asked by other men if he is willing to sell her (225).

Still, Sophia perceives herself as in control of her relationship with Kai thinking that her young slaveholder “will be easier to bend than an experienced warrior” and convinced that Kai “*wanted* to forget that she was a slave and bound to obey his wishes. Deep in his heart he wanted to believe she was enamored of him” (227). Sophia feels sorry for other enslaved people whom she considers to be “pitiful wrecks [...] human in form only [...] who] had forgotten everything about themselves” (247). In contrast to them, Sophia feels privileged, because “she knew who and what she was, knew that this was not her natural station, knew that

her aspirations were hers, and not merely thoughts and dreams imprinted in her mind through pain and discipline” (ibid.). Sophia is particularly distressed when she witnesses how an overseer sexually harasses an enslaved girl working in a bamboo field, realizing that

[w]hatever her personal miseries, what this girl, and women outside the Wakil’s protection, suffered was certainly hell itself. The girl didn’t understand how to play the men off against each other, or to turn his sexual excitation into laughter, to trick him into remembering his own mother and sisters, or any of the thousand other maneuvers she had learned in preparation for her role. Painfully and shamefully at first, Sophia had been brought to understand her sensuality and its power, to understand it better than any man she was ever likely to meet. That simple understanding gave her leverage, even when logic and reason said she should be powerless. But these girls . . . she knew, could feel that they were the lowest kind of sexual chattel, and for just a moment allowed their terror to touch her heart” (249).

Thus, Sophia puts her position into perspective and contrasts it with that of ordinary enslaved women. Although Sophia’s living conditions are better than those of many other enslaved women, her optimistic attitude towards her own future is rooted in her positive self-image as able to influence and manipulate Kai. However, Sophia’s hopes of Kai freeing her are shattered when she catches him performing sexual intercourse with his soon-to-be fiancée Zulu princess Nandi: “She felt confused, embarrassed, humiliated, as if all her dreams and plans were tumbled about her like shards of broken glass” (275). In a conversation with Aidan, Sophia realizes that she was merely Kai’s “plaything” all along and that he will not free or even marry her (276). Immediately afterwards, Sophia and Aidan start having a secret affair (277). The affair is initiated by Sophia, originally as a means to punish Kai for his infidelity thus emphasizing her agency (277). The choice of one’s own lover as a means of reaffirming one’s agency is a motif that is also found in Harriet Jacobs’ autobiography *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* in which the author describes how she takes Mr. Sands, “a white unmarried gentleman” as her lover (464): “There is something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you, except that which he gains by kindness and attachment” (465). In time, Sophia and Aidan fall in love with each other. Their clandestine relationship is soon discovered by Kai who at first does not realize that Aidan is having sexual intercourse with Sophia when he walks by Aidan’s hut and hears how his friend is engaging in sexual activities. Expecting Aidan to perform the act with merely another ordinary

enslaved woman, Kai thinks that “[p]erhaps he could even join in the current entertainment,” doubtful that “the wench would object” and remembering fondly how he and Aidan used to rape³⁵ enslaved girls on the plantation prior to Sophia’s arrival (301). This illustrates how Kai views enslaved girls and women as goods to be consumed and not as people in their own right.

After recognizing Aidan’s lover as Sophia, Kai physically attacks both Aidan and Sophia and challenges him to a fist fight for Sophia (303). With her own preferences disregarded, Sophia is thus reduced to the status of a coveted trophy. During the fight, which is focalized by Kai, his former friend Aidan appears to him “as if he were some kind of ape, his thin lips and pale eyes narrowed. He stank of fear, of the primitive, of an unevolved people still trapped in a stone age of ignorance and superstition” (303). This shows how Kai’s friendship to Aidan was built on Kai’s predominance – as soon as Kai’s control is threatened, his racist prejudices emerge again. In spite of Kai’s declaration (“You are both my slaves. I can do with either of you as I wish”), he keeps his word after losing the fight against Aidan and grants him the right of use and enjoyment of Sophia (306). Even though, Sophia and Aidan realize that “[t]heir fate was utterly in the hands of the man who owned them both, who had every reason to consider himself betrayed, and the privilege to enforce his will” (308). Kai, however, keeps his promise to Aidan since “Aidan had earned her” and allows him and Sophia to get married (312). Once again, Kai does not consider Sophia as a person in her own right, but merely as an object to be used. Demoted to the status of an ordinary domestic servant, Sophia manages to befriend other enslaved women – forming such friendships was not possible for her as Kai’s mistress due to the other women’s stigmatization of Sophia’s sex work.

When Sophia gives birth to a son (whom she names Mahon after Aidan’s father), the novel addresses questions concerning motherhood and familial bonds under enslavement. Sophia needs to go back to work only three days after giving birth “carrying her new son [with her] in a stomach sling” (334). The precariousness of her situation becomes clear to Sophia when Lamiya, the fiancée of Kai’s brother, enters the kitchen and asks to hold the baby: “She [i.e. Sophia] appreciated the

³⁵ Kai does not think of him having sexual relations to enslaved girls as rape – but since they do not have the power to reject his advances, other enslaved people on the plantation describe his acts as such (and I agree with their estimation): see page 209.

courtesy [of Lamiya asking for permission to hold Mahon], but knew that under it was the fact that any member of Abu Ali's household could sell her, or her baby. The realization caused a brief, hot flash of panic" (335). After Lamiya returns Mahon to Sophia, she "held her baby as tightly as she could without cutting off his breathing" (336). Sophia's situation echoes Harriet Jacobs' observation that "[t]he mother of slaves is very watchful. She knows there is no security for her children" (88). Sophia's fears turn out to be justified, as soon afterwards both she and Mahon are acquired by Kai's uncle Malik.

The prospect of being separated from her husband causes Sophia, Mahon and Aidan to attempt escaping from the Dar Kush plantation. However, their escape fails, and Sophia and Mahon are forcibly transported to Malik's plantation, while Aidan is whipped and forced to stay behind at Dar Kush. Upon her arrival, Sophia's outlook on life changes: "She was a *slave*. This was her *prison*" (360). Although her official status has not changed, Sophia did not feel like a slave during her relationships with either Kai or Aidan, since she felt as if she some kind of power over Kai and was able to enter a relationship with Aidan on her own terms. After Malik's wife Fatima dies giving birth, Malik puts the responsibility of caring for his infant daughter Azinza on Sophia and rapes the enslaved woman repeatedly. Even in this helpless situation, Sophia resists: "Refusing to flinch or make any display of pain or shame, face a mask of unnatural calm, she turned away," dissociating herself by remembering her childhood and finding solace in her Christian faith (375).

Many women's slave narratives broach the issue of the sexual threat that male slaveholders pose to enslaved women, e.g. Mary Prince's slaveholder Mr. D--- who "had an ugly fashion of stripping himself quite naked, and ordering [... Mary] then to wash him in a tub of water" (14) or Harriet Jacobs' slaveholder Dr. Flint whose rape threats eventually lead to her escape. However, most traditional slave narratives shy away from explicitly describing how enslaved women are raped by their slaveholders because "slave women were [...] confined to claiming legitimacy on very narrow grounds – as sexually 'virtuous' – that obscured the realities of slave women's exploitation" (Santamarina 233). An exception are Louisa Picquet's experiences that were published under the title *Louisa Picquet, the Octoroon: A Tale of Southern Slave Life* by Hiram Mattison in 1861. When Louisa's third slaveholder Mr. Williams rapes her, she reprimands him for

“commitin’ adultery” (23) thus becoming a “resisting victim who has no doubt about occupying the moral high ground” (Santamarina 240). Xiomara Santamarina explains how in spite of “the threat this emphasis poses in totally sexualizing Picquet and all slave women, Picquet emerges in this account as a loving daughter and mother committed to her family’s integrity, notwithstanding slavery’s depredations” (240). This is also the case in *Lion’s Blood*, where Sophia is shown to prioritize her son’s wellbeing and does not give up hope that she will be reunited with her husband. I read the character of Sophia as engaging with the tradition of biracial women’s slave narratives, as outlined by Santamarina:

Principally, these women (i.e. Ellen Craft and Louisa Picquet as representatives of biracial enslaved women) refused to enact the part of the “tragic mulatta” who dies as the victim of slavery’s moral contamination, instead taking on responsibility for their own survival, taking on the risks this entailed, and emerging as subjects who eke out a slim measure of agency (Santamarina 238).

Sophia does not simply accept her position but becomes also involved in a planned insurrection. When tasked with actively seducing Malik in order to steal the key to armory, Sophia once again becomes “the girl from Alexandria,” “a master artisan, fit for a Wakil’s son” (382). Thus, Sophia turns the tables on Malik, transforming a situation in which she is powerless to her advantage. Although Sophia’s stealing of the key is successful, the insurrection ultimately fails. Sophia is returned to Malik but refuses to speak to him using her silence as a form of resistance (472). It is only after the end of the Aztec war that Sophia sees Aidan again when he challenges Malik to a fight for her freedom. Sophia’s ultimate emancipation is eventually a result of Aidan’s and Kai’s willingness to fight for her highlighting once again the limits of Sophia’s agency. Sophia is granted her freedom, because her former slaveholder Kai allows it. After her emancipation, Aidan, Sophia and Mahon plan to go west and make a living at the Frontier, thus participating the imperialist project that previously had cost both of them their freedom.

While Sophia is the most prominent female character in the novel, she is not the only one. Aidan’s mother Deirdre O’Dere is introduced at the beginning of the novel as a hardworking, strong and beautiful woman who cares deeply for her husband and her two children. During the Viking attack on her crannog, Deirdre tries to protect the children of the village by hiding in the forest with them where they are, however, attacked and abducted by Viking raiders. At the slave market in

Tarifa, the abducted people are separated into those who can read and write and those who are illiterate. Although Deirdre's literateness would have secured her a better position, she begs the trader to allow her to stay with her illiterate children (39). During the Middle Passage, Deirdre suffers a miscarriage (48). Throughout their abduction and enslavement, Deirdre remains committed to protecting her children:

with the power found only in the depths of a mother's loving heart, Deirdre summoned up what strength remained to her and hardened her spirit. If there was no hope of ever finding a way home, then she must resolve to find the best life she could for her children here in this new and alien world (60).

However, when they arrive in North American Djibouti Harbor, Deirdre's daughter Nessa is separated from her mother and brother. The description of Deirdre's reaction to her daughter's selling is reminiscent of Harriet Jacobs' account of how her uncle Benjamin was sold away from his mother (Harriet's grandmother):

Could you have seen that mother clinging to her child, when they fastened the irons upon his wrists; could you have heard her heart-rending groans, and seen her bloodshot eyes wander wildly from face to face, vainly pleading for mercy; could you have witnessed that scene as I saw it, you would exclaim, Slavery is damnable!" (39).

Their separation becomes even more tragic when the readers learn that Deirdre dies without ever reuniting with her daughter.

However, in spite of her pain of losing Nessa, Deirdre is committed to care for her remaining child Aidan as best as she can. Focalizer Aidan notices that his mother "tried to be strong for him, but he heard her crying at night, every night" (118). Deirdre encourages Aidan to learn Arabic hoping that this skill will improve his life on the plantation. Still, the enslavement has not only affected Deirdre's mental health, but also her physical condition: "Her eyes were dark-rimmed and her posture was slumped, as if she were still chained in the terrible narrow spaces in the slave ships" (131) and "[t]he coldness that had seeped into her lungs on the Great Crossing had never entirely left her, and in the last months she seemed unable to warm herself, or to throw off a cough that now brought blood up onto her handkerchief" (167-168). Despite her own suffering, Deirdre's worst fear is that "she would die and leave Aidan alone in this horrible place" (168). When Deirdre dies soon afterwards, she is buried in the grove, a place where the enslaved of Dar

Kush practice their respective faiths. No gravestone marks the place and while she lives on in Aidan's memory, her story is lost to the diegetic world.

The portrayal of female characters in *Lion's Blood* shows which consequences a heteropatriarchal social structure has for women with a special emphasis on the struggles of enslaved women regarding bodily autonomy (or rather lack thereof) and reproductive rights. Its depiction of the sexual exploitation of marginalized women and separation of families takes up concerns that have been addressed before in women authored slave narratives thus reminding readers of the real-world counterparts of Sophia and Deirdre, not only in its historical context, but also in the various forms of disenfranchisement that still exist to this day.

c. Demanding the Inclusion of Marginalized Voices in Historiography

The alternate timeline of *Lion's Blood* acts like a distorting mirror: familiar images (marginalized Irish people, superior civilizations of ancient Egypt and ancient Ethiopia, the desire of powerful nations to build an empire through colonialization) are combined with startling twists such as a dominant African Muslim culture instead of Western (Christianity inspired) hegemony. The contrast to real-world history is engaged in a playful way through little jokes as the text mentions icons of European culture such as Amadeus Mozart (whose songs are described as "perfectly respectable," though inferior to African music; 232) or Leonardo da Vinci (who is described as "a mad Frank [... who] had possessed genius unknown to others of his kind" ; 272). Although the diegetic world of *Lion's Blood* seems to be very different from our own at first glance, a closer look reveals that its reversal of history remains incomplete as the novel locates the power of change first and foremost in (white) men: with Socrates and Alexander the Great as driving forces of historical progress, *Lion's Blood* reproduces a philosophy of history as driven by (white male) geniuses, rooted in Enlightenment ideas of continuous progress and the Great Man theory popularized by 19th century philosophers such as Thomas Carlyle. This is not only visible in the novel's alternate timeline, but also in the narrative arc of its two male protagonists, Aidan and Kai. Aidan's plotline follows the structure of traditional slave narratives from his abduction, followed by his experience of the Middle Passage, his sale and subsequent enslavement to attempts at escape, until he finally achieves freedom.

After his emancipation, Aidan chooses to settle with his family at the frontier, thus participating in the expropriation and displacement of North America's indigenous people. Although Kai keeps his promise to free his enslaved soldiers who fought with him in the Aztec war, most of them stay on the plantation to work for Kai whom they continue to address as "master" and "life on Dar Kush returned to normal" indicating that even though the official status of the plantation workers has changed, their lives remain more or less the same (585-586). Kai might feel morally superior to his fellow plantation owners, but the overall effects of his abolitionist ambitions stay marginal.

With the introduction of Sophia, *Lion's Blood* explores female experiences of enslavement that range from sexual exploitation and lack of bodily autonomy towards the struggles of motherhood and family building under the constant threat of separation through sale. As a biracial woman, Sophia questions the validity of racialized binaries and occupies a precarious position within the plantation hierarchy: as Kai's personal sex slave, Sophia is exempt from the works activities that are expected from the other enslaved women on the plantation which incurs the envy of her enslaved fellows; in her privileged position, Sophia can join her slaveholder Kai at formal events, but is regarded as inferior by Bilalistan's noblewomen. In this manner, *Lion's Blood* addresses both the stigmatization of sex workers and the lack of solidarity across social dividing lines among women. Although Sophia's agency is severely limited by her positionality as an enslaved woman, she manages to preserve her sense of self-worth through taking action: she chooses Aidan as her lover, attempts to escape from the plantation and participates in an insurrection. While Sophia's fate is controlled by the men around her, she is not a passive victim of her circumstances, but tries to influence them with all means at her disposal. By employing Sophia as an internal focalizer in several chapters, the novel moves beyond the male gaze of its two protagonists and disrupts their stereotypical perspectives on her as an exoticized object of sexual desire, highlighting instead Sophia's conscious use of her seduction skills as a survival technique. In contrast to Sophia who manages to keep her self-esteem throughout the novel in spite of the abuse she is subjected to and is allowed to stay with her baby son, Aidan's mother Deirdre is portrayed as her tragic counterpart – a mother who is forcibly separated from her daughter and dies soon afterwards as a result of destitute living conditions and despair.

Thus, *Lion's Blood* approaches the topic of racialized enslavement from a multitude of different perspectives that include both the ruling classes (through the use of Kai as a focalizer) and oppressed characters (such as Aidan, his mother Deirdre and Sophia). As the previous subchapters have illustrated, the multiperspectivity of *Lion's Blood* serves to emphasize the plurality of voices that make up historical moments. By employing several focalizers, the novel suggests that historiography should take into account sources conveying the perspectives of marginalized people (such as traditional slave narratives that are evoked through the description of the Middle Passage in the novel). The portrayal of Kai's and Aidan's friendship in *Lion's Blood* presents communication and meaningful interpersonal relationships across racialized dividing lines as antidote to racial hatred. Although his relationship to Aidan changes Kai's attitude towards racialized enslavement, his abolitionist tendencies fail to have wider repercussions (apart from his financial support that enables Aidan to move to a frontier region with his family). Thus, the supposed solution to racialized enslavement (and its afterlife) falls short on the macrosocial scale and privileges a more individual approach.

2. Re-Thinking Historiography in Bernardine Evaristo's *Blonde Roots* (2007)

In 2007, the UK commemorated the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade within the British empire with a range of events including the opening of an International Slavery Museum in Liverpool and the integration of traditional slave narratives into school curricula (Eckstein 34). This resurgence of public interest in the British involvement in the slave trade was preceded by a reappearance³⁶ of depictions of black enslavement in British literature since the 1990s in works as for example Caryl Phillips's *Cambridge* (1991), Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997) or David Dabydeen's *A Harlot's Progress* (1999). However, unlike these earlier authors Bernardine Evaristo's 2008 novel *Blonde Roots* sets its focus specifically on female experiences of enslavement and thus might be read as a feminist corrective to the existing tradition of British neo-slave

³⁶ Eckstein outlines that while enslavement and its abolition were common topics in 17th and 18th century British literature, "[i]n the post-Victorian imagination, however, slavery and the slave trade rapidly faded from collective memory and hardly appeared in public or artistic discourses" (Eckstein 35).

narratives. In contrast to the earlier realist neo-slave narratives mentioned above, Evaristo's novel employs the genre of alternate history: Set in an alternative world in which 'progressive' African people enslave 'primitive' white Europeans, the novel tells the story of 'whyte' slave Doris/Omorenomwara, both from her own perspective and from the point of view of her 'blak' slaveholder Chief Kaga Konata Katamba I alias Bwana. In the light of the 2007 celebrations of the anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade which imply that racialized enslavement is a practice of the distant past and thereby obscures its ongoing material after-effects, neo-slave narratives such as *Blonde Roots* can work to unsettle such notions of history and through the use of chronopolitical interventions may make visible what Saidiya Hartman describes as afterlife of slavery.

As I will show in this chapter, *Blonde Roots* evokes tropes of traditional slave narratives including a representation of the Middle Passage, descriptions of everyday slave life and the enslaved person's ultimately successful journey into freedom, so that the novel can be read as a neo-slave narrative, a contemporary novel which "use[s] histories of slavery to query race, gender, sexuality, place, and to debate the degree to which past practices remain current" (Babb 218). Simultaneously the novel employs chronopolitical interventions in order to draw connections between the historical oppression of marginalized groups and their ongoing struggles for equality which I will examine closely using Michael Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory.

In this chapter, I focus on the way in which *Blonde Roots* disrupts established notions of temporality. I will argue that the use of chronopolitical interventions in the novel works to draw attention to continuities in racist and misogynist violence. The scholarly discussion of *Blonde Roots* so far has predominantly focused on the novel's treatment of gender. Most prominently, Sika A. Dagbovie-Mullins analyzes how "the white female body occupies the position of the deviant, aberrant Other, a "role" historically held by blacks" (2); as "Doris's whyte skin barely masks her symbolic black body," her "account makes black women's slave experiences visible and heard" (20). Dagbovie-Mullins recognizes that the employment of a white character as a stand-in for black enslaved women is insofar problematic as it relies on whiteness to inspire empathy with black women. She argues "that Evaristo avoids this sentimentalism via her use of satire" (Dagbovie-Mullins 4) and she concludes that Doris' whiteness is "sardonically

exposing the black female body's historic invisibility" (Dagbovie-Mullins 19). I agree with Dagbovie-Mullins' estimation and supplement her argument with my use of Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory. Judie Newman reads *Blonde Roots* as a response to Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* and considers the novel "a feminist corrective to Gilroy's male model"³⁷ (295). Sofía Muñoz-Valdivieso concludes that novels such as *Blonde Roots* "contribute to the rewriting of the British past as they highlight the involvement of the country in slavery and the slave trade, so that narratives of slavery can become integrated into the memory of the British nation, and thus play a role in the public discourse that constructs the identities of British people" (56).

Temporality, however, has played a minor role in the debates on *Blonde Roots*: Ingrid von Rosenberg argues that the novel advocates "a gendered view of black history" and links the novel's treatment of time to Julia Kristeva's concept of *Women's Time* (391-392). Katharine Burkitt argues that the novel destabilizes historiography itself, and regards Evaristo's novel as a "self-reflexive slave narrative, which questions received notions of history, and, perhaps more radically, also critically examines those personal anecdotes [i.e. traditional slave narratives in the sense of autobiographies by and biographies of enslaved or formerly enslaved black people] which have been seen to displace history as an incontrovertible discourse in the postmodern era" (407). Thus, in contrast to critics such as Muñoz-Valdivieso or Rosenberg, Burkitt does not read the genre of the neo-slave narrative as a mode of history-making that is predicated upon remembrance (in the sense that the main purpose of neo-slave narratives is the remembering of forgotten/suppressed histories), but instead she explores the potential of neo-slave narratives to call into question the very notion of history-making itself. This chapter will follow her line of thought and argue that it is the use of chronopolitical interventions in the novel that disrupts the very basis of historiography.

Although every publication mentions the temporal disruptions in *Blonde Roots*, Rosenberg is the only scholar to analyze its temporality in more detail: Her article compares the representations of history in three of Evaristo's novels (*The*

³⁷ Newman refers to criticisms of Gilroy's work which emphasize that "Gilroy's case studies focus on middle class male intellectuals in America (Alexander Crummell, Martin Delany, W. E. B. Du Bois), make little of class and gender, largely ignore Latin America, and appear somewhat oblivious to potential collusion between black nationalism and patriarchy" (Newman 284).

Emperor's Babe, *Soul Tourists* and *Blonde Roots*) and – with reference to Kristeva's *Women's Time* – concludes that “that Evaristo deals with different time levels in a most sovereign manner, mixing periods or inventing ahistorical timeframes, always intent on making connections to the present” (392). Rosenberg then regards this “presentation of the past-in-the-present [... as a counternarrative] to the traditional presentation of history as linear and progressive” (392). While I generally agree with this estimation, Rosenberg's focus on the gendered perceptions of temporality obscures potential additional racialized dimensions. In this chapter, I will address this gap by using Kodwo Eshun's concept of chronopolitical interventions as a specifically Afrofuturist approach to temporality. This does not mean, however, that I will ignore the treatment of gender in the novel, on the contrary, I aim to show that the concept of chronopolitical interventions can provide valuable insights on the workings of both race and gender with regard to the constitution of temporalities. This chapter understands constructions of time as an instrument of power that can be used by dominant social groups to assert authority over marginalized groups and thus maintain the status quo. Consequently, the use of chronopolitical interventions in novels that unsettle conventional constructions of time is regarded as political activism – a way to challenge to status quo and open up new perspectives towards more inclusive temporalities.



a. Redrawing Maps, Remixing Histories: The Worldbuilding of *Blonde Roots*

The temporal disturbance that *Blonde Roots* creates, starts at the onset of the novel with a map of its imaginary world:

Europa is south of Aphrika, the island of the United Kingdom of Ambossa is close to the western coast of Aphrika and on the other side of the Atlantic is Amarika with the West Japanese Islands close to its east coast. The designation of a route crossing the Atlantic as “Middle Passage” foreshadows the novel’s preoccupation with transatlantic slavery. Because of Evaristo’s re-location of the Equator northwards, the continent of Europa is still in a temperate zone, whereas the U.K. of Great Ambossa, Aphrika and the West Japanese Islands are tropical.

The map’s combination of the familiar shapes of Europe and Great Britain with geographical dislocations and changes in spelling works to overturn readers’ expectations which might be based on their familiarity with real-world maps. In doing so, the novel suggests that maps as a mode of knowledge production are always rooted in their historical contexts which in this case are histories of imperialist expansion. As such, the map draws attention to the act of mapping as an imperialist tool. Justin D. Edwards explains how “agents of imperialism have drawn maps in order to appropriate the land and subjugate the native population”: “Imperial maps [...] mark the successful abstraction of space where locality and proximity are completely subordinated to the lines of the colonial property” (Edwards 87-95). Through its deviation from real-world maps, the novel invites its readers to question their basic assumptions, which can be traced back to map-making and its underlying ideologies of the world/space as measurable and discernible. By unsettling the historical binds between Africa, America and Europe, the map has the potential to emphasize how the relationship between the three continents has been shaped by imperialist interests whose legacies continue to have an impact on the lives of their people. One example for this is the widespread assumption that countries in the northern hemisphere and its temperate climate zones are always further developed than their tropical counterparts in the southern hemisphere. Categories such as first to third world countries that supposedly measure stages of development work from the notion that there is a universally desirable model of development to which every country should aspire thus

neglecting cultural specifics and the potentially negative consequences that modernization efforts brought in from the outside can have for certain countries. This also ties in with the concept of the “civilizing mission, whereby the colonizing power aims to bring up the colonies to the levels of culture and material standards of its own society” which was used as a justification for colonialist exploitation throughout the 16th to early 20th century (Kumar). By moving the Equator to the north and positioning the dominant ethnic group in a tropical climate, the novel challenges these assumptions that can be traced back to imperialist ideologies.

The map also engages with British history by splitting the UK and England. While both Great Britain and England retain their respective characteristic shape, Great Britain belongs to the dominant Kingdom of Ambossa, while England is located in backward Europa. This separation can be read as a comment on the constructed nature of real-world Great Britain and the cultural dominance of England within it. By forcing the readers to regard Great Britain and England separate from each other, the map challenges readers to think about the role of England both as a part of Great Britain and as its own country making it clear that neither is a natural, atemporal occurrence, but that both were consciously created. The nickname Cabbage Coast for the English west coast mocks the popularity of cabbage dishes in England, but at the same time evokes comparable names for the actual African west coast. The origins of these names such as Gold Coast, Slave Coast, Pepper Coast and Ivory Coast can be traced to the imperialist exploitation of those areas, as they illustrate the imperial powers’ focus on resource extraction with no regard for the consequences that this had for the regions in question and the people inhabiting them. However, the map’s engagement with imperialist histories is not limited to the transatlantic world. The re-naming of the West Indies to West Japanese Islands hints at Japan’s history in the 20th century in which the country first became a colonizer of southeast Asia prior to World War II and later, after the war, was subjected to occupation by the United States. By evoking the changing history of Japan, the map alludes to the fragility of imperialist empires reminding readers that once dominant countries can lose their power.

The main focus of the map is transatlantic enslavement. Compared to the real-world triangular trade of enslaved Africans, the map puts some incarnation of Britain at each apex of the triangle: in the southern region of the map there is England, the place from which people such as the protagonist are abducted and

ultimately enslaved; in the western region there are the afore-mentioned West Japanese Islands whose cities “Little Londolo” and “New Ambossa” make clear that those islands are under control of the globally dominant Ambossans (the novel’s stand-in for real-world British people); in the north-east there is the United Kingdom of Great Ambossa – home of slaveholder Bwana, the antagonist of the novel. The omnipresence of Britain in all three regions emphasizes that British people were involved in each step of the slave trade – a counteraction to public discourses on the British involvement which instead often highlight the pioneering role that Britain took in the abolition of slavery such as the public events surrounding the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade within the British empire which I have mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. In contrast to such celebrations which tend to treat abolition like a unique event that changed the lives of enslaved people from one day to the next, the novel instead suggests considering abolition as a slow-moving process as I will show by analyzing its treatment of temporality.

Sebnem Toplu has argued that “Evaristo’s redrawing the boundaries of nations and re-placing the continents signifies the elusiveness of space, besides dislocating the readers’ spatial and national assumptions” (Toplu 47). Although I agree with Toplu’s observation, I argue that not only “spatial and national assumptions” are dislocated, but also temporal ones: while the Middle Passage signifies a setting somewhere between 1501 and 1866, the terms UK and Great Ambossa (as a stand-in for Great Britain) refer to the Acts of Union of 1707 and 1800 respectively and the annexation of Caribbean islands by the British Empire as indicated by the presence of Little Londolo and New Ambossa did not start until 1609 with colonization of Bermuda by the Virginia Company. Evaristo sets her story “in an unspecified age that disorderly mingles, among others, the Middle Ages and Renaissance period, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and contemporary times” (Muñoz-Valdivieso 52). Great Ambossa is in a somewhat post-industrial state: “The city of Londolo’s Tube trains had officially stopped burrowing many years ago” (Evaristo 6). The presence of trains evokes associations with technological progress – their stopping raises the question whether they were replaced by more advanced technology or whether the discontinuing of train services is a sign of a declining society. The novel does not provide a straightforward answer to this question, leaving the interpretation open to the

reader. As the trains do not seem to have been replaced by any other technology, their discontinuation might also be read as a sign of a society which is divided by social inequality and whose inhabitants are growing more isolated: while wealthy inhabitants can still travel anywhere in their private “camel-drawn carriages” (3), Londolo’s poorer inhabitants lack the means to leave their living quarter.

The description of Great Ambossa’s colonies – among them New Ambossa, one of the West Japanese Islands where Doris is forced to work on a plantation – is reminiscent of late eighteenth century British colonies in the Caribbean, while the state of Europa is situated somewhere between medieval times judging from its inhabitants’ clothing and the execution of witch trials and the eighteenth century as the social structure of Doris’ hometown prior to the arrival of slave traders suggests (Evaristo 134 ff., Toplu 49). The parallel existence of ways of living that are associated with different historical periods disorients readers and contradicts historicist ideas of teleological progress. As racialized enslavement is present across all three spatiotemporal settings (Great Ambossa, West Japanese Islands and Europa), the notion that enslavement transcends time and space suggests itself as the depictions of enslaved people in the novel range from medieval serfdom (in the case of Doris family prior to their abduction) to the 16th to 19th century transatlantic slave trade up to references to modern day human trafficking (one example for this would be Doris’ first slaveholder Little Miracle’s threat to sell her to a brothel). I do not suggest that all of those representations of enslavement are the same; instead, I propose that the juxtaposition of these forms of enslavement enables the readers to see continuities between them (e.g. the ways in which they affect women differently than men) without denying their differences (e.g. the fact that Doris’ serfdom in England is not justified by supposed racial differences, in contrast to her enslavement after her abduction from England).

The novel’s paradoxical temporal setting can be considered as a chronopolitical intervention: British scholar Kodwe Eshun explains that “[t]he field of Afrofuturism does not seek to deny the tradition of counter-memory. Rather, it aims to extend that tradition by reorienting the intercultural vectors of Black Atlantic temporality towards the proleptic as much as the retrospective” (Eshun 289). Regarding the future as a contested “chronopolitical terrain” (289), Eshun advocates for the use of what he calls “chronopolitical interventions” (292), through “Afrofuturism [...] as a program for recovering the histories of counter-futures

created in a century hostile to Afrodiasporic projection and as a space within which the critical work of manufacturing tools capable of intervention within the current political dispensation may be undertaken” (301). In the same vein, *Blonde Roots* creates a counter-past-future-present³⁸ by imagining what a world without white supremacy and Western hegemony would look like – albeit a world that is still riven by the oppression of marginalized groups. As such, the novel does not present the elimination of white supremacy and Western hegemony as a quick fix for social problems, but rather shows that any capitalist society will inevitably lead to the oppression and economic exploitation of other(ed) people. By combining various historical settings in a disorderly manner, *Blonde Roots* also invites readers to question their assumptions which are revealed to be based on conventional temporalities and to draw connections between the historical oppression of marginalized groups and their ongoing struggles for equality: the novel emphasizes how anti-black and misogynist violence have affected (and continue to do so) the lives of people of color, women and particularly women of color; this is exemplified in its references to racial profiling, ghettoization, racialized standards of beauty or rape culture, among others.

b. Blending Historiography and Slave Narratives

Bernardine Evaristo prefaces *Blonde Roots* with a quotation by Friedrich Nietzsche that hints at an incredulity towards historiography: “All things are subject to interpretation: whichever interpretation prevails at a given time is a function of power and not truth” (Evaristo, before pagination starts). This skepticism towards historiography is typical for 21st century neo-slave narratives, as Timothy Spaulding explains: “the postmodern slave narrative critiques historical and fictional representations that rely on claims of verisimilitude” (Spaulding 5). A rejection of hegemonic modes of conceptualizing history is reflected in Evaristo’s multi-perspective narrative strategy.

Blonde Roots is divided into three parts: ‘Book 1’ and ‘Book 3’ are narrated by the protagonist Doris/Omorenomwara. She serves both as fixed internal focalizer and as overt intradiegetic first-person narrator in those two parts of the narrative

³⁸ I adapt the term “past-future-present” from El Hag Ali and Kingsmith’s paper, in which they use it to refer to “the ways in which the material conditions of the past pre-configure the future (4).

and allows the readers intimate insights into her life as an enslaved woman in a manner similar to 18th and 19th century slave narratives while retaining a language reminiscent of 21st century colloquial English. Various flashbacks and dream sequences interrupt the chronological order of Doris' account. These illustrate the protagonist's traumatized state of mind due to her enslavement and have the effect of disorienting the readers' temporal perception while giving Doris the status of an unreliable narrator. Katherine Burkitt reads the characterization of Doris as unreliable narrator as criticizing the genre of traditional slave narratives as "unreliable signifiers of racial, national and gender identities," an estimation that ties in with the incredulity towards metanarratives of Western historiography implied by the preface of the novel (416). Sofía Muñoz-Valdivieso explains that traditional slave narratives "were constricted by their being embedded in a culture in which the black minority voices still had to conform to the conceptions of truth and validity held by the white majority" – a factor which impacts the credibility of traditional slave narratives and challenges their claims to authenticity (53). As most traditional slave narratives were published with the purpose of convincing their readers to support abolition, they had to conform to certain standards and were edited to meet their readers' expectations. Xiomara Santamarina explains how the "representations of the often humiliating experiences of slave men and women potentially exacerbated former slaves' vulnerability in their readers' eyes" (232), which was particularly problematic for female authors of slave narratives, as their credibility was tied to their perceived virtue (which meant their sexual abstinence, unless married) which "obscured the realities of slave women's exploitation" (233). Thus, traditional slave narratives were limited in their potential to represent racialized enslavement in a realistic way. Neo-slave narratives have addressed this problem from the beginning of the genre onwards by including scenes that would not have been printed two hundred years prior due to their potential to scandalize readers. The relationship of *Blonde Roots* to traditional slave narratives, however, is more complicated than the former just filling the gaps left by the latter: by portraying Doris as an unreliable narrator, the novel casts doubts on her narrative. If Doris' credibility is doubtful, this also implies that traditional slave narratives are not fit to be the basis of any identity formation. Thus, even though *Blonde Roots* employs tropes inspired by traditional slave narratives, it simultaneously destabilizes them by problematizing their importance for the formation of black

British identities. *Blonde Roots*' breaking with the traditional structure of traditional slave narratives that follow their narrator's journey from enslavement to freedom in a linear way can also be read as pointing towards a view of enslavement as not-yet-ended – an idea on which I will elaborate later in this chapter.

'Book 2' is narrated by Doris' slaveholder Chief Kaga Konata Katamba I alias Bwana. The chief's family name and his adoration of goddess Yemonja positions him as a member of the Yoruba. However, it should be noted that the Aphrikan hegemony in *Blonde Roots* is not Yoruba dominated, but unites elements of various real-world African cultures.³⁹ This gesture towards pan-Africanism creates a sense of coherence between different African cultures and can be read as suggesting that all African cultures were/continue to be affected by imperialism and racialized enslavement, slightly shifting the focus away from exclusively transatlantic enslavement. I read the creation of a pan-Africanist dominant social group in *Blonde Roots* as an attempt to avoid highlighting one specific African ethnic group at the expense of others – and considering that the UK of Great Ambossa is the capital of this pan-Africanist culture, one can also regard it as a statement on real-world UK culture as composed of diverse European influences. The chapter narrated by Bwana resembles an 18th century pro-slavery pamphlet in form and content and its title "The Flame" links it to the homonymous "newspaper of the British far-right party, the National Front, indicating the long reach of racist ideology" (Newman 292). In spite of the identification of Bwana as Aphrikan, Evaristo states in an interview that she has "very clearly (and satirically) given him the characteristics of an Eighteenth-Century slave trader" as she only appears "to be investigating the notion of Africans enslaving Europeans [...while she is actually] re-presenting the history of Europeans enslaving Africans" (Collins 1202). In contrast to earlier science fiction that employed storylines of people of color enslaving white people as a horror scenario for their white target audience (see for

³⁹ Bwana's nickname, for example, is of Swahili origin and means "master." Another example for the incorporation of various African cultures is the Ambossan language in which "[c]licks and clacks were interspersed between words – sounds made by sucking the tongue against the roof of the mouth" (77) which is reminiscent of the click consonants used in the Khoisan languages of southern Africa. Other examples include the use of neck rings by Aphrikan women which is also practiced among the Ndebele people of South Africa (95), the mentioning of Anancy Spider fables [originating among the Akan people of present-day Ghana] (97) and references to Yoruba Adinkra cloth (99), Akan kente strips (100) as well as so called talking drums which have been used as a form of communication throughout West Africa (33).

example Robert Heinlein's 1964 novel *Farnham's Freehold*⁴⁰), the satiric approach of *Blonde Roots* ridicules racist attitudes while simultaneously taking its dire consequences seriously.

The use of 18th century language and style in Bwana's chapter forms a stark contrast to the use of contemporary English in Doris' chapters; this anachronism can be read as a temporal classification: while Bwana's racist attitudes originate in the past, the suffering of oppressed racialized groups extends into the 21st century. Bwana tells his story as an overt intradiegetic first-person narrator addressing an implied reader whom he seeks to convince of the moral rightness of slavery. In order to achieve this goal, he combines (what are today considered pseudo-) scientific findings with his personal experience. Instead of explicitly criticizing racism in general and scientific racism in particular, it is the position of the pamphlet within the novel that stirs the readers' emotions in Doris' favor according to Judie Newman: "Evaristo deliberately positions the pamphlet between the scene [...] when Doris, terror stricken, thinks she is about to be recaptured by Bwana and the moment when the chief does recapture her, and she suffers a brutal whipping" and that is why "[a]nxiety concerning her [i.e. Doris'] fate permeates the reader's experience of the pamphlet" (Newman 294). Thus, *Blonde Roots* offers two different perspectives on enslavement, a narrative strategy that Burkitt regards as exemplifying "that there is no single narrative of slavery and that the historical moment is itself hybrid, constructed by multifarious stories and voices" (409). Muñoz-Valdivieso recognizes multiperspectivity as "a central feature" of neo-slave narratives and concludes that "[i]n *Blonde Roots* the constructed nature of values is brought to the fore in its comic inversion of common assumptions about beauty, history and reality" (53).

This inversion becomes particularly apparent in the portrayal of Europa in the novel. Bwana's experiences in Europa as outlined in 'Book 2' constitute a parody of colonial European descriptions of Africa and its intertextual references to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* indicate its status as an artefact of colonial discourse since the contemporary reader might be aware of the reproaches of racism

⁴⁰ For more information on the controversies surrounding *Farnham's Freehold* and its treatment of racism, see Stasiewicz 242-243.

that Conrad's novel faced from the 1970s onwards.⁴¹ Bwana's ship lands at the 'Cabbage Coast' of England, where he is confronted with 'savages' "whispering in their nonsensical language [...] without the c!icks, c!ucks, c!acks and !tsks of normal speech [...] akin to the low monotonous moan of cattle" (Evaristo 124). Bwana is irritated by the amount of clothes worn by the English people and their massive body hair cloys him (Evaristo 125-126). In Aphrikan society, the Europeane preference of monogamy is "ridiculed as uneconomical, selfish, typically hypocritical and just plain backwards" while "the Europeane need for solitude" is regarded as "further proof of [their] inferior culture" (Evaristo 19, 69). This systematic degradation of Europeane culture and Bwana's digression on scientific racism at the beginning of 'Book 2' mirror the Eurocentric discourse of civilization that provided an ideological foundation for slavery (Newman 290). This discourse of civilization is rooted in a specific teleological view of history that presupposes a hierarchy of developmental levels that nations undergo, from so-called primitivism to civilization as the height of development. Europa thus becomes a dark mirror image of Bwana's home Ambossa: a process of Othering has occurred that provides the Ambossans with a moral justification for the exploitation of the people of Europa. This moral justification is entangled with temporal classifications: the Ambossan ideology categorizes the Ambossans as progressive and the Europeane people as premodern and not-yet-civilized. Bringing the Europeanes in contact with the supposedly advanced Ambossan world through enslavement is considered as part of their civilizing mission by the Ambossans.

Naturally, Doris' view of Europa is quite different: "The Ambossans called us [i.e. native inhabitants of Europa] tribes but we were many nations, each with our own language and funny old customs" (Evaristo 7) – a statement that echoes imperialist prejudices of Africans as less developed than Europeans. Still, Doris' life in England is not as idyllic as it seems at first: Doris' family, the Scagglethorpes, are "*serfs*, the bottom link in the agricultural food chain" meaning that they do not own land, but they are tenants of Lord Perceval Montague who is involved in the slave trade and at first profits from the sale of his subordinates before he is later enslaved himself (Evaristo 8, 239). Newman reads this characterization of England

⁴¹ Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" becomes "Heart of Greyness", Evaristo's Europeanes display severed heads on poles as Conrad's Kurtz does and Bwana encounters an Ambossan in Europa who has apparently 'gone native' (Evaristo 129, 131, 132; Newman 292f.).

as a critique of “the British love affair with costume drama and the ‘heritage’ industries” that constructs “a past which never was, with its horrors airbrushed out” (Newman 289). Newman infers from the description of England in *Blonde Roots* that “Britain was never a land of freedom, and there is nothing idyllic about its history, nor (if we translate the mirror imagery) African history, which includes aristocratic Africans who sold slaves” (Newman 289). Newman supports her thesis by referring to the gossip which the Scagglethorpes and the other peasants spread about Percy’s family that resembles plots of Victorian literature (Newman 289). Gossiping about their masters gives the peasants “drama by association, glamour by proximity, status through acquaintance” and thus keeps them satisfied in spite of their poor living conditions or – as Newman puts it – “the novel calls attention to a delusive, mystified utopian history, rather like images of mythical African pasts, a history that prevents imaginative awareness of liberatory possibilities” (Evaristo 53; Newman 289). The portrayal of England in *Blonde Roots* from Doris’ point of view once again mixes different historical references thereby destabilizing the readers’ temporal orientation: the somewhat atemporal pastoral idyll of the English landscape is combined with a mention of a system reminiscent of Medieval serfdom and the Scagglethorpes’ obsession with gossiping about noble families evokes both Victorian sensation literature and present-day yellow press magazines. Doris’ experiences as an enslaved girl and later woman cause her to reconsider her previous life in England and only her positive memories prevail: On the slave ship, Doris’ “dreams were filled with the laughter of [... her] sisters who had lost all irritating personality traits” (Evaristo 83). These different perceptions of Europa and its history – Bwana’s contempt, Doris’ subsequent idealization and the contemporary readers’ critical awareness – draw attention to the fact that historiography is inevitably biased as it is always informed by historians’ personal attitudes and world views and that standards of what is perceived as ‘good’ or ‘normal’ are always discursively constructed and culturally dependent. Reading the temporal disruptions in *Blonde Roots* as chronopolitical interventions enables me to relate these insights to the wider context of the (re)production of cultural memory. As *Blonde Roots* upsets its readers’ preconceived notions of history, new and different histories become imaginable and with them, new and different presents and futures.

A similar point is made in ‘Book 1’ when Doris explains the Aphrikan ideals

of beauty: “large and juicy” women with flat noses and hair with “perms, twists and braids” are sought after (Evaristo 30, 32). These ideals are only attainable for ethnically marginalized women if they are able and willing to spend money on painful plastic surgery (“The very thought of a mallet smashing down on my nose was just too scary for words”) and time-consuming visits to a hairdresser (“It [i.e. the hair extension] took up to ten hours and when the blonde, red, brown or straight roots came through it looked just plain tacky, apparently”). Doris herself is only considered beautiful by white men, while her “prominent clavicle, corrugated chest bones, concave stomach and thin blonde hair” are regarded as “ugly as sin” by the Ambossans (Evaristo, 31). Thus, *Blonde Roots* clearly illustrates the cultural dependence and constructedness of ideals of female beauty and also the consequences of these normalizations of beauty as the common disregard for the qualities of her body causes Doris’ “image issues” (Evaristo, 31; Newman, 290). Burkitt draws attention to the submission to ideals of beauty as a specific feminine practice and considers this part of *Blonde Roots* as a critique of the “enslavement of women to naturalized conventions of beauty” as these conventions apply to all women independent of their skin colour, so that Ambossan ladies who are rather thin are sent to “fattening farm[s]” in order “to be beefed up” (Burkitt 415; Evaristo 32). The fact that only the outward appearance of women is policed draws attention to the patriarchal power structures that are present in both England and the Ambossan empire. England, Doris’ homeland is ruled by a number of lords who wield absolute power over their subjects. This is illustrated by the story of Samantha who after defending herself against the rape attempt of her lord is sold into slavery as a punishment (80-81). In Ambossa, patriarchal ideology manifests itself in conventional ideas of feminine beauty as explained above. With its focus on female experiences of enslavement, *Blonde Roots* points to transnational legacies of violence against women in patriarchal societies: from witch trials in the novel’s European setting, to human trafficking and enforced sex work up to destructive ideals of feminine beauty that are present in both the Ambossan and the European setting, the novel depicts the oppression of women as constitutive element of both hegemonic and marginalized nations. Thus, *Blonde Roots* does not only reveal historiography to be a potential tool to affirm imperialist ideologies, but also illustrates how patriarchal structures harm women regardless of their ethnic and socio-economic background.

c. Conflating Time and Space in the Middle Passage

The chapter titled *The Middle Passage* takes up seventeen pages of the novel and is positioned between Doris' first escape attempt and her flashback to her time with the Ghika family, her first slaveholders as an enslaved girl. The description of the protagonist's first crossing of the Atlantic takes the form of an analepsis: adult Doris remembers her experiences as an eleven-year-old girl. The chapter is told in past tense and first-person narrator Doris (re-)evaluates her past suffering from her present perspective adding observations that her eleven-year-old self could not have made. The focalization shifts fluidly between young Doris' observations and adult Doris' comments and sarcastic remarks as the following examples illustrate. Young Doris describes that "[l]ice crawled all over her [i.e. Hildegaard, Doris' fellow captive on the slave ship] scalp, as they did all of ours. We scratched our heads until they bled and became infected," whereupon adult Doris explains that the enslaved "men were shaved but a woman's locks raised her market price" (79). Young Doris continues to tell the readers that the enslaved women on the ship "picked out the lice of the head in front. Behind the ears were favourite breeding grounds", followed by adult Doris' sarcastic statement that this "was quite effective as displacement activity" (79) – her use of a term from animal behavior science indicating that Doris and her fellow captives were considered nothing more than animals by the crew. Adult Doris also appears to be well informed about specifics of the slave trade business as her description of different storage systems on ships shows:

The shelves were space-effective and cost-effective, I later found out. There were two available options: The Tight Fit, which allowed for an extra 30 per cent of cargo, but with a downside of increased fatalities. Or the Loose Fit, which offered more space per person, but also resulting in reduced profit (78).

Onboard the slave ship, Doris can barely move "as Captain Wabwire had opted for the Tight Fit – more cargo, less space" (79). Doris probably gained knowledge about these structures while working as Bwana's enslaved secretary in Londolo (24).

Adult Doris' remarks simultaneously increase and reduce the credibility of the narration: On the one hand, the addition of seemingly neutral and verifiable facts emphasizes Doris' expertise and thus makes the description more believable. On the other hand, it also draws attention to the fact that Doris' story of her first Middle

Passage is told in retrospect with more than twenty years passed between experience and narration. I suggest that Doris' past, present and future conflate in the Middle Passage chapter. While adult Doris' comments create a certain (emotional) distance between the victims of racialized enslavement and the crimes against humanity committed against them on the ship, this distance is repeatedly disrupted by the shift of focalization to young Doris. The text conveys the sensory impressions of eleven-year-old Doris that are evaluated and commented on by mid-thirties Doris who is simultaneously showing an awareness of how those experiences impact her future prospects. This sentiment is expressed in the following quote from the novel: As eleven-year-old Doris is forcibly brought to the slave ship ("Two men rowed out to sea [...] ignoring the squirms of we poor captives wedged in between their legs. They were [...] strange blak men [...] Not of my own kind"), the focalization shifts to adult Doris who observes:

If I had to pinpoint a moment when the human race divided into the severe distinctions of blak and whyte, that was it: people belonged to one of two colours and in the society I was about to join my colour, not my personality or ability, would determine my fate (75).

Thus, *Blonde Roots* links the concept of race "as an invention to regulate social order" directly to the establishment of racialized enslavement and subscribes to the idea that "race is not some default biological category, although it is a social and political identity" (Womack 28). To emphasize the arbitrariness of skin color as a signifier of identity, Doris uses the word "race" in the expression "the human race" and labels racialized identities using the word "colour" thereby destabilizing the entanglement of the concept of race with skin color.

The description of the Middle Passage in *Blonde Roots* serves as illustration of the physical and psychological trauma of dislocation and enslavement: To Doris, who is forced to cross the Atlantic three times as a slave, ships are "floating torture chamber[s]," as she witnesses on her first Middle Passage multiple deaths due to degrading living conditions, insanity, torture, mutilations, rape and a failed slave revolt (74). In 'Book 2', narrator Bwana offers a different perception of the transatlantic journey: As captain of the slaver *Hope & Glory*, he perceives the trip as "long and tiresome" and is irritated by the noise and smell of his "cargo [i.e. enslaved people]" (146). When the *Hope & Glory* gets into a dangerous storm, Bwana prays to his deity Yemonja and estimates the subsiding of the storm as a

sign of divine approval of his mission (122). Eventually, Bwana's first transatlantic business trip builds the foundation of his later wealth, since the money he earns there allows him to buy his "first sea-going vessel" which he uses as a slave ship (148).

The duality of suffering of the oppressed and monetary profit for the oppressor does not only apply to the Middle Passage, but also to racialized enslavement in general. Whereas Newman regards Evaristo's depiction of the Middle Passage as "a metaphor for both temporal and geographical dislocation," Burkitt argues that Doris' former status in the English serfdom system constitutes a form of slavery as well and thus "Atlantic slavery, although marking a moment of racial division, is not singular in its history of human suffering and atrocity" (Newman 287; Burkitt 411). Although Doris' description of the Middle Passage takes up only a rather small part of the novel, I argue against Burkitt's reading and consider the trauma of the Middle Passage as central to the plot and constitutive to Doris' character. Even though the English serfdom system in the novel contains instances of violence against subordinates as the story of Samantha – Doris' fellow captive on the slave ship who is sold into slavery as a punishment for defending herself against the rape attempt by the Lord of the estate on which she worked – illustrates – it does not dislocate and systematically dehumanize its victims in contrast to transatlantic slavery (Evaristo 80).

Doris' deep unsettledness due to her experience of the Middle Passage is reflected in the narrative style as well: when Doris believes that she has been betrayed by Underground Railroad conductor Ezinwene and will be sold into slavery again, she panics and the respective chapter in which she serves as focalizer features primarily staccato sentences: "I listened for sounds – there were none. [Line break] I looked around – at darkness. [Line break] There was no light – I was sealed in (Evaristo 105)." Doris' behavior and emotions in this chapter support the notion that the Middle Passage is central for Doris' character development. For Doris, her first entering of a slave ship is the point of no return: "I imagined telling my sisters back home that I had seen black men [...] I looked at those enormous vessels out at sea, ready to carry me somewhere I knew not, and it hit me. I wouldn't be reporting back to anyone" (Evaristo 66). In spite of Doris' realization that she will not be able to return to her family, she does not resign herself to the situation, but resists by participating in a rebellion. During Doris' description of her

role in the uprising, the focalization stays with young Doris the whole time, thereby building up tension without the interference of adult Doris' sarcasm. It is only after the ultimate failure of the rebellion that the focalization shifts back to adult Doris who admits that she still feels guilty for the failed uprising and then informs the readers about the survival rate of the enslaved people on the ship which at just below 57 percent "was about the international average" (91).

Blonde Roots' Middle Passage chapter illustrates protagonist Doris' traumatized state of mind by using shifts in focalization: when adult Doris narrates her first Middle Passage, she mentally re-lives the experience as indicated by the shift of focalization to younger Doris who directly conveys her sensory impressions. Adult Doris' sarcastic comments create a certain distance between herself and the occurrences which is, however, repeatedly disrupted by young Doris' observations. In contrast to depictions of the Middle Passage in traditional slave narratives that are usually told from the perspective of the enslaved in a manner similar to young Doris' focalization, adult Doris' comments provide additional information and context to these experiences and thereby also include the viewpoint of the participating traders, albeit in an ironic way.

d. Making Legacies of Racialized Enslavement Visible in the Motherland

In *Blonde Roots*, Evaristo uses the narrative strategy of defamiliarizing surroundings that contemporary readers are acquainted with. In 'Book 1' the reader is introduced to Londolo – the capital of the United Kingdom of Great Ambossa – which shares some features with contemporary London, but simultaneously differs significantly from the real metropolis in other aspects, as Doris' trip through Londolo illustrates:

The coffee houses in Paddinto were legendary – some even had auction blocks [...] I slunk past the Cocoa Tree, Coasta Coffee, Hut Tropicana, Café Shaka, Demerara's Den, Starbright and the highly fashionable Shuga, part of a trendy chain store of cafes which stretched from the West Japan Quays all the way to Amersha, a distant north-western outpost of the city. Shuga specialised in the novelty of cappuccino with rum, known as rumpaccino, the gimmick of the daily news relayed via the talking drum 'On the Hour every Hour' (even though this antiquated postal service went out of fashion moons ago), homemade star- apple pie with peanut ice cream, and, advertised in chalk on a black signboard, 'Fresh Slaves.' (Evaristo 33).

The description of urban space in this paragraph contains several elements that are

familiar to contemporary readers: “trendy chain store[s]” of coffee shops that sell coffee specialties with fancy names as well as pastries and advertising their daily offers on black sign boards. However, this familiarity is interrupted by variegating the names of the district and places in London (Paddinto instead of Paddington, West Japan Quays instead of West India Quays) and of the shops (Coasta Coffee instead of Costa Coffee, Café Shaka instead of Caffè Nero, Starbright instead of Starbucks etc.), by referring to traditionally West African means of communication (talking drum) and the lunar calendar (which measures time in moons instead of months) and by including the business of slavery. The use of places that are familiar to contemporary readers transports the business of slavery into their immediate environment and makes it easier for them to imagine racialized enslavement as a part of their everyday life. The connection between the coffee houses and enslavement is made explicit through the signboard that says “Fresh Slaves,” but it is also present on a more subtle level, as the offered goods coffee, cocoa and rum are all produced on the plantations of Ambossa’s colonies on the West Japanese Islands. Thus, “[t]he announcement of fresh slaves points to the intimate relationship between capitalism, consumption, and slavery” as Sika Dagbovie-Mullins explains (8). She continues to argue that “[t]he unexpected juxtaposition of hip coffee or cocoa houses and slave auctions draws a parallel between contemporary companies who profit from modern slave labor and plantations and countries that depended on slavery during the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries” (9).

Dagbovie-Mullins instances the working conditions of West African cocoa farmers to substantiate her thesis (9-10). Thus, the chronopolitical intervention in the paragraph that I analyze for the close reading bridges the gap between the 16th to 19th century transatlantic slave trade and the modern-day economic exploitation of farmers in the Global South. The connection between racialized enslavement and (neo-) colonial exploitation becomes particularly clear in the last sentence of the novel which states that “[i]n the twenty-first century, Bwana’s descendants still own the sugar estate and are among the grandest and wealthiest families in the United Kingdom of Great Ambossa, where they all reside. The cane workers, many of whom are descended from the original slaves, are paid” (261). This statement reminds the readers of the consequences of historically established dependence-relations between former slaveholders and former enslaved workers which were

reinforced by political measures such as the £20 million compensation paid to former slaveholders by the British state in the 1830s or the mandatory six year apprenticeship that enslaved people were subjected to after the abolition of slavery through the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833 (Draper). It also hints at subpar working conditions of farmers in the Global South as the final sentence implies that the only difference between cane workers before abolition and them after emancipation is their payment and nothing else.

Blonde Roots also explores how legacies of imperialism and racialized enslavement have shaped modern British society. On her walk through Londolo mentioned above, Doris passes through the “Vanilla Suburbs”, where “free whytes were mainly consigned to living in squalor in communal tents in tumbledown ghettos” (29). For Doris, the “Burbs” are simultaneously a place of longing and threat. On the one hand, the opportunity to buy traditional clothing, participate in European cultural events or enjoying “exotic European food” excites Doris, but on the other hand, she is worried that local white men might rape her as her body conforms to European standards of beauty and is scared of “the feared sheriffs who trawled the dunes most days looking for runaways” (30-31). Those sheriffs’ actions are legitimized by “the dreaded SUS laws – which meant detainment on suspicion of being either runaways or common-or-garden criminals. Naturally, having a white skin was all the evidence the sheriffs needed to accost a young man and strip-search him” (31). The real-world counterpart of this law (also called SUS) was in place in the UK from 1824 until 1981 and “allowed the stopping and searching of people on the subjective suspicion of individual police officers,” which in reality disproportionately affected members of marginalized groups (particularly young black men) as the so-called Scarman report on the Brixton riots of 1981 pointed out (Brown/Korff 127). *Blonde Roots* explicitly connects the existence of ethnicized ghettos and institutionalized racism to imperialist politics: the inhabitants of the “Burbs” are formerly enslaved people and their descendants, discriminatory practices prevent them from settling outside the ghetto where they suffer from subpar living conditions and where they are subjected to unjust treatment by the police.

Thus, *Blonde Roots* encourages its readers to acknowledge the impact that the real-world transatlantic trade with enslaved Africans has had and continues to have on contemporary international power relations, politics and culture while

simultaneously making visible the afterlife of slavery in the UK itself. The novel does so by once again mixing historical references from different eras: in Londolo, present-day coffee shops which are complicit in modern-day practices of economic exploitation encounter victims of 16th to 19th century transatlantic enslavement. Racialized others are isolated in ethnicized ghettos where they are subjected to harsh treatment by police forces but are also free to express and celebrate their cultural identities through their style of clothing, music and culinary specialties.

e. Questioning Historiography

This chapter has shown that *Blonde Roots* does not only tell a story about an enslaved woman with reversed signs, but also questions the ideological foundations of world views, historiography as well as cultural values. I have shown that the novel not only highlights the suffering of enslaved women, but also self-reflexively elaborates on the inaccessibility of complete knowledge about the past through historical sources as those tend to reflect only a certain, inevitably biased view. Thus, *Blonde Roots* deconstructs teleological narratives of history such as Whig historiography, subscribing instead to the idea of history as a discourse, as an instrument that can be consciously employed. In this respect, the novel answers Sarah Abdullah's call for postcolonial alternate history texts that

go beyond mere representation to the politics of representation in a self-reflexive, non-essentialist manner, resisting conventional spatio-temporal structures through hybridity and flux [...] presenting history that is neither passive nor static but in the very act of making, constantly shifting in its form and pluralistic in its content (Abdullah 126).

As Johan Lau Munkholm explains “[i]nstead of challenging imperial powers by producing new wholesome narratives of the past, instead of attempting to regain thorough control of time, they [i.e. cultural artefacts such as *Blonde Roots*] keep time open for ongoing investigation”⁴² by using chronopolitical interventions. Those interventions fulfill various functions in the novel: first, they disorient the readers' spatiotemporal perception thereby inviting them to question their own preconceptions. Second, the chronopolitical interventions in *Blonde Roots*

⁴² Munkholm uses John Akomfrah's film *The Last Angel of History* and the work of jazz legend Sun Ra as examples for strategies of Afrofuturistic temporal rebellion. I suggest that his conclusion of afrofuturism re-envisioning the future and the past by contesting and re-imagining historical archives is transferable to *Blonde Roots* (cf. Munkholm 61).

transcend timespaces by connecting historical events with present social issues by implying European imperialist ambitions to be the foundation of the ongoing capitalist exploitation of the Global South. Third, in combination with multiperspectivity they displace ideas of history as a single coherent narrative opting instead for a concept of history as formed by a series of competing narratives. Simultaneously chronopolitical interventions are used to suggest that contemporary exploitative corporate practices are one of the legacies of the transatlantic slave trade and thereby part of the afterlife of slavery.

3. Conclusion: Alternate History as Afrofuturist Practice

The preceding analyses of Steven Barnes' *Lion's Blood* and Bernardine Evaristo's *Blonde Roots* have shown how both authors employ the genre of alternate history to negotiate the ways in which racialized enslavement is portrayed in historiography. In both novels, white Western hegemony is replaced by the global dominance of African nations: in *Lion's Blood*, Egyptian and Ethiopian Muslims have gained supremacy whereas the dominant ethnic group in *Blonde Roots* is not located in a specific real-world African culture, but instead combines elements from various African groups. Both *Lion's Blood* and *Blonde Roots* share their emphasis on realistic representations of racialized enslavement that can be traced back to traditional slave narratives, albeit in different styles. Whereas *Lion's Blood* combines the neo-slave narrative genre with a coming of age story, *Blonde Roots* satirizes both traditional slave narratives as well as 18th century pro-slavery pamphlets.

Linking both stories to the concept of chronopolitical interventions enables me to evaluate the potential impact of the experiences described and its implications for the futures imagined by both novels. As explained in the theory chapter, the term chronopolitical interventions describes the employment of "temporal complications and anachronistic episodes that disturb the linear time of progress" (Eshun 297). While both *Lion's Blood* and *Blonde Roots* disrupt conventional temporalities, they do so in different ways. *Lion's Blood* features a chronological narration during which its two protagonists experience personal growth. By employing such a straightforward structure both form- and content-wise, the novel reproduces traditional ideas about history as linearly progressive, while its

multiperspectivity featuring both hegemonic and enslaved voices suggests that marginalized perspectives should be included in history-making. In contrast to that, the fragmentary, non-chronological structure of *Blonde Roots* questions in how far historiography can ever provide a complete picture of any historical event, even when including multiple perspectives, thereby criticizing not only the mechanisms of exclusion that are present in historiography, but the very process of history-making itself.

Both novels criticize the systems that enabled crimes against humanity such as racialized enslavement and colonialization. By centering their enslaved protagonists, both novels emphasize the suffering of the enslaved in similar ways; where they differ is in their portrayal of slaveholders. In *Lion's Blood*, Kai is the youngest son of a plantation owner, a lonely teenager who befriends enslaved protagonist Aidan. In the beginning, Kai is portrayed as oblivious to his own privilege and indifferent to the lives of his enslaved servants. In the course of the novel, his interactions with both his enslaved friend Aidan and his enslaved lover Sophia inspire empathetic reactions in him which are reinforced by his eventual conversion to Sufism that brought about by his abolitionist teacher and mentor Babatunde. By casting a likeable character who in the end becomes an abolitionist in the role of the slaveholder, *Lion's Blood* suggests that with the help of interpersonal relationships, education and religious training, slaveholders can develop from naïve children who have not yet been enlightened on the equality of all human beings to abolitionists. Although the novel features some unapologetic proponents of slavery such as Kai's brother Ali, his uncle Malik and Shaka Zulu, all of them are killed in the end (as is Kai's father who is skeptical about the moral rightness of slavery in theory, but pragmatic in practice, as it he would not be able to run his plantation without his enslaved workers). Thus, *Lion's Blood* locates the spreading of abolitionist tendencies in education and spirituality and is optimistic about their potential to eventually end racialized enslavement. In contrast to the rather nuanced characterization of slaveholder Kai, *Blonde Roots'* antagonist Bwana is portrayed in a more stereotypical way: this becomes apparent in the chapter focalized by Bwana where he – in the form of a first-person narrator – tells the readers about his first voyage on a slave ship. The chapter reveals him to be entrenched in racist and imperialist ideology. The position of the chapter right after protagonist Doris' panic attack at the prospect of being re-captured and enslaved

again further increases the readers' aversion to Bwana and consolidates his status as the villain of the story. The stereotypical characterization of Bwana works to keep the readers' attention on Doris and can be read as an ironic reversal on stereotypical representations of black people in anglophone literatures written by white authors. By depicting Bwana in such a one-dimensional way, one is tempted to read him not as an individual character, but rather as a stand-in for a whole group of people (in this case, English slaveholders of the eighteenth century). Thus, whereas *Lion's Blood* sets its focus on the interpersonal relationship between enslaved protagonist Aidan and his slaveholder Kai, *Blonde Roots* is less interested in individual fates, but rather centers on the intertwined systems of imperialism and racism that lead to the emergence of racialized enslavement.

Lion's Blood and *Blonde Roots* engage with traditional slave narratives in different ways: While *Lion's Blood* acknowledges traditional slave narratives as a credible source of information about the living conditions of the enslaved, *Blonde Roots* draws attention to the limits of authenticity conveyed by slave narratives. While *Lion's Blood* is told chronologically with only the occasional flashback and follows the enslavement-escape-freedom structure of traditional slave narratives, *Blonde Roots* abandons a chronological narration in favor of multiple narrative strands and uses narrative leaps in time and gaps to illustrate Doris' traumatized state of mind: when focalizer Doris thinks that she is about to be re-captured, the sentences in the respective chapter become incomplete and the novel jumps to a flashback of her first abduction and subsequent enslavement. In other depictions of traumatic events in Doris' life that are conveyed through flashbacks, the sensual observations of younger Doris are supplemented by sarcastic comments from older Doris creating a distance between the experience and its narration. This centering of the dissociating qualities of trauma contrasts sharply with the orderly structure of traditional slave narratives and thereby casts doubts on the latter's authenticity, as "the identities deployed by slave narratives are necessarily anecdotal, marginal and formed on the basis of recognizable literary conventions as well as those histories of suffering and shame" (Burkitt 409). Thus, *Blonde Roots* acknowledges traditional slave narratives as historical sources, but simultaneously emphasizes their limitations due to both internal factors (i.e. the narrators' potentially traumatized state of mind) and external factors (i.e. conventions in the literary industry or readers' genre expectations).

Both novels draw their readers' attention to continuities of racialized and misogynist violence, often through referencing histories of oppression of other marginalized groups, which I read through the concept of multidirectional memory. *Lion's Blood* evokes Irish American history through its casting of an Irish protagonist as enslaved protagonist thereby inviting readers to draw connections between both Irish and African American histories, both of which were influenced by experiences of exclusion, discrimination and ghettoization. The ways in which Irish people have ultimately merged into American mainstream society can also be read as an optimistic forecast that, just as anti-Irish sentiments declined over time, so will discrimination against African Americans stop eventually.

Lion's Blood not only broaches the issue of racist prejudices, but also addresses continuities in misogynist violence through the character of Sophia: sold into slavery to cover for her father's debts, Sophia is forced into sex work and is stigmatized for this, not only by women from the dominant ethnic group, but also by her enslaved fellows. With Sophia's story, then, the novel draws attention to the sexual vulnerability of enslaved girls and women – which was present in both the antebellum United States and is still imminent with present-day human trafficking. Additionally, as a biracial person, Sophia is only shunned by both black and white people, since her hybrid identity destabilizes the presumed fixed racialized boundaries. Thus, Sophia “becomes a liminal figure who transgresses racial distinctions and racialized notions of womanhood in order to challenge dominant cultural understandings of such identity categories” (Zackodnik xii). This is made clear from Sophia's entering of plot onwards: while she is at first described in an objectifying manner by focalizer Kai, immediately afterwards the focalization shifts to Sophia herself who then has the opportunity to voice her concerns and ambitions. By including Sophia's own perspective in the narrative, *Lion's Blood* makes visible the inaccuracy of misogynist stereotypes and counters the limiting and sexist views that many of the male characters have on her. After Sophia has born a son, the novel also emphasizes the precarious status of enslaved mothers by hinting at the permanent looming threat of family separation (although Sophia is never separated from her son, she is sold away from her husband). *Blonde Roots* highlights histories of misogynist violence that range from medieval witch hunts in Europe/Europa to men in various positions of power raping women (instances include both noblemen in Europa abusing their female subjects, slave traders assaulting their abducted

victims and plantation owners raping enslaved women) as well as modern-day human trafficking. The novel features both examples of female solidarity across socio-economic division lines (e.g. Aphrikan noblewoman Ezinwene who volunteers as an Underground Railway conductor) and cases of female characters who are complicit in the patriarchal systems that oppress them (e.g. Doris' first owner Little Miracle who threatens to sell Doris to a brothel if she does not obey her commands or Doris' sister Sharon who becomes Bwana's enslaved mistress and thereby gains a superior status in the hierarchy of the plantation). *Blonde Roots* also addresses the challenges of enslaved motherhood through protagonist Doris who gives birth to two children but has to witness how they are sold away from her as babies. While those depictions of misogynist violence can already be connected to the afterlife of slavery through – for example – questions of reproductive rights, the issue of the afterlife of slavery is also brought up more directly.

Due to its setting in a slave owning society, *Lion's Blood* only addresses questions concerning the afterlife of slavery in the epilogue of the novel when recently freed protagonist Aidan and his family make their way west to build a new life at the frontier:

Four times in as many hours Aidan and his family were stopped by road patrols and forced to show their documents to men with small eyes and angry mouths. It seemed almost physically painful for these patrolmen, most of low birth, to admit that their documents were genuine, the Wakil's seal and signature unimpeachable, and grant them the open road (597).

This anecdote can be read as a reference of the conditions which African American travelers faced (and as some would argue, continue to face in some form or another) when en route in North America; an impression that affirmed by the novel's allusion to the *The Negro Motorist Green Book* – a travel guide for African Americans that appeared annually between 1936–1966 – which makes an appearance in *Lion's Blood* as “a map detailing their entire passage west, showing places where free whites might find shelter and food along the way” (597). In contrast to that, the afterlife of slavery figures more prominently in *Blonde Roots*: the novel addresses historical consequences such as the reparation payments that British slaveholders received or practices of prolonged economic exploitation of disenfranchised plantation workers that continued after the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833 through apprenticeships. *Blonde Roots* also mentions modern-day manifestations of the afterlife of slavery such as its influence on ideals of beauty, policing practices like

racial profiling or the ghettoization of marginalized groups and explicitly connects those practices to racialized enslavement and the racist ideologies which build its foundation.

The different stances that both novels take on the afterlife of slavery become particularly clear when analyzing their endings. In *Lion's Blood*, protagonist Aidan is freed by his former friend and slaveholder Kai in return for his services during the Aztec war. Together with his wife and son, he seeks to build a new life in the frontier region. While this can be considered a happy ending for Aidan and his family, it also leaves a bitter aftertaste as Aidan thereby continues the imperialist project that had previously cost him his freedom – an aspect that is not addressed in the novel. *Blonde Roots* ends on a more ambiguous note: Although Doris eventually escapes and joins a maroon community, she never feels truly at home there and never manages to retrieve her two children who were taken and sold away from her by Bwana. This ambivalence is continued into the epilogue which emphasizes the continuity of historically established dependence-relations between former slaveholders and former enslaved workers.

Thus, I read *Lion's Blood* as presenting a more optimistic vision of the future: Aidan's and Kai's friendship has contributed to Kai's character development into a staunch abolitionist and eventually led to Aidan's (and his family's) emancipation. Aidan's decision to start a new life in a recently developed region that is (in Aidan's opinion) supposedly⁴³ untainted by racialized conflict and exploitation marks the end point of his journey from enslavement to freedom. In this manner, *Lion's Blood* suggests that interpersonal relationships with marginalized people can change the dominant social group's attitudes towards racialized equality. In contrast to that, I consider the implications for the future implied by the ending of *Blonde Roots* to be more pessimistic: the novel suggests that there is no future imaginable that is sufficiently different from the past, as long as people cling to historiography (and traditional slave narratives) as source for the establishment of (racialized) identities. Whereas *Blonde Roots* clearly criticizes and questions the identity-generating function of historiography and traditional slave

⁴³ It should be noted that the frontier region of the novel is, in fact, already inhabited by indigenous people who will be pushed back by the increased number of new settlers which might lead to racialized conflicts.

narratives, it does not offer any alternatives that it considers preferable to that. Both novels can be described as Afrofuturist in the sense of constituting

a counter-tradition of Afrodiasporic media production, thought, and performance that transforms science fictional practices and themes to envision alternate identities, timelines, and counter-realities [...that] create startling, creative, and uncanny effects (van veen 2014: 5).

Whereas *Lion's Blood* imagines a future in which meaningful interpersonal relationships are a viable way to overcome racist oppression, *Blonde Roots* emphasizes the persistence of racist ideologies and their impact on power relations between people, nations and societies.

4. Interventions in the History of Science in Rivers Solomon's *An Unkindness of Ghosts* (2017) and Esi Edugyan's *Washington Black* (2018)

1. The Black Technoscientific Genius Trope in Rivers Solomon's *An Unkindness of Ghosts* (2017)

An Unkindness of Ghosts is the debut novel of African American author Rivers Solomon and was first published in September 2017. It is set more than three hundred years in the future, in which humanity has left a devastated earth in search for a new homeland. Their spaceship the *HSS Matilda* however is organized like an antebellum South plantation with a ruling white elite exploiting and dehumanizing people of color. The readers follow protagonist Aster Gray – a black queer neuroatypical self-proclaimed witch doctor – as she tries to help the enslaved population of the ship as best as she can. On her way through the lowdeck slums of the *HSS Matilda*, Aster learns about the strategies of resistance that the enslaved employ which in turn inspires her to develop her own resistance tactics.

I read the character of Aster as an updated incarnation of the black technoscientific genius trope of earlier Afrofuturist fiction and show how her activism against the oppressive system of white supremacy on the spaceship is rooted in her self-perception as a scientist. An autodidactic astrophysicist, botanist and chemist, Aster's forms of resistance include the cultivation of medicinal herbs, the strategic placement of bombs and eventually continuing her late mother's quest of redirecting the spaceship back towards earth. I argue that the act of reversing the

direction in which the *HSS Matilda* is going becomes a metaphor for the disenfranchised subjects' quest to reclaim control over their own future – thus intervening in what Kodwo Eshun has conceptualized as the “futures industry” (Eshun 291).

In order to explain how Solomon's novel revises the black technoscientific genius, I first introduce the trope and its significance for earlier Afrofuturist fiction. A second subchapter focuses on the character of Aster Gray and its engagement with earlier forms of black technoscientific genius characters with particular attention to Aster's identity as a black, queer, neuroatypical scientist as well as illuminating connections between the neo-slave narrative genre and *An Unkindness of Ghosts*. A concluding final subchapter will elaborate on the implications of the open ending of the novel which is read as conveying a sense of hope.

a. Black Technoscientific Geniuses and their Legacies

According to Lisa Yaszek, Martin R. Delany's novel *Blake; or, The Huts of America* (1859, 1861-1862) can be credited with creating the first fictional black technoscientific genius (Yaszek 2014: 17). In this alternate history novel, protagonist Henry Holland, renamed Henry Blake after his enslavement, escapes from a plantation in Mississippi after his wife has been sold away from him. While trying to reclaim his wife, Blake uses his intelligence and technoscientific knowledge to unite the Afrodiasporic populations of the American Atlantic regions, both free and enslaved, in the struggle for freedom. This prototype of the black technoscientific genius – a young, male, heterosexual (often self-educated) scientist with the mission to save his community from racialized oppression – would become a popular motif in Afrodiasporic speculative fiction between 1880 and 1945 (Yaszek 2015: 60). African American inventor/scientist/engineer Benjamin Banneker (1731-1806) provided a real-life role model for those fictional genius characters (Yaszek 2014: 16). Banneker who is probably best known for building the first American wooden clock was also a self-educated astronomer, biologist and mathematician and heavily involved in the abolitionist movement.

The first fictional black technoscientific genius protagonists echo Banneker's achievements of intellectual accomplishments and social commitment against the backdrop of a racially prejudiced society. In those stories, the protagonist is often

called into action after experiencing racialized violence and/or discrimination firsthand which in turn inspires him to become a force of societal change. Unlike Anglo-American science fiction of the same era that featured similar scientist characters, early African American science fiction tended to be less interested in the national level, but rather extended its focus to worldwide developments and avoided the clear victory at the end of the novel in favor of more uncertain endings. The black technoscientific genius saw a renaissance in early 2000s Afrodiasporic science fiction. In contrast to its earlier incarnation, those new geniuses could be either male or female and combine established forms of technology with imaginary new and sometimes with African or Afrodiasporic inspired technoscience (Yaszek 2014: 22). A constant feature of fictional black technoscientific genius remains their resistance against racist regimes of oppression.

b. Aster Grey as a Black Technoscientific Genius

In *Aster Gray*, author Rivers Solomon takes up many of the aforementioned points while adding a distinctive contemporary 21st century perspective. Born into the enslaved population of *HSS Matilda*, Aster is raised by her aunt Melusine since her mother Lune mysteriously disappeared right after giving birth to Aster. When realizing that Aster is highly intelligent, Melusine uses her contacts to the ruling elite to arrange for her to become the apprentice of surgeon general Theo Smith, who is the illegitimate son of Melusine and a former Sovereign and well respected on the ship because of his medical expertise. Learning from Theo and through reference books, Aster becomes a skilled healer. Her neuroatypicality is portrayed as beneficial for her learning process as it allows her to fully focus on the materials at hand which she memorizes with a high attention to detail. In spite of this inclusion of positive aspects of Aster's neuroatypicality, the novel avoids the pitfalls of what is known as the "supercrip narrative" – idealizing "representations [of disability that] rely on concepts of overcoming, heroism, inspiration, and the extraordinary [and] focus on individual attitude, work, and perseverance rather than on social barriers" (Schalk 2016: 73). *An Unkindness of Ghosts* does not idealize Aster's neuroatypicality, as it shows how Aster's difficulties in interpersonal communication have disadvantages for her that she is unable to avoid or overcome. These include Aster's problems with reading social clues that often result in

misunderstandings with her friends or conflicts with overseers that might have been mitigated or prevented otherwise. Despite Aster's hard work and perseverance, the white supremacist leadership of *Matilda* severely limits her scope of action and the novel emphasizes the ways in which the plantocratic system impedes Aster's efforts to provide medical care for the enslaved population. If the readers admire Aster's actions, it is rather out of an appreciation for what she is accomplishing in spite of *Matilda*'s oppressive system and not in spite of her neuroatypicality.

Although Aster is never explicitly referred to as neuroatypical on the diegetic level, her behavior displays symptoms commonly associated with autism, such as difficulties with understanding other people's emotions or figures of speech, a strong reliance on routines and an avoidance of eye contact. While the author has labelled Aster as autistic in an interview, the diegetic world of the novel uses different expressions to describe Aster's condition, as the following quote illustrates:

'You're a little off, aren't you?' The woman grabbed Aster's chin, turning her face so they were forced eye to eye. 'You're one of those who has to tune the world out and focus on one thing at a time. We have a word for that down here, women like you. *Insiwa*. Inside one. It means you live inside your head and to step out of it hurts like a caning' (Solomon 23).

This quote draws attention to the cultural specificity of labelling neuroatypical people as autistic. The (unnamed) woman validates Aster's neurodiversity by implying that there are more women like her on the ship. Simultaneously, she also does not explicitly evaluate Aster's condition as strictly negative and offers empathy for Aster's difficulties when "stepping out of her head". Thus, the novel opens up new perspectives on autism, that do not necessarily consider it as a disability. This, together with the novel's rejection of supercrip stereotypes works to disrupt potential prejudices that neurotypical readers might have regarding neuroatypicality. The novel's engagement with Aster's autism is continued through its narrative structure.

Most of the chapters employ an extradiegetic, heterodiegetic narrator who is using Aster as an internal focalizer; interspersed are three chapters that incorporate the perspectives of three other characters through first person narration: Surgeon General Theo Smith allows the readers to catch a glimpse of the live on the wealthy upper decks, his enslaved mother Melusine Hopwood takes the readers along for a

work day as a nanny on the upper decks and Aster's (enslaved) friend Giselle Nwaku gives in to her destructive impulses. All focalizers in the novel are experiencing marginalization: although Theo is not enslaved, his privileged position is affected by his status as the son of an enslaved woman (Aster's aunt Melusine), by the need to hide his wish to live as a woman and by his obsessive-compulsive disorder. Melusine who is asexual was forced into the role of a caretaker of children which she abhors. Giselle is severely traumatized due to the longstanding sexual abuse that she is subjected to by *Matilda's* overseers which has resulted in what Aster describes as "myriad psychological disturbances" (343) that include self-harming behavior as well as psychotic episodes. Thus, the novel focuses on the experiences of marginalized characters and tells the story from their perspective. The chapters narrated from Aster's point of view put the readers in her frame of mind by describing the environment in distanced, scientific terms. Through this, together with the third person narrative situation of Aster's chapters, the novel creates a certain emotional distance between the events described and both the readers and the protagonist. On the diegetic level, this emotional distance might be considered as something that helps Aster to cope with the huge number of cruelties against the marginalized people on the spaceship that she witnesses and experiences every day.

Just like every other enslaved person on the ship, Aster is forced to work on the fields of *Matilda*, but afterwards she spends her time cultivating medicinal herbs and providing medical care for the enslaved who suffer from malnutrition, frostbite and physical wounds inflicted by cruel overseers. Her status as a healthcare provider gives Aster certain privileges, such as a "pass" that allows her to move freely between the different decks of the ship. The restriction of the mobility of the enslaved is reminiscent of the conditions on historical 18th and 19th century American plantations where enslaved people required a pass signed by their slaveholder in order to be allowed to leave the plantation (this practice is also explained in Frederick Douglass' first autobiography *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave – Written by Himself*). Her relative freedom of movement on the one hand provides Aster with opportunities to learn from the diverse cultures present on *Matilda*, but on the other hand also shows her how the white ruling elite lives in luxury at the expense of the enslaved. It should further be noted that Aster's freedom of movement remains precarious: the ruling elite only

allows Aster to perform medical treatments that are profitable for them, that means medical care that keeps the enslaved alive and able to work. Acts that are opposed to the elite's interests, such as abortions, need to be kept secret as they could result in Aster's execution if discovered by government officials.

In contrast to the dominant upper-deck society that adheres to a strict heteropatriarchal order, the inhabitants of the lower-decks tend to be more open for gender diversity, as – on some of the decks – children are not assigned a gender at birth but get to develop their own gender identity as they grow older. Despite this freedom, it should be noted that the ruling elite is keen on exploiting the reproductive potential of enslaved people with functional ovaries and uteruses. In order to avoid being forced to bear children who will subsequently be enslaved, Aster has persuaded Theo to perform a hysterectomy and a mastectomy on her which has incurred the wrath of *Matilda's* government officials. It is not only Aster's physicality that complicates her gendering by the reader. While Aster uses the pronouns "she" and "her" and presents as female, she is just as comfortable disguising as a man should the need arise. When Theo helps her to sneak into an event disguised as a man, the clothes that he obtains for her "fit like they were made for her" (210). Aster likes "to pretend that she was a man" (272), though "[i]t wasn't the boy part that attracted her [...] It was becoming someone else" (272). This, together with Aster's lesbian sexuality, leads me to describe her as queer. Aster's queerness also extends to her personal gender identity, as she does not identify with a particular gender herself: "I am a boy and a girl and a witch all wrapped into one very strange, flimsy, indecisive body" (308). Aster's self-identification as a witch on the one hand, refers to "the powerful allure of witch stories and the cultural compulsion to label certain types of (usually female) deviant behavior as witchery, a threat to social order" (Lindeman 758) and on the other hand, connects her to narrative traditions of conjure women as folk heroes in African American literature (for more information on conjure women, see Martin). It is important to note, though, that Aster's witch identity is not in conflict with her identity as healthcare professional, but that these two identities work in a rather complementary way. That means that Aster's medical work is firmly rooted in conventional concepts of science while her witch identity is fundamental to her private life, including her rejection of heteronormativity and her attempts at honoring her ancestors.

In the course of the novel, Aster moves from small everyday acts of resistance to inciting a revolution after *Matilda*'s government executes an innocent child. The child in question, Flick, was a patient of Aster's whose leg had to be amputated due to frostbite. The execution is a direct reaction of Aster's confrontation with a sadistic government official and used to punish her for her lack of submissiveness. Due to her freedom of movement, Aster manages to arm parts of the enslaved population and to coordinate a common course of action. While the uprising occurs, Aster prepares to leave *Matilda*. She has just deciphered her late mother Lune's diary entries and learned that Lune has redirected the spaceship back to earth right after Aster's birth. As Aster enters a space capsule where she discovers her mother's remains, Aster chooses to lead the way back to earth, driven by her own scientific curiosity. The novel ends with Aster arriving on earth discovering that the formerly ruined planet has become habitable again – a hopeful ending that hints at Aster and her fellow marginalized ship mates' opportunity to build a new, self-determined future for themselves.

The novel's combination of the black technoscientific genius trope with generic characteristics of the neo-slave narrative works to make visible both the empowering potential of black scientific practice and its limitations. Although Aster's skills and actions enable her to help the enslaved community, she has to act in secret and is dependent on Theo's (albeit marginal layer of) protection. Aster constantly uses her knowledge of science to resist against the plantocratic system, through stealing medical supplies and by cultivating her own medicinal herbs, by performing abortions for the enslaved or by building bombs. Aster's freedom to act is, however, severely limited: this tension between the empowering potential of Aster's scientific practice and the oppression she faces is present throughout the novel and is illustrated, for example, through Aster's invention of a numbing salve that she uses daily on her genitals to help her cope with expected rape attempts by overseers: "There was no system to their [i.e. the overseers'] violence [...] Best to spread on the salve daily" (64). This act exemplifies both the cruelty and normalized misogyny of *Matilda*'s plantocratic system and Aster's efforts to maintain a sense of agency through her scientific knowledge.

c. Reclaiming the Future

The characterization of Aster in *An Unkindness of Ghosts* engages the trope of the black technoscientific genius popularized by earlier Afrofuturist fiction and gives it a distinct 21st century spin: Aster is portrayed as a black, young, highly intelligent scientist with the mission to save her community from racialized oppression, but she is also female-presenting, genderqueer, lesbian and neuroatypical. This puts her into an even more marginalized position than the classic black technoscientific genius character and certainly makes her more vulnerable to repression by the white heteropatriarchal elite of the spaceship, but also leads to members of precisely this elite to underestimate her abilities. The fact that the creation of a protagonist such as Aster occurs in the late 2010s can be related to changes in the public recognition of genderqueer people whose visibility has increased in recent years and to a rising number of medial representations of neuroatypicality as an endearing quirk rather than a disability. Aster experiences racist physical, sexual and emotional violence throughout the novel, which inspires her small acts of resistance such as her secret cultivation of medicinal herbs. However, it is the public execution of her patient Flick that is the final straw which motivates her take the more extreme action of arming the enslaved people and coordinate an attack. Just like earlier Afrodiasporic science fiction, the focus of the novel is global rather than nationalist and its ending is open, but hopeful: Aster manages to get to earth in a space capsule and discovers that the planet is habitable again. The novel ends immediately after Aster's arrival, so that the readers do not learn whether the revolution she incited on *Matilda* was successful or whether Aster and the surviving members of *Matilda*'s crew will be able to establish a fairer social order on their reclaimed home planet. My reading the ending as hopeful is not just based on Aster's survival of her risky trip back to earth, but also on two passages from the novel. When Aster is working in her botanical garden on *Matilda*, she observes the life cycles of her plants and states "[t]hat was the way of things – to live, and then to have their offspring live, and so on for all time, as it was in the beginning and would be until the end of days. And everything connected, back to the very first thing that ever was, and to the last thing that ever would be" (251). While Aster cannot have biological offspring due to her hysterectomy, her gardening skills can bring plants to life and thereby provide food for other people.

Aster's act burying the bodies of Giselle and her mother then does not come across as Aster bidding farewell to them, but rather as her planting the seeds to build a new both physical and social environment, creating a personal connection between herself and earth. Thus, the final two sentences of the novel, "But dirt, dirt would do. They were sheathed in it" (349), can be read as symbolizing the potential for growth on earth.

In contrast to early Afrofuturist fiction, Aster is no solitary heroine who saves a helpless community on her own: the community of the enslaved plays a pivotal role in their own rescue: with the help of her friend Giselle, Aster deciphers her mother's diary from which she learns that *Matilda* is headed back towards earth; with the help of her friend Mabel's technical expertise, Aster manages to coordinate the attack on the ruling elite. In the end, Aster is less of a savior and more of a facilitator: her ability to move freely between the different decks of the spaceship allows Aster to build a network among the enslaved people which enables them to unite in their struggle for liberation.

d. The Black Technoscientific Genius as a Liberator

I conclude that *An Unkindness of Ghosts* addresses questions concerning the afterlife of slavery through both its setting and its characterization of Aster Gray as a black technoscientific genius. The portrayal of Aster in the novel maintains key elements of the black technoscientific genius trope, such as ethnicity, age, superior intelligence and social mission while simultaneously broadening its scope to allow for the inclusion of (gender)queerness or neuroatypicality. Although readers might expect that Aster's positionality as female-presenting, neuroatypical person would lead her being even more oppressed than her male, neurotypical counterparts, the novel subverts that expectation by turning these supposed weaknesses into something that Aster can use to her advantage. Aster's strategies of resistance against the spaceship plantocracy are rooted in her self-perception as a scientist and ultimately it is her ability to think beyond boundaries that enables her to pave the way for a new future for both herself and her shipmates. Thus, *An Unkindness of Ghosts* continues the African American literary tradition of employing black technoscientific genius protagonists as intellectual anti-racist activists and expands it through Aster's queerness and neuroatypicality.

What constitutes the chronopolitical intervention in *An Unkindness of Ghosts* is its combination of generic motifs of neo-slave narratives (dehumanizing treatment of and gratuitous violence against enslaved people by slaveholders and overseers, the disruption of traditional family structures and the emergence of substitute families, resistance strategies of the enslaved, the protagonist's ultimately successful quest for freedom) with those of science fiction (far-future setting on multigeneration spaceship, scientist/inventor protagonist). The novel represents the future as still caught up in the same racist ideologies that justified racialized enslavement in the 17th to 19th century and may invite readers to question in how far their action in their own time might contribute to preventing or bring about such a future. *An Unkindness of Ghosts* thus warns its readers against a re-emergence of racialized enslavement and simultaneously locates the potential for resistance against anti-black racism in the character of the black technoscientific genius. The spaceship setting does not only create a somewhat futuristic atmosphere, but also influences Aster's quest for freedom: Aster's discovery that her mother directed the spaceship back to earth leads to her and her allies secretly arming the enslaved population in order to cause a revolution on the ship itself (reminiscent of the rebellion of Mende captives on the *La Amistad* in July 1839), in the hope that – when *Matilda* returns to earth – Aster and the surviving shipmates can build a new, more just society. Whereas traditional and realist neo-slave narratives imagine the final destination of the protagonist's escape as someplace north, where the protagonist is supposed to integrate into (predominantly white) mainstream society, *An Unkindness of Ghosts* is more radical by giving the escapees an entire uninhabited planet to shape according to their needs.

2. Science as Empowering/Exploitative Force in Esi Edugyan's *Washington Black* (2018)

In this chapter, I will show how Canadian author Esi Edugyan's novel *Washington Black* represents science as potentially liberating practice for the black protagonist but simultaneously characterizes the scientific community as a sphere that exploits the labor of marginalized people without acknowledging or recompensating their contributions. Combining generic influences of (neo-)slave narrative, bildungsroman and adventure writing (Davies 6-7), *Washington Black*

tells the story of the eponymous protagonist who grows up enslaved on a Barbadian plantation where he is recruited by the plantation owner's scientist brother Christopher 'Titch' Wilde to help with his experiments. A friendship-like relationship develops between Wash and Titch who eventually helps him to escape. In the course of the novel, Wash becomes a proficient scientific illustrator, autodidactic marine biologist and creator of the first aquarium in London, but his accomplishments are never publicly recognized.

At the center of my analysis is the protagonist's journey which I suggest exemplifies the struggles of black scientists in white supremacist societies that persist long after emancipation. Bringing Dominic Davies' ideas concerning *Washington Black's* engagement with the (neo-)slave narrative genre in conversation with Lisa Yaszek's concept of the Black Technoscientific Genius, I aim to disentangle the novel's representation of science as a potentially empowering force for the protagonist that simultaneously makes him vulnerable to exploitation by a scientific community that is dominated by wealthy white men. Reading Wash as a reinterpretation of the black technoscientific genius trope of earlier Afrofuturist fiction allows me to grasp the emancipatory implications of Wash's scientific practice, whereas Davies' suggestion that "Washington buys into [the] idea that his humanity — tautologically synonymous with freedom — might be attained through artistic and scientific achievement" (14) makes its problematic aspects visible.

This chapter is divided into four subchapters: First, I will elaborate on the novel's reinterpretation on the neo-slave narrative genre and show how the structure of *Washington Black* disrupts temporal conventions. The second subchapter will focus on my reading of the protagonist as a black technoscientific genius (analogous to my exploration of this trope in the previous chapter), while also highlighting problematic aspects of the protagonist's scientific practice. A third subchapter will analyze the novel's open ending, before my conclusion reflects on how *Washington Black* negotiates the tension between science as empowering practice and its exploitative potential.

**a. A Generic Reimagining of (Neo-)Slave Narrative and
Adventure Fiction**

Particularly in its first part, *Washington Black* retains many characteristics that are typical for 18th and 19th century slave narratives:

The prototypical text begins with a confession of ignorance as to the narrator's age, circumstances of birth, and parentage, recounts the separation from family members and the proximity of a presumed (white) father, represents the unspeakable violence of masters, overseers, and slave breakers, and celebrates the achievements of literacy, mental fortitude, and finally successful escape and ostensible freedom in the north (Brown 4).

Throughout the novel, protagonist Wash serves as an intradiegetic, homodiegetic narrator. At the beginning of *Washington Black*, (then still enslaved) Wash is unsure about his "age, circumstances of birth, and parentage": "I was born in the year 1818 on that sun-scorched estate in Barbados. So I was told. I had also heard it said that I was in a shackled cargo hold during a frenzied crossing of the Atlantic, aboard an illicit Dutch vessel. That would have been the autumn of 1817" (Edugyan 13). Not knowing details about his family background is a source of suffering for Wash, until eventually, as an adult, he gains access to the records of Faith plantation and learns who his biological mother was. In *Washington Black*, representations of acts of "unspeakable violence" committed by slaveholders are just as present as celebrations of "the achievements of literacy, mental fortitude, and finally successful escape"; those factors lead Dominic Davies to the conclusion that *Washington Black* is "reproducing the [slave narrative] genre so convincingly that it almost reads as a 'found' and autobiographical, rather than contemporary and fictional, narrative" (Davies 6).

Whereas I agree with Davies' assessment concerning the novel's imitation of central characteristics of traditional slave narratives, I argue that *Washington Black* gives the genre a distinct neo-slave narrative twist by including temporal disruptions. The first one of those is directly at the beginning of the novel: instead of starting with the "I was born" statement, *Washington Black* puts two other chapters in front of it. The first of those outlines the death of Wash's first slaveholder and the arrival of Erasmus Wilde, Wash's future (and final) slaveholder. The second chapter portrays Wash's relationship to Big Kit, an enslaved woman on Faith Plantation (whom he much later identifies as his

biological mother). It further describes how the worsened living conditions under Erasmus Wilde's leadership result in a number of suicides among the enslaved community. Enraged by this development, Wilde defiles the suicide victims' corpses by having them decapitated and exhibiting the severed heads on wooden sticks. While Davies reads the beginning of the novel as a nod to the genre of the eighteenth-century sentimental novel (Davies 6), I suggest considering it as a chronopolitical intervention in the conventional temporal order of the traditional slave narrative in which the intensity of the violence directed against the enslaved supersedes the standard opening which is also remarked on by the narrator himself at the start of the third chapter: "But that is no beginning. Allow me to begin again, for the record" (13). The narrator's use of "for the record" combined with the depictions of cruelties against the enslaved in the first two chapters works to remind readers that many such atrocities remained unrecorded with the genre of the (eighteenth and nineteenth century) slave narrative, whereas the direct addressing of the reader with his polite asking for permission can be read not just as performance of modesty, but as a reminder of the power that (white) editors had over the final shape of slave narratives.

A close reading of selected passages in the first chapter shows how *Washington Black* uses shifts in focalization to bridge the gap between the different temporal dimensions of Wash's enslaved childhood and (supposedly) free adult life. As adult Wash remembers his first slaveholder Richard Black's death and his first encounter with Erasmus Wilde, the focalization shifts between adult Wash as an external focalizer and young Wash as an internal focalizer, illustrating the lasting influence that this experience has had on Wash's life. Adult Wash compares his previous slaveholder sarcastically to "a specimen preserved in a bottle" whose "usefulness, surely, had passed" (3). As the readers later learn that Wash has become a scientist, his description of Richard Black as "specimen" reads like an attempt to reframe and take ownership of his childhood experiences by casting himself in the role of the observer, thus creating a certain distance between his victimized younger self and his emancipated, scientifically minded adult self.

A few pages later, a shift towards internal focalization reveals his younger self's utter terror at meeting Wilde who in his white clothing appears to him "like a duppy, a ghost" (5). Internal focalizer young Wash perceives the extent of Wilde's power as monstrous: "I feared he could vanish and reappear at will; I feared he must

feed on blood to keep himself warm; I feared he could be anywhere and not visible to us” (5). The supernatural terminology used here is quite an accurate description of Wilde’s behavior if read metaphorically: Wilde can leave (and return to) the plantation at any time; his wealth is based on the exploitation of enslaved workers and he keeps the enslaved community under permanent surveillance through the overseers working for him. The use of paranormal vocabulary to describe a slaveholders’ power in *Washington Black* has the effect of illustrating the monstrosity of a slaveholder’s power. Even after Wash’s successful escape from Faith plantation, Wilde continues to h(a)unt Wash: Wilde offers a bounty for the capture of Wash and additionally employs a bounty hunter to find him. Wash lives in constant fear of re-capture for years, until he eventually meets Wilde’s bounty hunter Mr. Willard who informs him that Wilde has died. After a fight with Willard that leaves both men seriously injured but still alive, Wash once again flees, this time from his new home in Nova Scotia to London.

Throughout the novel, Wash’s frequent moves are often necessitated by emergency situations. This is particularly true for his initial escape from Faith plantation. After Wash has been involuntarily implicated in the suicide of Titch’s cousin Philip, Titch and Wash hastily flee from the plantation in their hot air balloon called *Cloud-cutter*. They start their journey from the mountain Corvus Peak which according to Davies does not exist in real-world Barbados; Instead, he locates it “in Mt. Edziza Provincial Park on the western edge of Edugyan’s British Columbia, Canada” (Davies 12). Whereas Davies regards this as “another curious twist in novel’s geography” (Davies 12), I would go further and read it as a way to hint at the interconnectedness of Caribbean and Canadian histories.

Entanglements between Caribbean and Canadian histories are also made visible through Wash’s migration (including some detours) from Barbados to Nova Scotia. Wash’s journey echoes real-world Canadian history as Nova Scotia has had a substantial black community for a long time (for more information about black Nova Scotians, see Aboh). The novel explicitly mentions a certain historical group of African Canadians: the so-called “Black Loyalists”, “about 3,500 free and enslaved Africans [...] who sided with and fought on the side of the British in the Revolutionary War [and] were evacuated to Nova Scotia” in 1783 (Aboh 123). After leaving the Arctic, Wash journeys to Nova Scotia, since “Titch had spoken much of the Loyalists” (228), however, when Wash arrives in Nova Scotia in 1834,

many of those Loyalists would not be there anymore. Sadlier explains that black people were discriminated against regarding the choice and size of the land they were provided with which is why in “1,200 Black Loyalists sailed to Freetown, Sierra Leone” in 1792 (Sadlier 39). This explains why Wash does not find a large black community in Nova Scotia upon his arrival. There are also interconnections between Canadian and Caribbean history: Sadlier mentions the Jamaican Maroons who had fought against the British on their island since 1655 and eventually surrendered in 1796 (Sadlier 39). According to Sadlier, about 600 of them were deported to Halifax immediately afterwards (Sadlier 39). However,

[a]fter about 4 years of increasing resentment [by the local black population, because] of [...] their favored treatment [by the British colonial government], and with the Maroons, in turn, displeased with the social restrictions, the unfamiliar crops, and the cold climate in their new home, the Maroons sought to leave. By 1800, 550 of the Maroons left for Freetown, Sierra Leone” (Sadlier 39).

Wash’s journey thus has historical precedents and his experiences of discrimination and anti-black violence echo the real-world struggles of black Canadians in the late 18th and early 19th century. Before I get into more detail concerning Wash’s stay in Nova Scotia, let me once again return to Wash’s first mode of transportation, the *Cloud-cutter*. A closer of analysis of Wash’s travel in the hot air balloon will yield new insights on *Washington Black*’s engagement with the genres of travel writing and science fiction.

Wash and Titch’s journey in the *Cloud-cutter* and particularly Joe Wilson’s book cover art for the UK edition of the novel that is reminiscent of vintage science fiction illustrations bring to mind classical science fiction stories in which technologically advanced hot air balloons play a role. Among those is Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Balloon Hoax”, first published in 1844, in which a crew of British inventors cross the Atlantic in a gas balloon within three days. In this fictional newspaper article, the innovative flying machine *Victoria* is represented as a triumph of technological progress. Just like Wash and Titch, the crew of the *Victoria* is unexpectedly caught in a storm. However, unlike Wash and Titch whose *Cloud-cutter* crashes, the protagonists of Poe’s story make the most of their circumstances and abandon their plans of flying to Paris and decide to go the North America instead, where they triumphantly arrive three days later in South Carolina. Gas balloons also figure prominently in Poe’s 1849 future-set short story *Mellonta*

Tauta where they serve as high-speed means of transportation. Later, Jules Verne employs various flying devices in his adventure novels: one example would be his 1863 book *Cinq Semaines en Ballon* in which three British explorers travel from Zanzibar to modern-day Senegal by hot air balloon. While Verne's travelers are mainly concerned with "mapping, surveying, recording and securing geographical knowledge about the continent," Krobb explains that the "European ideology that facilitated and legitimized exploration, the teleology of knowledge acquisition, is omnipresent in the novel" (Krobb 4). Thus, the motif of hot air balloon travel in science fictional narratives and travel writing is inextricably linked to European imperialism and its underlying ideologies. Against this background, I suggest reading the inclusion of the *Cloud-cutter* in *Washington Black* as subverting the trope of the brave (white) English explorer that is so common in nineteenth century adventure novels rather than as a symbol for the Victorian quest "for scientific knowledge, industrial development, and commercial success" (481), as Šlapkauskaitė does. Although Titch is indeed an ambitious English inventor, his feats are not celebrated as heroic, but instead are ridiculed by his plantation owning brother who perceives them as a waste of time and money. While the first journey of the *Cloud-cutter* certainly yields new scientific insights for Titch, his main motivation for eventually setting off is his effort to save Wash. Instead of just serving as mobile laboratory, the *Cloud-cutter* enables Titch to live out his abolitionist ideals by liberating enslaved Wash thus also physically distancing himself from his family's involvement in the exploitation of the enslaved workers on the Barbados plantation while simultaneously reaching a supposedly elevated state of morality. This view is undermined by the novel hinting at Titch's less altruistic motivations for fleeing Faith plantation including him shirking from his responsibility to manage the plantation while his brother is in England and his suppressed feelings of guilt towards his cousin's suicide due to his earlier bullying of Philip.

However, in contrast to the traditional science fiction stories mentioned above, Titch is actually relegated to the sidelines while Wash is the protagonist. John Rieder's concept of the colonial provides a theoretical lens through which Wash's position can be contextualized: "The colonial gaze distributes knowledge and power to the subject who looks, while denying or minimizing access to power for its object, the one looked at" (Rieder 17). In contrast to the works of Poe and

Verne mentioned above that center white European men, it is a black, (formerly) enslaved person from the Caribbean whose perspective the readers share. The effect of this might be described as what Rieder calls a reversal of the colonial gaze: “The narrator no longer occupies the position usually accorded to the scientific observer, but instead finds himself in that role historically occupied by those who are looked at and theorized about rather than those who look, analyze, and theorize” (17). This, I argue, is also the case in *Washington Black* where the focalization stays with Wash throughout the whole novel and only shifts between the perspective of young Wash and that of adult Wash in some of the early chapters.

Casting a black character in the leading role of the narrative also puts *Washington Black* into conversation with earlier Afrodiasporic fiction such as Edwidge Danticat’s 1995 short story *A Wall of Fire Rising* in which a wealthy family’s hot air balloon functions as a symbol for protagonist Guy’s yearning to escape his impoverished living conditions in a Haitian village. Guy tells his wife that he dreams of using that balloon to fly away and start a new life. Chen explains how the hot air balloon signifies “different kinds of flight” (Chen 39), both in the literal and the metaphorical sense and how eventually “[s]uccessfully flying the hot air balloon comes to represent, for Guy, the transcendence of a life whose circumstances continually emasculate, infantilize, and entrap him” (40). Guy’s snatching and successful start of the hot air balloon is cheered by the workers of the local sugar mill who regard Guy’s theft of the balloon as an act of resistance against a capitalist system that subjugates workers. However, Guy does not use the balloon to travel to another place, but to commit suicide. As Guy realizes the futility of his endeavor, he reclaims agency over his own life by ending it on his own terms. In contrast to Danticat’s Guy, Wash is at first skeptical and scared of flying the *Cloud-cutter*, perceiving it like a wild animal that “groaned terribly” or is “making a terrible shriek” (137). In fact, Wash boards the hot air balloon only when he has no other choice to save his life, which constitutes a reversal of the situation in *A Wall of Fire Rising* as Guy uses the balloon to end his own life. Yet, in both cases, the respective protagonist achieves a sense of freedom.

In contrast to many other neo-slave narratives (including the ones discussed in this dissertation), protagonist Wash spends only a short part of the novel (about a third) in actual enslavement. The focus of the plot quickly shifts towards Wash’s artistic and scientific achievements making clear that – although his life continues

to be impacted by his previous experiences of racialized enslavement and the racist ideologies that support it – his accomplishments are more formative of Wash’s identity than his previous victimization at the hands of slaveholders.

b. Washington Black as a Black Technoscientific Genius

Wash’s talent for drawing and understanding scientific contexts play a key role in his successful escape from Faith plantation. Selected by Wilde’s brother Titch as an enslaved valet, Wash is exposed to the world of science for the first time. Although Titch at first chose Wash only because of his size and weight with the purpose of testing his newly invented mode of transportation – the *Cloud-cutter* – with him, he soon discovers Wash’s talent for drawing and makes him his “chief illustrator” (50). In this capacity, Wash assists Titch in his efforts to document the Barbadian plant and animal life. Titch also teaches Wash to read, write and to calculate, so that the boy can support him with the design and production of the *Cloud-cutter*. During their experiments, Wash is injured by an explosion which leaves his face permanently disfigured. Titch comments on Wash’s injury by claiming that “Science has left its mark on you now, Wash. It has claimed you” (88). Titch’s personification of science serves to deflect the responsibility for Wash’s mutilation away from Titch himself and reveals Titch’s self-centeredness. Titch is shown to be empathetic towards (certain) enslaved individuals (mainly Wash) and his activism for abolition includes the recording of the abusive treatment of the enslaved community on Faith plantation and handing the documentation over to the Abolitionist Society in London and freeing Wash. Titch explains his motivation for doing so by telling young Wash that “[s]lavery is a moral stain against us” (105); this statement is later criticized by adult Wash who accuses him that he was “more concerned that slavery should be a moral stain upon white man than by the actual damage it wreaks on black men” (405). Wash is eventually disappointed that Titch does not consider their relationship as close as he does and feels upset about Titch’s abandonment.

Titch leaves Wash in the Arctic region of Canada where he travelled to look for his supposedly dead father. After finding out that Wilde senior is still alive and has built himself a new life with his (romantic) partner Peter House, both Titch and Wash stay with the couple for a while and assist them in their scientific research,

before Titch eventually walks off into a snowstorm after an argument with his father. According to Hansson, fictional representations of the Arctic tend to suggest that “[t]he region exists in a kind of dream-time where real-world developments have had no effect and embodies primitivism as well as future potential” (Hansson 70). This also applies to *Washington Black* where it serves as a place of retreat for Titch’s father who can live in an openly homosexual relationship and dedicate himself to his research there without the scrutiny of mainstream English society. Wilde senior and his partner have adapted to the local conditions by living in an igloo and connecting to an indigenous man who is helping them, though it should be noted that – while Wilde senior does not consider the man his servant – he also does not bother to learn his language and instead of using his actual name which Wilde senior regards as “unpronounceable”, he calls him Hesiod (204). Thus, Wilde senior still embodies a somewhat colonial mindset when it comes to his interactions with indigenous people. The whole Arctic episode in the novel seems to have fallen out of time, with Titch and his father repeating behavioral patterns from Titch’s childhood, Wilde senior embracing a lifestyle that his fellows in Britain would reject as premodern which to the 21st century reader, however, appears to be ahead of his time with his refusal of heteronormativity and his sustainable way of living. As such the representation of the Arctic in the novel is in line with Hansson’s observation concerning the “thematic functions” of Arctic settings, “such as the role of the Arctic as a distinct contrast to the civilization left behind and a refuge from the pressures of modernity. As an environment that is regarded as pre social, it is a mediating space between the modern present and the utopian future” (Hansson 75). She continues to argue that “[t]hese imagined qualities mean that the Arctic is frequently represented as a place of becoming” (Hansson 75). For Wash, it is the place where he starts to become a scientific illustrator in his own right, rather than just Titch’s assistant. During his time in the Arctic, Wash keeps working on his drawing skills, documenting anything that awakens his interest and becoming aware of his progress: “I was suddenly astonished at myself [...] How far I had come these long months; how much I had grown in both art and life” (209-210). When Titch apparently commits suicide, Wash first stays with Wilde senior and Peter House, but after the former’s death, he makes his way to Nova Scotia inheriting a “leather-bound treatise on marine life” (226) from Wilde senior which foreshadows Wash’s budding interest in marine zoology.

It is only after Wash and Titch have gone their separate ways, that Wash can truly discover the empowering qualities of his own scientific practice. After abandoning his artistic and scientific ambitions for a while, Wash is inspired to return to his pursuit when he sees a fluorescent species of jellyfish during his work as a docker in Nova Scotia. Wash perceives the jellyfish as “alien and wondrous beings” (232) and feels the urge to capture his impressions on paper. Although he is first unsuccessful at doing justice to them, he relishes “the feelings of calm and peace” that drawing provides him with (233). Afterwards, it becomes a habit for Wash to go to the beach early in the morning to draw the local water animals: “These early ventures had become my one pure pleasure; the sense of freedom was intense. At the easel I was a man in full, his hours his own, his preoccupations his own” (240). Even after his escape from Faith plantation, Wash continuously experiences anti-black discrimination and violence. In contrast to that, his matutinal activities at the seaside enable Wash to get to know what it would be like to exist in a non-discriminatory space. Whereas Wash earlier feels like “there could be no belonging for a creature such as [himself], anywhere: a disfigured black boy with a scientific turn of mind and a talent on canvas” (230-31), his newfound joy in drawing gives him a sense of belonging and purpose. Wash also identifies with the aquatic animals that he documents and studies: in a conversation with his girlfriend Tanna, Wash mentions how his favorite marine organism is the nudibranch since “it will steal the harpoon off a jellyfish or anemone, then mount it to its own back as a weapon” (306). This comment can be read as visualizing Wash’s appropriation of science: once wielded against him like a weapon, Wash has managed to get hold of it and can now use it to defend himself.

Similar to Aster Gray in *An Unkindness of Ghosts*, protagonist Wash shows traits of a Black Technoscientific Genius: he is a young, male, heterosexual, neurotypical, (mostly) self-educated scientist who has experienced racist violence. However, whereas the prototypical Black Technoscientific Genius often takes on the mission to save his community from racialized oppression, Wash’s aim in life is different: He seeks to initiate scientific advancements and to engage in science communication to the general public. Inspired by the prospect of sharing the beauty of aquatic animals with “a public who would never have the chance to see such creatures up close” (274), Wash sets out to develop the technology necessary to transport living sea animals from Nova Scotia to London where they are to be

exhibited. As Wash sees his vision of an aquarium become reality, he muses: “Oh, what this meant to me, seeing my idea come into the world [...] here, finally, was a thing of my own making – the invention of a boy born for obliteration, for toil and for death. What vindication, to think I might leave this mark” (315-316). Wash’s desire to “leave his mark” reverses Titch’s comment that science had left its mark on Wash from earlier in the novel and can thus be read as an attempted act of reclaiming agency over his own life but also over his legacy. Whereas it appears at first that Wash takes on the project out of scientific curiosity and idealism alone, it later becomes clear that he is also yearning for public recognition. However, his hopes of receiving public recognition for his achievements are disappointed: His mentor G.M. Goff – a respected British marine biologist and book author – realizes Wash’s plans for the aquarium in London, but under his own name. This creates an identity crisis for Wash: “I had believed the project would be a testament to my contributions in the world, and that this, somehow, would mark my passage through it, confirm that my existence had been meaningful, and worthy” (380). This quote illustrates that Wash has begun to regard his scientific achievements as a fundamental part of his identity and that he ties his sense of self-worth to his ability to leave behind a legacy. When Wash’s girlfriend suggests that his success might nevertheless inspire other black people interested in science, he declines explaining that nobody will know his name or his ethnicity (306). Wash’s frustration with the lack of public recognition is echoed in real-world history where – for example – in the antebellum United States enslaved inventors could not file patent applications; this was the case for enslaved African American inventor Benjamin Thornton Montgomery who tried (without success) to have his boat propeller patented in the 1850s (Ingham/Feldman 38).

Wash, who had once believed in “science as the great equalizer” (297) has become disillusioned. Although his premise that “[n]o matter one’s race, or sex, or faith – there were facts in the world waiting to be discovered” (297) still applies, he realizes that a marginalized scientist discovering these facts does not automatically mean that he would actually receive credit and public acknowledgement for his discovery. Thus, Wash’s scientific practice that has previously felt personally empowering for him hits its limit when confronted with a white supremacist society in which white European (in this case, British) scientists exploit the work of their marginalized colleagues under the guise of supporting them. This becomes

particularly problematic for Wash since he has apparently internalized tying his sense of self-worth to his scientific achievements, as Davies points out: “Washington buys into this idea that his humanity—tautologically synonymous with freedom—might be attained through artistic and scientific achievement” (Davies 14). This inner conflict between Wash’s yearning to continue working as a scientist and deriving his self-esteem from his accomplishments despite the lack of public recognition remains unsolved though Wash realizes that he needs to find a way of coping with it: “I understood only that I would have to find a way to make peace with the loss, or I would have to leave the whole enterprise behind and everyone connected with it” (385). Facing these two alternatives – either continuing his scientific practice while accepting that he will not receive credit for his achievements or giving up this (fundamental) part of his identity, Wash eventually seeks out his earlier mentor Titch towards the ending of the novel.

c. Uncertain Endings

The conclusion of *Washington Black* resembles the uncertain ending that is typical for Afrodiasporic novels with a black technoscientific genius protagonist: after finally reuniting with Titch in Morocco, Wash walks into a sandstorm. This nebulous turn of events can be read in different, partially contradictory ways. Whereas Davies puts Wash’s walking towards “the rising sun and the beginning of a new day” into dialogue with Frantz Fanon’s prompt to “reach for light [...], determined, enlightened and resolute” thus suggesting that Wash is heading towards a bright future (22-23), Wash’s departure also shows parallels to Titch’s walking into a snowstorm in the Arctic with the intention to commit suicide (though he is eventually unsuccessful in this particular endeavor). This reading of Wash’s exit as suicide attempt can be substantiated by looking at Wash’s final dialogue with Titch. Wash asks Titch, how far they are from Dahomey which reminds the readers of the second chapter of the novel in which Big Kit (later revealed to be Wash’s biological mother) remembers her time as royal guard at Dahomey prior to her enslavement (7). After Erasmus Wilde’s arrival, Big Kit initially plans to kill herself and Wash because of the degrading living conditions on Faith plantation and promises Wash that they would be reborn in her homeland Dahomey. Thus, Wash’s question

concerning Dahomey can be interpreted in two ways: either as a suicide attempt or as Wash trying to reconnect with his mother's homeland.

This brings us back to the two choices that Wash faces – either remaining an unknown scientist whose work is exploited by more powerful men or giving up on science altogether. Wash's final act of walking into the sandstorm resists unambiguous readings and remains open to multiple interpretations. First, in line with Davies' suggestion of Wash walking towards a bright future, the sandstorm might symbolize the harsh conditions that Wash faces in the (British) scientific community. His venturing out into such a hostile environment might signify Wash's determination to make a name for himself as a scientist despite external resistance. Second, however, it would be just as plausible to read Wash's walking into the sandstorm as an attempt to cover up his tracks (as Titch did after disappearing in the Arctic) and start a completely new life on the African continent, potentially even making his way to Dahomey thereby abandoning his scientific ambitions in favor of (re)connecting with his ancestral bonds which is the stance that Šlapkauskaitė takes in her article (Šlapkauskaitė 491). Third, analogous to Titch's suicide attempt in the Arctic, one might consider whether Wash is actually trying to kill himself in the sandstorm. Just like Titch was greatly disappointed by his father who hid away in the Arctic with his romantic partner letting his family believe that he was dead, Wash has – just moments before – experienced a similar disappointment in his father figure Titch. Contrary to Wash's hopes, he “had lain easily on his [i.e. Titch's] conscience” (416), another parallel to Titch's relationship to his father that is represented as rather one-sided with Titch yearning for his father who would rather be left alone and does not seem to feel guilty for abandoning his family. Wash feels as though no progress has been made since their years on Faith plantation and anticipates that Titch will also leave his new boyish companion. The combined burden of Wash's realization that he has not played a special role in Titch's life and his understanding that he cannot hope to be publicly recognized as a scientist might have been too much to cope with for Wash, hence his eventual suicide attempt.

The novel leaves it entirely open which of those three options is the most plausible. Thus, the central dilemma of Wash's inner struggle of feeling empowered by his scientific practice and him being subjected to exploitation because of his skills remains unresolved. This refusal provides closure through a more

unambiguous ending can be read as a comment on the unknowability and/or erasure of the historic life stories of Afrodiasporic people in general and black scientists in particular while also provoking readers to continue thinking about the novel's protagonist and challenging them to imagine possible futures for him.

d. Unresolved Tensions

In *Washington Black*, scientific practice plays a key role in protagonist Wash's life: this starts when Titch Wilde first introduces young Wash to his scientific activities and involves him in his experiments. Through his support, Wash is able to acquire a basic education and to develop his talent in scientific illustration. Through his personal relationship to Titch and his experimental hot air balloon, Wash eventually manages to escape from Faith plantation. While this mode of transportation connects *Washington Black* to 19th century adventure fiction, the novel reverses the colonial gaze inherent in this genre by employing Wash as its only focalizer. Once he is free, Wash continues to improve his skills in scientific illustration and starts to become an expert in marine zoology, perceiving these activities as personally empowering. However, Wash's talents (in combination with his racialization as black) also make him vulnerable to exploitation by white (British) scientists who benefit from Wash's work without crediting him, much to Wash's frustration. The novel does not solve this tension between the empowering qualities that scientific practice develops for the protagonist and the potentially exploitative working conditions that he faces because of his racialized identity: the open ending affirms this impression and can be read as relegating this task to the readers, encouraging them to question in how far exclusionary structures still persist within their own societies in general and scientific communities in particular.

3. Conclusion: Interventions in the History of Science

An Unkindness of Ghosts and *Washington Black* engage with the trope of the black technoscientific genius of earlier Afrofuturist fiction. Whereas both novels emphasize the emancipatory potential of scientific knowledge without omitting the obstacles that a white supremacist society poses to black (aspiring) scientists, *An Unkindness of Ghosts* highlights how the black technoscientific genius can transform their whole community, while *Washington Black* is more interested in its

protagonist's individual journey and remains ultimately slightly more pessimistic about the revolutionary potential of the black technoscientific genius. I suggest seeing both novels as complementary in both setting and focus. Whereas *Washington Black* works to reinscribe the accomplishments of 19th century black scientists into the history of science and to disrupt its common privileging of white (and through the character of Tanna, also male) scientists, *An Unkindness of Ghosts* uses its future setting to warn against the resurgence of racialized enslavement, but also emphasizes how scientific knowledge can empower black people to the point of eventually even changing the direction in which society is developing (illustrated through Aster's rerouting of the spaceship).

This differing emphasis on individual versus collective developments is also reflected in the narrative structure of both novels: while *Washington Black* is told entirely from the perspective of the protagonist, *An Unkindness of Ghosts* employs different characters as focalizers. *Washington Black's* focus on its eponymous protagonist strengthens the novel's attempt to rewrite and reclaim a place for black scientists within the history of science, combining the genres of (neo-)slave narrative, scientist biography and adventure fiction (a genre in which representations of science/ scientists have a longstanding tradition). The novel further employs shifts in focalization between adult Wash and his younger self to illustrate both the protagonist's personal development and the ways in which his experience of enslavement continues to influence his future life. Although *An Unkindness of Ghosts* centers its scientist character Aster and her scientific, medical and technological achievements, it later shifts the focus towards the importance of communities to affect lasting social change, thereby both including the celebratory approach towards the empowering potential of scientific practice that is typical for hard science fiction and engaging with questions of how to use those technologies to affect positive social change which is a recurrent motif in soft science fiction.

Another difference is the emphasis on diversity in *An Unkindness of Ghosts*. Although *Washington Black* features homosexual minor characters (Titch's father and his romantic partner), protagonist Wash is a heterosexual, cis man who – though not technically disabled – experiences social exclusion and stigmatization because of his facial burn scars. Although *Washington Black* later introduces a young female scientist through Wash's fiancée Tanna who is struggling with societal expectations because of her gender, Wash's story as a male black heterosexual scientist is

paramount throughout the whole novel, similarly to representations of black technoscientific genius characters in late 19th and early 20th century Afrofuturist fiction. *An Unkindness of Ghosts*, however, has a more diverse cast of characters: protagonist Aster is a neuroatypical, lesbian woman who has chosen to receive a hysterectomy and double mastectomy. Further non-heteronormative characters include Theo – a neuroatypical, lesbian, closeted trans woman – as well as Giselle – a neuroatypical, queer, cis woman – and Melusine – an asexual cis woman. Thus, *An Unkindness of Ghosts* imagination of the future centers non-heteronormative characters and its characterization of Aster as queer and neuroatypical expands the black technoscientific genius trope to make it more inclusive.

Both novels illustrate ongoing relevance and revolutionary potential of black technoscientific genius characters. In spite of its ultimate ambiguity surrounding its protagonist's scientific practice, *Washington Black* celebrates Wash's accomplishments and represents his activities as impactful. *An Unkindness of Ghosts* turns its black technoscientific genius character into the catalyst of a revolution that seeks to unsettle white supremacist heteropatriarchal elites. Read side by side, the two novels create a counter-past-future-present: *Washington Black*'s acknowledgement of the achievements of past black scientists together with *An Unkindness of Ghosts*'s black scientist who manages to resist against white supremacist space plantocracy create a perceived continuity of black scientific practice and thereby might work to normalize not only the existence of black scientists, but also the public recognition of their work. Whereas this chapter has explored the empowering potential that scientific practice may contain for marginalized characters, the following chapter will dive deeper into how science can be employed to create and maintain racialized hierarchies and how certain scientist characters subvert this pattern and work to destabilize said hierarchies through their own activism.

5. (Com)Modified Bodies in Tenea D. Johnson's *R/Evolution* (2011) and Stephanie Saulter's *Gemsigns* (2013)

1. Biopolitical Reparations Activism in Tenea D. Johnson's *R/Evolution* (2011)

This chapter focuses on the representation of reparations activism in African American author Tenea D. Johnson's 2011 novel *R/Evolution*. Apart from both non-violent and militant reparations activists, *R/Evolution* features instances of biopolitical activism through genetic engineering. I argue that the concept of "genetic reparations" that the novel introduces through the character of Dr Ezekiel Carter draws attention to continuities of antiblack violence, such as structural discrimination in the healthcare and housing sector, while simultaneously conveying a sense of hope that those can be offset through technological progress and solidarity.

My first subchapter will engage with the worldbuilding of the novel: Set in the near-future United States, the novel imagines a world severely divided along racialized lines, with the main conflict concerning the question of reparations for slavery. While non-violent protest prevails in the early years of the conflict, later militant activists on both sides fight against each other leading to a civil war that is eventually lost by the proponents for reparations. In this chapter, I will particularly focus on the militant pro-reparations group *New Dawn* who abducts the children of senators and subjects them to a reversed Middle Passage reconstructing the living conditions on a slave ship and taking the hostages from the United States to Ghana. Putting the novel's representation of the Middle Passage in conversation with depictions of the Middle Passage in other neo-slave narratives will reveal in how far the novel employs instances shifting points of view to inspire readers to think about the Middle Passage in new ways.

The second subchapter will focus on African American protagonist Dr. Ezekiel Carter and his development throughout the novel. Raised by his paternal grandmother in rural Kentucky after the death of his mother and abandonment of his father, Carter learns about the lives of his enslaved ancestors through his grandmother's stories. As a highly intelligent young man, Carter is able to gain a scholarship to go to university where he is first confronted with the privileged

lifestyles of his (predominantly wealthy white) fellow students. Later, as a recent graduate of medicine, Carter witnesses and is complicit in pharmaceutical companies' exploitative practices of using poor black patients as resources for their research which this chapter will connect real-world histories of the exploitation of African Americans and conceptualize as "clinical labor" following Melinda Cooper and Catherine Waldby.

A third subchapter will be dedicated to Dr. Carter's biopolitical reparations activism: Inspired by a story of his ancestor and an elderly circus performer, Dr. Carter creates genetically enhanced African Americans by using DNA samples from an ancient slave graveyard. In this chapter, I will examine Dr. Carter's actions from a perspective that includes concepts such as Saidiya Hartman's *Afterlife of Slavery*, Maria Root's *Insidious Trauma* and Paul Gilroy's notion of the *Slave Sublime* to evaluate and contextualize Dr. Carter's actions.

a. Re-telling Histories of Enslavement in *R/Evolution*

The plot of *R/Evolution* begins in early 2020s Kentucky when a twelve-year old Ezekiel Carter is listening to his paternal grandmother as she tells him the story of how his family got their family name: After a failed rebellion on a plantation, their enslaved ancestor was made a gravedigger and called Carter because he operated the death cart. Ezekiel is raised by his grandmother, because his mother has died of cancer and his father has left the family. Throughout this first chapter (which is told by an extradiegetic heterodiegetic narrator who employs Ezekiel as an internal focalizer) the discourse on reparations for slavery is already present as Carter's grandmother is watching a protest march for reparations on television. Connections between African American enslavement and the living conditions of (diegetic) present day black people are made explicit by the first sentence of the novel: "A lot of Black folks are walking around with their owner's last name" (7). Whether this is a comment by the narrator or a thought of focalizer Ezekiel is left open. Although the statement is quickly qualified in the following sentence ("Or rather their ancestor's owner"), it already anticipates the novel's subsequent focus on what Saidiya Hartman calls the "afterlife of slavery". While the plot of the novel spans about a hundred years and includes multiple spatial settings both within and outside of the United States and a diverse range of focalizers, the overarching theme

of the novel is anti-black violence (and resistance against it) which is addressed in every chapter, often in connection with transatlantic enslavement.

While the first chapter does not deviate too much from the real-world reality of the 2020s (probably because the living conditions of impoverished African Americans in rural Kentucky do not differ much from earlier years), the subsequent chapter incorporates representations of significant social and technological changes: After moving to a new town to go to university, fifteen-year-old Ezekiel notices body modifications on other people such as “built-in drives, umbi ports, preternaturally handsome babies, and the occasional bold Adapts of the very wealthy: impossible heights and proportion, cranial boosters and things he didn’t yet know the name for” (12). Whereas wealthy people in Ezekiel’s hometown of Erlanger still relied on traditional status symbols such as expensive cars or designer clothes, Ezekiel’s fellow students at the university express their social status through physical enhancements. Those modifications are not limited to human bodies, but affect also the environment, as Ezekiel’s genetics professor explains: “Even the ravages of global warming have been contained to unfortunate locales where technology has not yet made nature obsolete” (13). The professor’s words are indicative of a worldview which subscribes to a strict technology/nature duality and that simply describes to those who lack access to these technologies as “unfortunate” without even pretending to care about helping them. This attitude reflects a severe social divide in American society that is not only due to social stratification, but also racialized as later chapters further elaborate.

It is in this social environment that the public discourse on reparations for slavery takes place: during Ezekiel’s years at the university, there are two opposing factions: white supremacists who call themselves Knights and invoke “their Klan [i.e. the Ku Klux Klan] forefathers” in their opposition to reparations and the non-violent Rep War protestors who are derisively called “Handouts”, because their main action is to hand out leaflets to inform the public about their aims (14). However, there are also militant groups among the proponents for reparations. One of them is called *New Dawn*:

“Of all the groups demanding reparations for slavery, none was more feared than New Dawn. They didn’t want educational vouchers or free medical care like the other groups, they wanted everything – land redistribution, financial compensation, and stock in every conglom that had benefited from slavery. And even by 2024, that was all of the conglomerations” (19).

This quote illustrates how the proponents for reparations focus their activism on combatting structural racism, with a particular emphasis on education and healthcare, whereas more radical groups such as *New Dawn* draw attention to how the wealth of modern-day conglomerations is based on their past involvement in the transatlantic trade with enslaved Africans.

The novel introduces the readers to *New Dawn* and their methods through the character of Kristen Burke, the twenty-two-year-old daughter of a New York senator, who is abducted by *New Dawn* alongside eight other (young adult) daughters and sons of American senators. While most of the chapter that narrates this abduction is focalized by Burke, there are also a few shifts to the perspectives of *New Dawn* crewmates that provide the readers with additional information. One of them is *New Dawn* leader Captain Philip Taylor who serves as temporary internal focalizer. In conversation with his crewmates, Captain Taylor explains that he is “trying to find a balance between highlighting their [i.e. the abductees’] advantages and introducing them to the Middle Passage’s suffering, so that they could in turn introduce the white world” (23). That is his reasoning for forcibly transporting the abductees across the Atlantic Ocean from the United States to Ghana, where he and his crewmates intend to start new lives after releasing their hostages. Analogous to my previous chapters on alternate history neo-slave narratives, it needs to be highlighted how problematic this use of white people as stand-in for historical black people is, as suggests that white people are unable empathize with black people and thus require another white person to identify with. While *Lion’s Blood* circumvents this problem by relegating the role of the enslaved to an Irish (and thereby also historically marginalized) character and *Blonde Roots* uses humor and irony to avoid oversimplified readings, *R/Evolution* problematizes *New Dawn*’s decision to abduct white young people by outlining the shortcomings of Captain Taylor’s plan. *New Dawn*’s reliance on privileged young adults as tools to inspire empathy for historical black victims of transatlantic enslavement involuntarily perpetuates the racist hierarchies that it seeks to destroy as the act reaffirms that white victims of crimes receive far more public and media attention than any other racialized identity. This is also one of the reasons why Taylor’s plan eventually fails, as the public perception of the act is that of black criminals abducting innocent white adolescents and people in their twenties. Although American mainstream society

feels sympathy for the hostages, the simultaneous vilification of the black perpetrators prevents them from following up with histories of transatlantic enslavement and reinforces anti-black sentiments.

The similarities between real-world historical victims of abduction and transportation across the Atlantic and the senators' daughters and sons are limited to them being abducted, branded, kept in cages (which are slightly larger than their historical counterparts) before they are forced onto a ship where they are chained and kept in the cargo bay. However, the living conditions of the hostages (called "Examples" by Captain Tailor who considers the whole operation to be "one of the most ambitious experiments in the Rep War campaign") are much better than those of actual historical Middle Passage survivors (23). They do not experience what Orlando Patterson has conceptualized as "Social Death": they are not confronted with "natal alienation, general dishonor, and gratuitous violence", because of their status as offspring of (white) people who are in a position of power (Wilderson 2010: 17). As the abductees not only know exactly who their parents are, but also will be returned to them in the end, they do not experience natal alienation. When criticized by his crewmate Shireen who regards the treatment of the hostages as too harsh, Captain Tailor responds by explaining: "They get to go free at the end [...] Their children will be free. Their minds will be free. They won't work a single day. Mark my words: No one will ever deny them their due" (28). Captain Tailor has set up certain "moral prerogatives" for his experiment: "no rape, no dying, limited physical abuse" (23). Thus, the abductees also face neither general dishonor nor gratuitous violence. Although the hostages do not experience Social Death, the parts focalized by Burke show that they do not know about Tailor's rules which causes them to fear that they will eventually be raped, maimed and killed which severely traumatizes them.

To ensure the hostages' health, the crew provides them with medical treatment. Although the abductees are not fed much, the food that they are given has vitamins and protein powder added to it. The hostages do not only speak the same language, but also already know each other, because they all belong to the same (privileged) social circles. Their lives are the opposite of expendable, as the success of *New Dawn's* mission is dependent on the hostages' survival. An important part of Tailor's plan is the creation of videos in which the abductees express their gratitude for being treated better than historical Middle Passage

victims. Tailor's act of letting the hostages speak for themselves recalls autobiographical accounts of historical Middle Passage survivors – which exist in several 18th and 19th century slave narratives (e.g. the *Narrative of Olaudah Equiano* or the *Histories of Zangara and Maquama*) – that managed to reach a large audience (Gould 21). The broadcast of the abductees' testimonies emulates the format of reality TV shows such as *Big Brother*, *Survivor* or *I'm a Celebrity...Get Me Out of Here!* (which regularly feature short one-on-one interviews where the participants get the opportunity to share their thoughts in order to encourage the audience to sympathize with them) with the important difference that the abductees do not participate voluntarily. This emulation of an established genre is comparable to 18th and 19th century slave narratives which included elements of other literary genres such as travel writing, spiritual autobiography or sentimental literature. *New Dawn's* appeal to their viewers' voyeurism and interest in the victims' suffering also mirrors how 18th and 19th century “abolitionist readers and publishers [of slave narratives] desired – indeed required – [...] detailed evidence” of the abuse of the enslaved (Gould 19). This re-enactment of the Middle Passage as a spectacle for the consumption of a (white) American audience can be read as a cynical comment on consumerism: In order to reach their target audience, *New Dawn's* actions need to adapt to American television viewers' expectations.

Tailor's experiment seems to have been successful with focalizer Kristen Burke who develops from a woman who “[a]ll her life, [...] flipped past the Black History Month specials, those horrible images somebody should have forgotten by now” (22), to someone who empathizes with the historical Middle Passage victims and cooperates with Captain Tailor having “[l]earned his brutal lesson” (29). However, within the entire storyline of the novel, the abduction of the senators' daughters and sons heralds a new more violent era in the fight for reparations as this act is met with disapproval by the general public. Burke herself is severely traumatized after her abduction and leads a seclusive life as an artist on the Seychelles after her release; the fact that she is able to do so emphasizes the privileges that she has as the daughter of a very wealthy family. *New Dawn's* action leads to an increase in racist hate crimes against African Americans and new white supremacist hate groups form, including one that names itself “Kristen Burke Society” after Burke whose video testimony had inspired widespread outrage. When Burke herself returns to the US and learns about that organization, she

publicly disavows them. The increasing social tensions eventually culminate in a civil war which is lost by the reparation proponents. Lill, another African American character who would be the first woman to give birth to a baby that was genetically modified by Dr. Carter, comments on the postwar living conditions of African Americans: “The old folks said it was like time had stopped and went backwards to match people’s minds” (51). This comment illustrates how the novel represents the lack of progress made regarding the fight against both structural and individual racism as if black people are caught in a time loop that keeps reverting to the dehumanizing living standards that have shaped African American history. It is against this background that Dr Carter develops his specific gene therapy in an attempt to compensate for racist discrimination and anti-black violence.

b. Biological Labor and Resistance against Racist Oppression

While studying at his university’s medical school, eighteen-year-old Dr. Ezekiel Carter works as an intern at a healthcare facility in North Birmingham, Alabama. During his internship, he witnesses how the operating company of the clinic exploits their impoverished African American patients. Internal focalizer Dr. Carter observes that many of the patients suffer from cancer because of the toxic waste landfill that was established nearby which he knows to be no isolated incidence: “The prevalence of cancer in the Black population had risen at nearly the same rate as the number of landfills and polluting industries that propped up in poor Black neighborhoods across the country” (33). This observation echoes real-world corporate practices which – as studies have shown – often choose minority and/or low-income neighborhoods as sites for hazardous waste facilities (Mohai/Saha). Thus, the novel extrapolates existing trends and transposes them into the future.

The doctors at the healthcare facility where Dr. Carter is working are only treating those patients who are willing to provide DNA and tissue samples in exchange for the treatment. Dr. Carter is acutely aware of how the operator of the clinic profits from their patients: “the information Grey Corp gleaned from their [i.e. the impoverished African American patients’] genetic material would help prevent the same and different cancers in their richer neighborhoods and in other privileged people all over the country” (34). These practices are both reminiscent of historical cases of doctors profiting from their African American patients without

compensating them, such as the case of Henrietta Lacks⁴⁴ and also bring to mind modern-day practices of impoverished people selling their blood or gametes or being paid for participating in clinical trials. Melinda Cooper and Catherine Waldby's concept of clinical labor can be helpful when investigating these issues. Analyzing two speculative fiction novels by Anglo-American authors, Sherryl Vint connects representations of characters selling their own blood, tissue or gametes to Cooper and Waldby's clinical labor (399). According to Vint, Cooper and Waldby

insist on considering such practices [i.e. surrogate pregnancies, sales of gametes or participation in clinical trials] as biological labour — not voluntary work or donation of biological materials or services — because often such activities constitute the only form of income for certain vulnerable populations, even if this is income in-kind (such as the provision of shelter or access to healthcare) (399).

Vint explains that “[t]hese clinical practices exemplify new and troubling ways to extract surplus value from people who thus come to the market less as a source of labor-power and more as mere biological ‘raw materials’ for the ongoing production of value” (399). Transferring Vint's insights to *R/Evolution* her conclusion that “the sociotechnical imaginary we establish for thinking about synthetic life, clinical labor, and commodified biology now will set the terms for what we shall collectively imagine as desirable futures as this science progresses — and indeed for who is part of this collective we” (411) is just as valid for this novel. In contrast to the (Anglo-American) novels Vint examines, *R/Evolution* sets an even stronger focus on the ways in which future social inequalities will be entangled with anti-blackness. The representation of the exploitation of impoverished African Americans for clinical labor in the novel can thus be seen both as referring to histories of non-consensual experimentation on African Americans as well as criticizing contemporary structural racism in the healthcare sector and as a warning against a future in which clinical labor is predominantly performed by black people. Through its black protagonist Dr. Carter who reclaims the tools of genetic engineering for his own purposes, the novel imagines new ways of resistance against both white supremacy and the capitalist exploitation of impoverished people of color.

⁴⁴ Henrietta Lacks was an African American woman who died of cervical cancer in 1951. After her death, cells taken from her body were used for research purposes without the consent of Lacks or her family. For more information on Lacks and other cases of non-consensual experimentation on African Americans, see Washington.

c. Genetic Reparations

At first, Dr. Carter is complicit in the exploitative system of the Alabama healthcare facility in which he gets his first job as a doctor. However, this changes when he meets an elderly African American circus artist. Seeing the sixty-eight-year-old Lady Jay perform a motorcycle stunt in which she jumps from one ramp to another inspires Dr. Carter: “Watching her, Ezekiel realized what more he could do. With his genetic genius, he could lift those left behind and propel them over the breach” (42). By casting Lady Jay in the role of Dr. Carter’s muse, *R/Evolution* reflects on the potential of artistic performances for racialized uplift. In the novel, it is the ability of Lady Jay’s stunt to create a sense of wonder in the audience that changes Dr. Carter’s outlook on life. A few years later, Dr. Carter has succeeded and the first baby with what he calls “genetic reparations” is born (43). The term “reparations” already indicates the political dimension of Dr. Carter’s project: the genetic modifications are supposed to compensate the African American community for centuries of racist oppression. Dr. Carter is thus intervening in the logics of biocapitalism that regard wealthy (Anglo-)Americans as potential consumers for all sorts of physical enhancements and impoverished black people merely as resources providing raw data that can be monetized by pharmaceutical and bioengineering companies. While Carter feels that he had “made something right” and is convinced that his creation of an African American baby with exceptional health can lead to social change, his methods are rejected by others, including many African American churches (44). This public controversy surrounding Dr. Carter’s methods eventually leads to a social stigmatization of the so-called “Carter Kids” and even results in fatal attacks against them (50/53).

A later chapter features a letter of Dr. Carter to his stepson in which he explains his motivations. The letter is working as a hypodiegetic narrative with an explicative function as it outlines Dr. Carter’s process of inventing and implementing his genetic reparations. Through the letter, the readers learn that – financed by a reclusive Jamaican billionaire – Dr. Carter has combined DNA obtained from an African burial ground with the DNA of modern-day African Americans. The idea that there is something inherently special about the DNA of (formerly) enslaved Africans ties in with Paul Gilroy’s notion of the Slave Sublime

(though it should be noted that Gilroy does not argue that enslavement has changed the DNA of Afrodiasporic people): According to Gilroy, the experience of transatlantic enslavement caused black people to become “the first truly modern people, handling in the nineteenth century dilemmas and difficulties which would only become the substance of everyday life in Europe a century later” (Gilroy 221). He continues to argue that Afrodiasporic people have acquired a “capacity [...] to redeem and transform the modern world through the truth and clarity of perception that emerge from their pain” (Gilroy 216). He calls this “special redemptive power produced through suffering” the Slave Sublime (Gilroy 216). What Dr. Carter’s work shares with the notion of the Slave Sublime is the exaltation of the legacy of the enslaved, a try to attribute meaning to their suffering. Apart from engaging with the Slave Sublime, Dr. Carter’s action also echoes his enslaved ancestor’s story: whereas his ancestor buried the corpses of enslaved rebels thus restoring their dignity in death, Dr. Carter does the opposite (that is, disinterring the bodily remains of enslaved people) in order to restore dignity to the living. This can also be read as a chronopolitical intervention, since due to Dr. Carter’s gene therapy, the DNA of his (and other African Americans’) enslaved ancestors is transported into the diegetic future of the novel thereby creating a continuity between enslaved past and troubled, but increasingly free future.

While Dr. Carter at first only creates babies with increased health, he later goes a step further: when Dr. Carter is approached by a desperate African American woman, Thelma Woods, seeking protection for her community from the frequent attacks by white supremacist terrorists, he initially rejects her request, but then changes his mind influenced by his grief for his recently murdered wife. Eventually, he helps Ms. Woods to get pregnant with triplets. In later chapters, the readers learn that Jesse, William and Raynard have been modified with super-soldier like abilities. Even as children, they manage to protect their mother and their community in Mound Bayou, Mississippi. The setting of the Woods’ family story in Mound Bayou is insofar significant as the real-world counterpart of this city was founded by two formerly enslaved men as an all-black community in 1887 and stands a testament to the accomplishments of formerly enslaved people. The fictionalized future version of Mound Bayou is still mostly inhabited by black people, but under frequent attack from racist hate groups. However, as the three boys grow up, they realize that their capacity to bring about long-lasting social change is limited by the

constraints of an increasingly violent white supremacist society. Towards the end of the novel, William returns from a business trip only to find Mound Bayou destroyed and all inhabitants (including his family) murdered. At this point in the novel, it seems as though Dr. Carter's plan has failed: in spite of their superior abilities, the genetically modified people are defeated by the vast number of murderous racist terrorists. The individual actions of a few selected people cannot affect American mainstream society that has been influenced by anti-black ideologies for centuries.

After a period of grieving, William continues with his life and – when he realizes that he is about to die – he chooses to send samples of his DNA to non-commercial laboratories that “serve only at-risk people in financial need” (112) in the hope that they can use the knowledge gained from his DNA to help marginalized people. Although Dr. Carter's plan to improve the lives of his fellow African Americans in the long term has eventually failed, the ending of the novel still conveys a sense of hope. William is optimistic that his donation of DNA will make a difference: “From what I've seen the world is about to change more than any of us can anticipate. And after all these years, I've learned that hope is the one thing I won't do without any longer. But I want hope for us all. Here is where we begin” (112). This is the final sentence of the novel which evokes a sense of continuation beyond the ending of the novel: William's death and his subsequent donation of DNA might be read as prompting the readers to stand up for more social justice. This assumption is supported by the title of the final chapter “An open letter to your readership” and by its setup as an actual letter written by the character of William. In his letter, William addresses the readers directly using second person pronouns (“You should know this” etc.) as well as creating a sense of community between himself and the readers by using first person plural pronouns to refer to both himself and the reader (“We still have choices” etc.) (110). Thus, the ending of the novel invites its readers to imagine themselves in the United States of the 22nd century and to ponder questions of access to healthcare, the relevance of genetic predisposition and how to reduce social inequality.

d. Evaluating Biopolitical Activism

This chapter has shown how *R/Evolution* uses its near-future setting to raise awareness for structural racism and how it harms African Americans. Through the black technoscientific genius protagonist Dr. Ezekiel Carter, the novel negotiates whether genetic modifications for human enhancement can work to destabilize racialized hierarchies, without providing a clear answer to that question. Although Dr. Carter manages to help individual families, his hope that this will lead to long-term structural change is eventually disappointed. The temporal disruptions on the plot level that appear throughout the novel (for instance in the form of a re-emergence of the violent oppression of African American citizens, through Dr. Carter's use of enslaved Africans' DNA for his genetic reparations as well as through *New Dawn*'s re-enactment of the Middle Passage) emphasize the century-long influence that racist ideologies have had on American society. Those chronopolitical interventions serve to connect contemporary forms of anti-black violence to histories of racialized enslavement, thus revealing those injustices to be what Saidiya Hartman calls the afterlife of slavery. The strong opposition that Dr. Carter's biopolitical reparations activism attracted might be seen as an indicator for its transformative potential. Although this potential is not fully realized throughout the plot of the novel, the ending of *R/Evolution* hints at how this might change in the future (beyond the plot of the novel) and involves the readers in these considerations by having a genetically modified character addressing them directly and inviting them to stand up for more social justice.

2. Exploring Racialization as Technology for Oppression in Stephanie Saulter's *Gemsigns* (2013)

In Jamaican author Stephanie Saulter's 2013 debut novel *Gemsigns*, a global pandemic known as "the Syndrome" has wiped out most of humanity; to cope with the sudden loss of the majority of the human work force, bioengineering companies have modified human genes to create genetically altered workers. Those workers, known as "gems" (as opposed to "norms", i.e. non-modified humans) have been supplied with highly specialized skills needed for their various jobs, e.g.

gems with hyper-developed senses of smell and taste for toxic waste detection, gems with the strength, lung capacity and altitude tolerance for

mountaintop mining, gems who could breathe underwater, gems with paranormal speed and dexterity for the new consumer product assembly lines, gems whose bodies synthesised drugs or grew organs and tissue for transplant (49).

In order to make gems visually distinguishable from norms, all of them are engineered with “brightly coloured, phosphorescent hair” which is known as their “gemsign” (49). This focus on visually distinctive physical features as a marker of racialized identification echoes real-world issues of assigning certain shades of skin color and/or certain hair colors and hair structures to racialized classifications. For more than a hundred years, gems have been considered to be the property of the company that created them, but as those products of bioengineering companies have become more and more advanced in their cognitive skills, calls for their emancipation arose (52). The fact that the mainstream population only joined the abolitionist movement after they were able to identify with the enslaved gems because of their advanced cognitive skills is problematized in the novel: bioengineering companies deliberately designed some types of workers such as surrogate mothers with intellectual disabilities to make them easier to manage. This ties in with Alys Eve Weinbaum’s

argument [...] that in all situations in which human biological life is commodified, processes of commodification must be understood as subtended by the long history of slave breeding as it was practiced in the Americas and Caribbean. When human biological life itself is commodified, reproductive labor is invariably conceptualized as a gendered process that can be undervalued and thus hyperexploited” (Weinbaum 2019: 8).

As it was often the case with enslaved mothers in 17th to mid-19th century North America, the gem surrogates are separated from their babies within six months after giving birth. While the baby gems are transported to other facilities where they are raised, their mothers are prepared for their next pregnancy, so that a gem surrogate mother would give birth to about fifteen babies during her working life. *Gemsigns* portrays those gems with cognitive impairments (surrogate mothers and other workers) as valued members of the gem community who are capable of experiencing complex emotions without having the ability to verbally express those thoughts and feelings which is a source of suffering for them.

The plot of *Gemsigns* starts about one year after the abolition of gem enslavement, right before the European Conference on the Status of Genetically

Modified Humans in London, United Kingdom. The aim of this conference is to develop legal guidelines for the future treatment of gems. The readers join anthropologist Dr Eli Walker who has been tasked with the creation of a report on the presumed humanness of gems. On his research trip, he is confronted with lobbyists of the bioengineering industry as well as representatives of the gem community who try to influence him in their favour. Arising conflicts between gems and norms in competition over scarce jobs and around the status of romantic relationships between gems and norms provide the backdrop to the main plot of Dr Walker's research. In London, gems have been ghettoized in a dingy quarter called the Squats; meanwhile norms have formed religiously motivated hate groups who attack and murder gems. Although a lot of the similarities between diegetic gems and extradiegetic histories of enslaved Africans and their Afrodiasporic descendants are implied in the novel, some of those parallels are also made explicit: the people (both norms and free gems) who helped escapee gems before abolition are described as "a new underground railroad" (273) evoking associations with the eponymous network of abolitionists in the 19th century United States of America that helped enslaved people to escape to Canada. The fact that the historical underground railroad serves as an inspiration for those sympathetic to the cause of gem emancipation reaffirms the legacy of the underground railroad as an example for civic resistance against state-sanctioned injustice and inequality.

Additionally, the novel mentions how

Gemtech (i.e. companies that produce gems) reports on errors, accidents and deaths were reviewed and found to be finely detailed with respect to the implications for bioengineering, but otherwise cursory. In the newly resurgent universities, students compared them to eighteenth-century insurance reports of Middle Passage losses, put their hands in their heads and wept (52).

Thus, *Gemsigns* highlights problematic connections between racialization and capitalism as the same companies who created this new "race" of anthropomorphous sentient beings are simultaneously those who profit most from the emerging racialized construct. Simultaneously, the passage also affirms the institution of the university as a space where ethic evaluations of public events can take place. The fact that it is the similarity to Middle Passage reports that shocks the students and inspires empathy for gems in them also reinforces the status of the transatlantic trade with enslaved people as a watershed moment within the history

of crimes against humanity. Nicola Hunte reads this as a “gesture to a preferred future based on an acknowledgment of a traumatic past,” since the novel’s “re-vision of that traumatic past occurs with the social response to these injustices, which, in the narrative, is widespread outrage and mourning” (Hunte 2019: 148). Building on Hunte, I suggest that *Gemsigns* also uses its preferred future in which abolitionist movements of the past continue to inspire neo-abolitionist tendencies to draw a connection between historical practices of oppression and their modern-day counterparts which might affect differently marginalized people, in order to highlight how they – just as their historical incarnations – are rooted in racist ideologies.

In this chapter, I argue that *Gemsigns* explores how racialization is employed as a technology for oppression while simultaneously offering ideas on how to counter those tendencies through science (Dr Eli Walker), religion (Reverend Tobias) and social activism (Aryel Morningstar, Gaela, Sally Trieve). The chapter is structured around these three themes and how their representation in the novel echoes African American and other Afrodiasporic post-emancipation histories.

a. Science Leading to the Commodification of Racialized Bodies

The novel shows science and technological progress to be both the root of a problem and its possible solution: as an embedded newspaper article explains the reasons for the gems’ creation, the readers learn that the “Syndrome” that has wiped out a large portion of humanity was in fact caused by the constant exposure of humans to computing and communication devices which generated “a greater cognitive load than human beings had evolved to process” (Saulter 45). While scientists failed to cure the Syndrome, their efforts towards the creation of humans immune to its effects resulted in extensive genetic engineering to ensure the survival of humanity. However, once they accomplished the creation of babies immune to the Syndrome, the bioengineers did not stop there. Encouraged by profit-oriented corporations that aimed to increase productivity in spite of the Syndrome-induced lack of workers, bioengineering companies started to develop customized genetically altered beings, at first only for the handling of menial work, later for more specialized tasks: as Nicola Hunte explains, the “economic crisis produced by the Syndrome justifies the familiar capitalist arrangement in which certain bodies

become commodities to be sourced, engineered and exploited” (Hunte 143). It is important to note that genetic engineering is not represented as inherently bad, it is its embeddedness in myriad social, cultural and economic systems of exploitation and oppression (cisheteropatriarchy, white supremacy, capitalism) that constitutes the main problem and leads to its abuse.

Through its setting in a post-abolition environment, the novel implies that the struggles for equality by formerly enslaved people do not end with abolition but continue afterwards in what Saidiya Hartman conceptualizes as the afterlife of slavery. Referring to the living conditions of African Americans, Hartman explains that “black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago” mentioning racist discrimination in (for example) the judicial system, the education and healthcare sector and on the labour and housing market (Hartman 2007: 6). The continuing presence of structural racism in the United States of America is well documented, particularly in the areas of law enforcement (Alexander), healthcare (Yearby) and education (Merolla/Jackson), whereas the topic is still understudied in the context of the United Kingdom where *Gemsigns* is set.

In *Gemsigns*, the enslavement of gems does not merely replace older forms of the economic exploitation of marginalized groups but is firmly rooted in real-world power structures. The novel does not limit itself to its main setting in London, but also takes a quick glance at the situation in other countries: “In Australia, it emerged that the genestock used for intense modification had, for close to a century, been almost exclusively aboriginal. The remaining norm aborigines rose up in fury, declaring the racism of past centuries far from dead” (273). Thus, *Gemsigns* addresses the exceptional vulnerability of marginalized people to be commodified by technological progress instead of profiting from it and in doing so echoes real-world histories of unethical experimentation on human beings, such as those outlined in Harriet A. Washington’s 2007 monograph *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present* and Warwick Anderson’s 2002 book *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health, and Racial Destiny in Australia*. To readers who are familiar with those histories of non-consensual experimentation of marginalized people, the unethical practices of bioengineering companies that *Gemsigns* describes appear to be a consequential continuation of earlier methods.

Apart from its representation of scientists as complicit in exploitative corporate practices, the humanities also have an important role to play in the framework of the novel as the central position of anthropologist Dr Walker shows whose expertise is valued so much by policy makers that his research report has a great influence on the future legal status of gems. Although Dr Walker might be considered the protagonist of the novel (due to the large number of chapters that are focalized by him and due to his powerful position as a political advisor), this status is slightly undermined at the beginning of the novel. *Gemsigns* starts with an extradiegetic, heterodiegetic narrator who directly addresses the readers and warns them to “beware illusions born of too still and centred a perspective” (5). In line with that statement, the focalization in the novel shifts between a multitude of different characters, including not only Dr Walker, but also various gems, employees of bioengineering companies, police officers and members of religious hate groups. The narrator is unsure about how to start their story and at first contemplates to begin with introducing Dr Walker, but then changes their mind and switches to the gem Gaela, before they eventually decide to narrate another gem girl’s escape from a bioengineering facility (the girl in question is later revealed to be Aryel Morningstar, a gem rights activist and the leader of the London gem community). I read the narrator’s privileging of Aryel’s perspective over Dr Walker’s as favouring marginalized people’s personal experiences over the information provided by scientific treatises, whereas the frequent shifts in focalization in the rest of the novel serve to address questions concerning the status of gems from a multitude of perspectives. After the first chapter (titled “0”), the narrator fades into the background and stops addressing the readers directly.

Right from the beginning of the novel, the cultural constructedness of the dividing line between gems and norms is immediately made obvious: both gems and norms are genetically modified (albeit with different purposes) and born by surrogate gem mothers. Whereas norms are engineered to be immune against the Syndrome and to be free “of deformity, disability or even the traditional variations in body size” (54), the abilities of gems are adapted to meet the demands of the labour market. *Gemsigns* explores the constructed gem/norm binary through Dr Walker’s research. While conducting interviews and evaluating the data made available to him by both bioengineering companies and gem rights activists, Dr Walker is approached by lobbyists of genetic engineering companies (represented

by Bel’Natur manager Zavcka Klist) who try to bribe him as well as by gem leader Aryel Morningstar who attempts to influence his opinion by presenting him with a picture of the gem community as made up of responsible and conscientious individuals. Knowing what is at stake for those affected by his report, Dr Walker is aware of those efforts to manipulate him and tries hard to stay neutral.

Upon completing his report, he concludes that

if we rely exclusively on genome analysis (as opposed to the historical circumstance of conception and birth) it becomes clear that this continuum [i.e. the continuum of incremental variation among gems] seamlessly merges those we classify as gems with those we think of as norms. There is no point of purely *genetic* variation that divides us. Crucially, there is also no evidence that the choices gems make, the ways in which they act and interact, are on the whole fundamentally different from what we would expect of norms under similar circumstances. Our study therefore concludes that, while genotype does influence the individual and social behaviour of gems, it does so to no greater a degree and in no significantly different a manner than for norms (227).

Dr Walker’s report echoes the real-world findings of UNESCO’s 1950 statement “The Race Question” which declared that “[a]ccording to present knowledge there is no proof that the groups of mankind differ in their innate mental characteristics, whether in respect of intelligence or temperament” (9). Thus, the novel puts Dr Walker’s work of disproving racialized prejudices against gems on the diegetic level into dialogue with extradiegetic efforts to refute scientific racism. In so doing, *Gemsigns* draws attention to the role of science and its potential to either justify and affirm racist prejudices or to dispel them.

In *Gemsigns*, Dr Walker’s conclusion that the gem/norm binary does not withstand scientific evaluation is further illustrated through the character of Gabriel, a five-year-old telepath living in the gem community. A subplot surrounds the question of Gabriel’s origin who is in the end revealed to be the child of norm parents who rejected him after discovering that he had mysteriously developed telepathy. Prior to the beginning of *Gemsigns*’ plot, Gabriel’s parents sold him to a bioengineering company that regarded him as a “most sensational prototype,” and subjected him to medical experimentation (277). After the abolition of gem enslavement, the company abandoned Gabriel and left him “on the doorstep of the Squats” where the gem Gaela found him, and eventually adopted him together with her romantic partner Bal (279). Whereas Gabriel’s telepathic abilities are rejected

as a disability in norm society, they are appreciated in gem society. According to Schalk, this pattern of a “quick transition from a potential disability to super ability is common in speculative fiction” (Schalk 2018: 60). This tension between dis/super ability is emphasized when – towards the ending of the novel – the gem community discovers the secret behind Gabriel’s unusual ability:

Gabriel carries a heritage sequence that used to be associated with a high risk of schizophrenia. Thanks to the surgery performed on the pre-embryonic cells of his great-great-grandparents, this is no longer the case. The junk code that might have made it difficult for him to distinguish his own consciousness from others’ has been stripped out, and the core sequence has been freed to express itself. His ability to perceive the thoughts of people around him is a naturally evolved trait, but it was the Syndrome-safety engineering of the past century that has enabled it to be expressed beyond infancy (279).

The association that the novel creates between schizophrenia and telepathy on the one hand, provides a somewhat logical explanation for Gabriel’s abilities, but on the other hand it also depathologizes schizophrenia by suggesting that those affected by it might be telepaths who are simply unable “to distinguish [their] own consciousness from others’”. In doing so, *Gemsigns* can be read as advocating for an attitude towards mental disorders that regards them as potentially empowering, rather than exclusively disabling.

Gabriel’s existence further complicates the binary opposition between gems and norms, combining gem-like abilities with a norm heritage. From a disability studies perspective, the character of Gabriel might be read as an example of a superpowered supercrip narrative, a concept developed by Sami Schalk with reference to “representation[s] of a character who has abilities or ‘powers’ that operate in direct relationship with or contrast to their disability” (Schalk 2016: 81). Schalk explains that “people and characters represented in this type of supercrip narrative in many ways exceed their own embodiment through their abilities, to the point where their status as disabled may be called into question” (Schalk 2016: 82). This is exactly what happens after Gabriel’s origins are revealed to the public: norm society which had previously rejected him because of his telepathy, now perceives the same extraordinary ability as miraculous and his story inspires public support for gem equality. Through this shift in public opinion, the novel illustrates the volatility of what is perceived as disability and what is not, which might inspire readers to rethink their own potentially ableist assumptions.

The plot surrounding Gabriel and his background takes up traditions of employing biracial characters in African American literature in order to “rhetorically transgress and contest a color line that attempted to police and secure racial identities” while simultaneously referencing the *tragic mulatta* trope (Zackodnik: xi). Teresa Zackodnik explains that “[w]hile the ‘tragic mulatta’ was the creation of white female abolitionists and functioned in post–Civil War American fiction as a sensationalized figure of ruined womanhood, African American women put the mulatta to diverse political use in antislavery oratory and in fiction from the late 1840s through the 1950s” (Zackodnik: xi). I suggest that *Gemsigns* engages with this tradition through the character of Gabriel, as Gabriel (analogous to the biracial female protagonist of the aforementioned trope) first passes⁴⁵ as a member of the dominant social group (in this case, as a member of the norm community, before his parents discover his unusual abilities) and is outcasted from this group after his true heritage is revealed (in this case, his telepathic abilities that position him closer to the gem than to the norm community). However, in contrast to the traditionally tragic ending of those stories about biracial women passing for white, Gabriel’s plot has a happy ending as he is taken in and accepted as one of their own by the gem community. Yet, a certain unease concerning Gabriel’s role in improving the perception of gems among norm society remains as the general norm public seems to require someone who resembles themselves in order to be able to develop empathy with the gems.

b. Religious Abolitionists and Fundamentalist Anti-Abolitionists

Whereas Dr Walker’s report manages to convince political decisionmakers, the general (norm) public remains sceptical and is much more influenced by the two religious groups present in the novel, the United Churches and the extremist hate groups called godgangs. Within the novel, transcripts of social media conversations function as an indicator of public opinion. The United Churches are a Christian group, represented by the priest Tobias. His church has advocated for the abolition of gem enslavement and after emancipation, Tobias and volunteers from his parish support the gem community in London through donations and volunteer work.

⁴⁵ Anxieties concerning gems “passing” for norms are addressed in *Gemsigns* mainly through Gabriel, as actual gems have great difficulties disguising their gemsign (their hair is designed to be resistant to hair dye).

Some gems have joined the United Churches, among them Nelson, who is later killed by religious extremists. After the murder of Nelson, Tobias is publicly mourning his parishioner's death and the United Churches attract a large number of new volunteers, some of whom are even atheists who "under the circumstances had no reservations about channeling secular support via an ecclesiastical route" (154). The novel thus emphasizes the role that religious institutions can play in abolitionist movements: apart from mobilizing their own adherents, they can also function as infrastructure to connect people in favour of abolition and thereby enable the participation of larger portions of society.

While the United Churches represent an integrationist approach to gems by inviting them to join their congregation and supporting their community through volunteer work, the so-called godgangs consider gems as "spawn of the Beast" and deny their right to life and physical integrity (281). The readers learn about their point of view through (temporary) focalizers John and Mac. Mac becomes the leader of one of those gangs. Characterized as "a delusional loner with his own god complex, Christian fundamentalist, no family or steady job" by a police memo (161), Mac himself believes that he is fulfilling "God's plan" by attacking and killing gems (15). The first gem whom Mac and his gang assault is Callan who is almost beaten to death after leaving a gay nightclub. The attack is focalized by Callan himself and his description of the crime reveals entanglements between racism and homophobia, as all of the insults the gang members hurl at him ("The Lord permits no home for such as you"/ "Abomination") could be read as both a comment on Callan's status as a gem and/or his sexual orientation (86). While Callan is only a minor character in *Gemsigns* (he plays a greater role in the two sequels where he gets his own plotline), his presence is indicative of the intersectionality of gems. Callan's identity as a gem does not completely override his other traits such as his whiteness, his masculinity or his homosexuality.

The godgangs are clandestinely encouraged and financed by bioengineering companies who seek to cause social tensions between gems and norms with the goal of convincing policymakers to let them continue the enslavement of gems in some form, making visible how businesses can use religious groups to advance their commercial interests. Whereas the United Churches' commitment for abolition echoes the real-world involvement of certain Christian groups (e.g. Quakers and Evangelicals) in the historical movement for the abolition of the transatlantic trade

with enslaved Africans and their calls for the emancipation of Afrodiasporic enslaved workers, the godgangs show parallels to both homophobic Christian churches and racist hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan that appropriates religious imagery for its own goals.

The conflict between United Churches and godgangs reaches a climax at the end of the novel, when Mac's gang abducts Gabriel and attempts to kill him by throwing him off the top of a skyscraper. Gabriel is subsequently saved by gem rights activist Aryel Morningstar who reveals her ability to fly in this public act. This scene abounds with Christian inspired symbolism, as it takes place on Christmas Eve and the building from which Gabriel is thrown is called Newhope Tower. Aryel Morningstar whose name recalls both apocryphal angel Ariel and fallen angel Lucifer spreads her wings and thus transforms into what is reminiscent of traditional portrayals of angels in order to save Gabriel who – due to his telepathic abilities – is revered as a “blessing” by members of the United Churches (269). Gabriel's name, in turn, evokes the biblical archangel Gabriel who serves as a messenger between god and people. This focus on communication is shared by *Gemsigns'* Gabriel who uses his telepathy to help gems who have trouble with verbal communication because of their engineered disabilities (110). Aryel's rescue of Gabriel then provides new hope for better relationships between gems and norms. Because of their willingness to murder a child,⁴⁶ the religious hate groups lose public support whereas Aryel's transformation is perceived as angelic and she is celebrated as a hero.

Just like science, religion is also portrayed as a double-edged sword that can work in favour of the interests of marginalized groups or the opposite: while the United Churches promote equal rights for gems and norms, some of their believers reject their position and form their own extremist religious groups, some of which are clandestinely encouraged and financially supported by bioengineering companies who hope that the resulting hate crimes and civil disturbances will convince politicians to allow gem enslavement to continue in some form.

⁴⁶ It can be considered problematic that it takes the abduction and attempted murder of a (white) child to inspire widespread public outrage at the godgangs whereas the previous attacks on a gay (white) adult man and an adult man of color did not succeed in swaying the public opinion.

c. Social Activism as Key to Reconciliation

Apart from science and religion, the novel also depicts social activism as an important determinant in the transition phase from abolition to equality between gems and norms. In *Gemsigns*, social activism takes several forms. Before abolition, the so-called Remnants (i.e. people who left the big cities during the Syndrome to live in rural areas without modern technology) helped escaped gems by hiding them in their communities (54). This was necessary, because bioengineering companies employed so-called “retrieval squads” to hunt down escaped gems and return them to the company that officially owned them (11). The bioengineering companies’ practice is reminiscent of the so-called slave patrols that policed the enslaved community in the antebellum US South. Just like the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 provided a legal justification for the forced return of refugees from enslavement to slaveholders, the work of the retrieval squads was backed up by law. Gaela (who would later adopt Gabriel) escaped from a Bel’Natur facility and hid from those retrieval squads for years using her special abilities that include infrared vision to earn money, meeting her romantic partner Bal in the process. After abolition, the couple moves to London where they become active members of the nascent gem community. Apart from Gaela’s civic involvement within the gem community, she also sides with other gems in public conflicts and defends them against harassment. One example for this occurs when she witnesses how a young gem street musician is harassed by a group of norms (79). Gaela’s standing up for the musician inspires previously indifferent bystanders to side with her and call the police to drive away the angry mob which I read as the novel’s emphasizing of the importance of moral courage.

A commitment to help the gem community is not only limited to private parties, as governments start to invest money into social services for gems; in London, Sally Trieve is the coordinator of these (80). She seems to be genuinely interested in supporting gems and is overall portrayed as a likable character. The wellbeing of the gems has priority for Sally and apart from coordinating the state aid measures, she is also still active as a social worker herself (100). Through the character of Sally, *Gemsigns* represents social welfare services specifically directed at helping marginalized population groups in a positive manner. However, the novel puts a greater emphasis on the important role of (private) social activism within the gem

community: the gems work together to make their new quarter liveable and develop their own arrangements to help each other, such as the establishment of Maryam House, a community center, which also serves as shelter for gems who are severely disabled as their genetic engineers put more emphasis on their planned function than on their quality of life. The inhabitants of Maryam House include gems who were “engineered for tissue regeneration, [...] dumpy and lumpy with various odd duplications of features and organs [...] poor social skills and limited intellectual potential” (102). Another resident is Herran, a gem who is able to directly connect his brain to computers. However, Herran is also “pretty far down on the autistic spectrum, with a lot of the cerebral cortex given over to visual processing” (73). In contrast to mainstream norm society that is not used to accommodating the needs of differently abled individuals (as those have been engineered out of their genetic code generations ago), the gem community under the leadership of Aryel Morningstar strives to enable social participation for as many gems as possible; at large community assemblies, Aryel brings a tablet and uses it

to receive messages from those outside the hall, and those present but unwilling to draw attention to themselves. This allowed the autistics and the shy to take part on an equal footing with the rest, since she checked the tablet frequently. She would read the messages aloud, and as with questions voiced from the crowd would either respond herself, or direct them to where they could best be answered (134).

Thus, the novel emphasizes the inclusiveness of the gem community which is contrasted with the exclusionary elitism of norm society. The London gem community in the novel works as a paragon of an inclusive, equitable society and shows how social participation of differently abled individuals can be implemented. This idea is expanded upon in the two sequels to *Gemsigns* which chronicle how the gems slowly become part of British mainstream society as the public acceptance of them and their (dis)abilities grows.

d. Destabilizing Binaries

This chapter has shown how the gem/norm binary in *Gemsigns* works to exemplify how racialization can be employed as a technology for economically motivated oppression. This new form of oppression is rooted in historically developed power structures and thus intersects with older

practices of discrimination against marginalized groups, such as anti-blackness. *Gemsigns* draws explicit parallels between real-world histories of the transatlantic enslavement of Africans and their Afrodiasporic descendants and the diegetic enslavement of gems and its abolition. The novel thereby reaffirms the historical and cultural significance of African and Afrodiasporic enslavement and – although this knowledge does not prevent the re-emergence of racialized practices of enslavement – *Gemsigns* suggests that it can inspire later abolitionist movements. I conclude that *Gemsigns* uses its post-abolition setting to make visible the afterlife of slavery and to illustrate that the struggles for equality of formerly enslaved people do not simply end with the official abolition of enslavement. Against this background, the novel is particularly attentive to the roles of science, religion and social activism in post-abolitionist societies. *Gemsigns* emphasizes the moral obligation of scientists to adhere to standards of ethical conduct which have to be continuously questioned and updated and warns against the interference of profit-oriented companies with research practices. Similarly, the novel highlights the chances, but also the dangers of entanglements between religion and racialization. Social activism is portrayed as an effective means to foster compassionate relations both within and across racialized groups as the actions of Aryel Morningstar at the end of the novel pave the way for a more equitable society. Thus, the cultural work that *Gemsigns* does includes both reminding its readers of real-world histories of racist violence while simultaneously inspiring said readers to seek inspiration to resist against modern-day incarnations of those practices in historical abolitionist movements thereby remaining carefully optimistic about the potential of challenging corporate employments of using racialization as a technology of oppression through science, religion and social activism.

3. Conclusion: (Com)Modified Bodies

The previous chapters have explored how both *R/Evolution* and *Gemsigns* engage with questions of human enhancement through genetic engineering while explicitly connecting those considerations to the transatlantic enslavement of Africans and their Afrodiasporic descendants. Whereas *R/Evolution* suggests that

genetic modifications can be used to compensate for racist discrimination (but simultaneously complicates this simplified notion), *Gemsigns* addresses the exceptional vulnerability of marginalized people to be commodified by technological progress instead of profiting from it. One reason for these different perspectives may be that genetic engineering is portrayed as indispensable for the survival of the human species in *Gemsigns*, while in *R/Evolution*, human enhancement is considered to be a luxury, only available to the wealthiest citizens.

In both novels, genetic engineering has the effect of solidifying racialized social hierarchies. In *R/Evolution*, wealthy (predominantly white) citizens can optimize the genetic setup of their offspring before their birth and are able to purchase cures for most diseases. In contrast to them, poor people of color suffer from environmental degradation, pollution and exposure to toxic waste and are exploited by pharmaceutical companies that regard them as raw material for their research. The novel showcases different forms of reparations activism whose temporal implications range from (reversed) re-enactment to genetic reparations. The protagonist's creation of a gene therapy based on the DNA of enslaved African Americans restores a higher meaning to his ancestors' suffering and simultaneously seeks to alleviate the marks that centuries of racist oppression and discrimination have left (and continue to leave) on the African American population. However, in the end, Dr. Carter's intervention of biopolitical reparations is not effective enough to destabilize longstanding racialized hierarchies. In *Gemsigns*, extensive genetic engineering has resulted in the creation of a newly racialized class of workers, the so-called gems. The creation of the gems is firmly embedded within real-world power structures, so that the gem's DNA is often based on historically marginalized groups. In both novels, resistance against those oppressive structures comes mainly from the marginalized groups themselves: in *R/Evolution*, Dr. Carter tries to level the playing field by providing impoverished people with genetic enhancements for free. After his death, William aims continue Dr. Carter's work by donating his enhanced DNA, but the readers do not learn whether he is successful as the novel ends with William's death. In contrast to this approach, *Gemsigns* mobilizes scientists, priests and (both gem and norm) social activists to effect sustainable social change. Cooperating with each other, they manage to shift public opinion in favor of equal rights for gems by the end of the novel.

In these two novels, the use of chronopolitical interventions is not only present on both the plot- and the structural level, but also comprises their use of explicit references to the transatlantic trade with enslaved Africans to contextualize the struggles of marginalized people in their diegetic worlds within real-world histories of racialized oppression. In doing so, *R/Evolution* and *Gemsigns* have the potential to make visible the afterlife of slavery and inspire readers to re-evaluate how their contemporary societies are shaped by and continue to maintain racialized social hierarchies. Both novels emphasize the importance of resistance against social inequality, although that takes a different form in each: In *R/Evolution* the opportunity to receive free genetic enhancements is meant to uplift impoverished African Americans, whereas the gems and their norm allies in *Gemsigns* use the tools of scientific policy advice, religion and social activism to create social change. In the end, *R/Evolution* and *Gemsigns* stand up against the commodification of the bodies of marginalized people and appeal to their readers to take the fight for social justice beyond the pages of the novels and into the real world.

6. Rhythmic Time and Caribbean Past-Future-Presents in Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* (2000) and Marcia Douglas's *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* (2016)

1. Commemorating the Past while Building a New Future in Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* (2000)

Nalo Hopkinson's 2000 novel *Midnight Robber* is set in the far future on two Caribbean colonized extraterrestrial planets. The protagonist of *Midnight Robber* is Tan-Tan, a girl who is born on the Caribbean colonized planet Toussaint (named for Toussaint Louverture, one of the leaders of the real-world Haitian Revolution that took place between 1791 and 1804). Tan-Tan's life on Toussaint is comfortable as the supercomputer Granny Nanny – named after Nanny the 18th century leader of the Jamaican maroons (cf. Perillo 6) – looks after planet's inhabitants with the help of Nanomites that are not only implanted in the bodies of the human population, but also present in all of Toussaint's environment. On Toussaint, people are not required to perform any manual labor which is instead handled by Nanomite technology. Due to her parents' lack of interest in her, Tan-Tan forms a close bond to her Eshu, an avatar that Granny Nanny uses to directly communicate with the

inhabitants of Toussaint. However, after her father murders her mother's lover, he flees from Toussaint to the bleak prison planet New-Half-Way-Tree taking Tan-Tan with him. As Tan-Tan makes an effort to create a new life on New-Half-Tree, she struggles to cope with the sexual abuse of her father which is eventually resolved by her killing him in self-defense. After the death of her father, Tan-Tan flees from her village, lives with the indigenous (non-human) inhabitants of the planet and returns to human society shortly before giving birth to the baby fathered by her father.

The academic discourse on the novel has so far mainly focused on the use of Creole language (Mukherjee; Pyne-Timothy), the role of AI (Morrison), the novel's treatment of race and technology (Boyle; Perillo), dialectical utopianism (Smith), materiality (Fehskens), its engagement with Afrodiasporic histories (Allen; Enteen) or posthuman feminism (Martín-Lucas). Most criticism does not explicitly examine notions of temporality in *Midnight Robber*, with the exception of Jacolien Volschenk who raises a number of interesting questions in her dissertation which I will discuss in detail in this chapter. In contrast to Volschenk who focuses on "the depiction of the effects and after-effects of colonialism as portrayed through historical references and figures, but also in the relationship between the human and non-human characters in the novel", my analytical approach is based on the work of Guyanese writer Wilson Harris.

Throughout this and the following chapter, Wilson Harris' concept of *Rhythmic Time* will serve as a theoretical background against which the novels' negotiations of temporality will be read. I am working with a model of *Rhythmic Time* that is based on Russell West-Pavlov's reading of Harris' work. Referring to Harris' connecting (Guyanese) landscapes to temporality, West-Pavlov explains that "Rhythmic time as it is manifest in the landscape is equally past, present, and future, in ways that recall the non-duality of particle-wave manifestations of quantum physics" (West-Pavlov 263). In the concept of Rhythmic Time, Harris brings together perceptions of temporality, landscapes as living beings and music, suggesting that there is "a language akin to music threaded into space and time" (Harris 39). West-Pavlov elaborates that "Harris refuses a notion of time as a forward movement celebrated by Conquistador historiography, at the expense of those other times that preceded its victory" and instead, "Harris imagines a resurgence of quantum time, a multivectorial time that oscillates between wave and

particle, and whose trajectory is only that of complexity, that is, an unbridled and unpredictable generativity” (West-Pavlov 164). Harris’ resistance against Conquistador understandings of temporality that regard time as exclusively linear results in a new concept of time that “is absolutely relational and co-creative with all the living and seemingly-non-living entities which make up its fabric” (West-Pavlov 269). It is this approach to temporality as one of simultaneity and relationality that makes the concept of Rhythmic Time so productive for my analysis.

This chapter is divided into three subchapters, all of which refer back to ideas of temporality as Rhythmic Time. First, I will focus on the novel’s representation of the artificial intelligence Granny Nanny and the implications that her presence has for the temporal structure of the novel. The following subchapter compares the two planets Toussaint and New-Half-Way Tree with regard to their, partially contradictory, temporalized situatedness. A third subchapter will take a closer look at the ambiguous ending of the novel and its effect on evaluating the narrative structure of *Midnight Robber*.

a. Granny Nanny as both Protector of the Marginalized and Colonizer

Granny Nanny completely controls life on the planet of Toussaint, as both human and non-human beings on the planet are equipped with her nano-bots. Granny Nanny at first seems to be a benevolent being who works to keep the inhabitants of Toussaint “protected, guided and guarded” even though she achieves that through constant surveillance of the population which has turned privacy into the “most precious commodity” (Hopkinson 10). Most of the inhabitants of Toussaint – who call themselves Marryshevites (after the corporation that enabled them to travel into space and colonize other planets) – accept this lack of privacy in exchange for a carefree life in which all they need is provided to them by Granny Nanny.

This picture of Granny Nanny as a benign mother-like figure is challenged when the readers later learn that in order to prepare the planet for human habitation, Granny Nanny has extinguished its entire indigenous population and modified its natural flora and fauna beyond recognition to make it fit for human consumption.

The price of the Marryshevites' untroubled existence is thus revealed to be the genocide of Toussaint's original inhabitants which is justified by excluding them from the realm of humanity. This duality of how Granny Nanny "paradoxically serves both anticolonial and colonial ends" has puzzled and been remarked upon by most of the scholars engaging with *Midnight Robber* (for more details on the academic discourse on this specific topic, see Perillo 7).

My position on this question is informed by the theoretical framework of this dissertation and its focus on the afterlife of slavery: On the basis that "the development of the 'Nansi Web stem[s] from Caribbean peoples' resistance to a (neo)colonial order on Earth" (Perillo 8), the protection of human autonomy from potentially inimical outside forces would have been an important factor in programming Granny Nanny. So important, in fact, that it would have made sense to include it in its core directive, which would make the prevention of her people's oppression the first priority of Granny Nanny. As the character of an AI is always influenced by the circumstances of their creators, *Midnight Robber* imagines an AI produced by people whose histories and lives have been shaped by displacement, enslavement and disenfranchisement. In order to prevent such oppression from happening again, Granny Nanny radically transformed Toussaint during the terraforming process by eradicating any potential threats, including its indigenous inhabitants. The futuristic AI is, just like her 18th century Jamaican namesake, "first and foremost concerned with the safety and freedom of her people" (Volschenk 82). Granny Nanny uses high-tech technology to perpetrate imperialist practices such as appropriation of land (for her people), genocide of its indigenous inhabitants and the extinction of its native flora and fauna. Using Harris' concept of Rhythmic Time as a lens through which to consider Granny Nanny's actions can further help to make sense of the tension between her (or rather her creators') anti-colonial goals and imperial methods she uses to achieve those goals. Travelling to outer space can thus be read as a revisionary re-enactment of terrestrial histories of oppression: Instead of abductees forced onto ships, transported to other continents against their will and subsequently enslaved, the Marryshevites build their own (space)ships and leave earth out of choice (though that choice is, of course, influenced by histories of exploitation by imperial powers). Against this background, Granny Nanny's destruction and radical transformation of the planet that the Marryshevites call Toussaint is like an echo of previous, terrestrial violent appropriation of land for

colonizing purposes. However, instead of simply repeating history, Granny Nanny is not creating another plantocratic society, but rather strives to make Toussaint a place where every inhabitant can live comfortably.

Granny Nanny's care does not stop with making Toussaint habitable: She continues to watch over her people and keeps them safe by exiling anybody who disrupts the harmonic social order that she has built. While Granny Nanny tolerates some forms of resistance, such as the existence of the pedicab runners who insist on performing manual labor, live in polyamorous relationships and disconnect from Granny Nanny's web, she is programmed to banish those who "upset the balance of the whole," a category that includes murderers and abusers (10). The place of exile is a version of Toussaint in another dimension which has been unaffected by Granny Nanny's influence, called New Half-Way Tree. The existence of New Half-Way Tree as a penal colony recalls real-world practices of imperial powers that maintained penal colonies, such as the British Empire which – in the 18th and 19th century – transported convicts to their colonies in North America, Australia or Bermuda. The Marryshevites accept Granny Nanny's practices of sending troublemakers to New Half-Way Tree – which for most of the novel – is a one-way journey with no chance to communicate between the two planets.

b. From Toussaint to New-Half-Way Tree

Once a year, the inhabitants of Toussaint engage in Jonkanoo festivities that have similarities to past and present-day Caribbean Carnival celebrations. Those festivities are one way through which the Marryshevites deal with their terrestrial history; another way through which history is passed on is through the childcare workers called minders. Minders teach their clients' children about historical events such as the enslavement of Africans, their Middle Passage and maroonage with stories and songs. In contrast to other scholars who consider the references to real-world as "empty" and the mentioning of historical figures as "utopian figureheads" who are devoid of "most of their symbolic meaning" and who argue that "the colonial violence perpetrated against the environment and native inhabitants of Toussaint is rationalised with reference to the oppression of the Marryshevites' ancestors" (Volschenk 77-78), I suggest that the embedding of allusions to historical events serves the purpose of putting readers in a certain frame of mind.

Viewing the plot from a perspective that includes an awareness of Caribbean histories changes the readers' perception of certain story elements: one example of this is the role of labor on Toussaint.

Taking histories of enforced labor, enslavement and indenture into account, both the ordinary inhabitants' transfer of labor to non-humans and the runners' insistence on performing manual labor can be read as different kinds of opposition to those histories of oppression. While the attitude of "Back-break ain't for people" can be considered as an internalization of ideas concerning the humanity (or lack thereof) of enslaved workers, the runners' activities can be regarded as a reclamation of the freedom to work out of choice instead of force (Hopkinson 8). With menial labor relegated to robots (or the aforementioned runners), the more demanding work is performed by so-called artisans who include for example cooks, seamstresses or gardeners. In contrast to the pedicab runners, whose willingness to perform manual labor is rejected by many inhabitants of Toussaint, the artisans "are valued for the creative and intellectual aspects of their work" and are considered to be artists rather than simply workers (Perillo 6). Volschenk argues that *Midnight Robber* "reclaims hard physical labour [...] Skilled labour *and* physical labour that has a purpose, a personal investment, is meaningful, redemptive and fulfilling" (Volschenk 112). This connection between labor and personal fulfillment becomes particularly noticeable when considering that as Granny Nanny provides for her people, the inhabitants of Toussaint do not have to work in order to survive. The lack of necessity of wage labor has turned Toussaint into a practically class-less society which has resulted in scholars classifying the setting as postcapitalist (Volschenk 106). In spite the apparent equality on Toussaint that is illustrated through the characters addressing each other as "Compère," there are certain social distinctions between Toussaint's citizens: Protagonist Tan-Tan's father Antonio is described as "the most powerful man in the whole country" (15). As the mayor, he lives in a "big stoosh home" and employs several artisans (12). The inhabitants of Toussaint might be free of classist discrimination, but social stratification still exists.

In contrast to Toussaint, the prison planet of New-Half-Way Tree has remained unmodified and is inhabited by animals and plants that can be deadly for inexperienced human travelers. After Tan-Tan's father has murdered his wife's lover, he escapes to the penal colony taking Tan-Tan with him illegally. Male members of the planet's indigenous population – whom the exiles from Toussaint

call Douen – serve as guides for the new arrivals and help them find their way to the existing human settlements. The Douen also work for the involuntary settlers, addressing them as “master” which makes Tan-Tan feels uncomfortable at first, as the virtually class-less society of Toussaint has taught her that “*Shipmates all have the same status. Nobody higher than a next somebody*” (121). However, as the sheriff of Junjah (the village where Tan-Tan first arrives) explains to her that the Douen are not human, she accepts this rationalization and internalizes their ideology of the Douen as primitive savages. At first it appears to the readers as if the Douen are oppressed by the settlers, but later they learn that the power relations between Douen and settlers are more ambiguous than it looks. The Douen work voluntarily for the settlers in order to spy on them and be better able to assess the threat they pose to their community. They also possess advanced technology (which the settlers do not recognize as such) that enables them to live in perfect symbiosis with their environment as well as superior knowledge of medicine which allows them to heal conditions for which the settlers’ modern medicine does not know a cure, such as birth defects. Thus, the characterization of the Douen complicates simplified notions of (ig)noble savages and master-slave dialectics.

This also thwarts easy temporal categorizations of Toussaint as futuristic and New Half-Way Tree as backwards, since both settings combine elements that have past, future and present connotations which I connect to the concept of Rhythmic Time: the representation of Toussaint and New Half-Way Tree rejects binary oppositions. Both places are at once progressive (most notably through the presence of technology that goes beyond what is available to humanity today) and regressive (e.g. through their treatment of those who are deemed non-human). This tension between supposedly polar opposites echoes what Wilson Harris describes as “the phenomenon of simultaneity in the imagination of times past and future, a future that renews time in its imaginary response to gestating resources in *the womb of the present and the past*” which he considers to be a defining feature of innovative West Indian fiction (Harris 180). By combining elements associated with the past and those associated with the future the novel plants the seeds for “a future that renews time” in its readers’ imagination. What such as future might look like is left open by *Midnight Robber*, though its ending hints at the changes that the possibility of cross-spatiotemporal communication may bring about.

c. Tubman's Arrival

The ending of *Midnight Robber* further serves to remix temporal dimensions, as the birth of Tan-Tan's son Tubman heralds a new era of communication between New Half-Way Tree and Toussaint: Tubman's "whole body is one living connection with the Grande Anansi Nanotech Interface" and thus gives Granny Nanny access to New Half-Way Tree (328). Whether Granny Nanny's arrival will result in another genocide against the Douen as it did on Toussaint – as Volschenk suggests (133) – remains open. According to Perillo, "most [scholars], whether they otherwise celebrate or condemn Toussaintian society and its technology, see Tubman's character as a gesture toward a truly liberatory future for both planets" (13), while she herself warns against "locating the novel's liberatory gestures too specifically in Tubman's 'hybrid cybersubjectivity'" as such a reading "not only oversimplifies the agentic, nonbinary qualities that the 'Nansi Web displays from the start but also risks depoliticizing the dissenting relationships that other characters (such as the pedicab runners and douens) establish with technology" (14). Whereas the narrator describes Tubman as "the human bridge from slavery to freedom" (329), in reference to the historical figure of Harriet Tubman, an African American woman who in the 19th century assisted in the escape of more than 300 enslaved people, the question whose freedom Tubman might help to regain is left open. The ambiguousness that surrounds the temporal situatedness of New Half-Way Tree is thus kept up: the readers themselves can choose if they prefer to regard Tubman's connection to Granny Nanny as a signal of progress that will improve the lives of New Half-Way Tree's inhabitants (both human and non-human) or rather as imperialist history repeating itself as the presence of Granny Nanny entails the danger of her transforming New Half-Way Tree (as she did Toussaint) through murdering its indigenous inhabitants and extinguishing the local flora and fauna.

The ending also exposes the identity of the narrator of the frame narrative that surrounds Tan-Tan's story. The unnamed narrator that addresses the readers directly in segments interspersed between the chapters telling Tan-Tan's coming of age story (mostly from her point of view), is revealed to be Tan-Tan's eshu who used to serve her on Toussaint and the eshu's implied addressee are not the readers of the novel, but Tan-Tan's son Tubman. This surprising revelation on the one hand,

de-centers the readers they realize that they were not the ones directly addressed by the eshu narrator, but on the other hand also invites them to identify with Tubman, as the narrator's explanations resonated with them. As the eshu is part of Granny Nanny's network, readers might also question its reliability, particularly in its representation of Granny Nanny, inviting them to revisit the earlier chapters and re-evaluate them with the knowledge of the narrator's identity. This technique of sending readers back to earlier chapters with a new understanding of both plot points and diegetic temporal framing creates new forms of reading which will be explored further in the next chapter on *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread*.

d. Resisting Temporal Classifications

I conclude that the setting of *Midnight Robber* rejects simple temporal classifications. Both Toussaint and New Half-Way Tree combine elements associated with past, future and present. On Toussaint, the extraterrestrial space setting and post-capitalist society appear futuristic, whereas the Carnival celebrations connect to both past and contemporary practices in the Caribbean and Caribbean diaspora. The importance placed on the remembrance of earth histories of colonialization and enslavement signifies an awareness of its identity-forming function but is simultaneously ironized by the imperialist practices of Granny Nanny that made comfortable life on Toussaint possible. On New Half-Way Tree, the Douen are perceived as underdeveloped by the human settlers but are later revealed to have developed advanced technology and their living in the forest is shown to be not a sign of primitiveness, but instead the result of an intricately planned, sustainable use of their environment. These chronopolitical interventions work to disorient the readers' temporal orientation: the resulting disorientation opens up spaces for re-thinking historically established power relations. This effect is amplified by the ambiguous ending of *Midnight Robber* that invites readers to think through the implications of Granny Nanny's extension of her sphere of influence on their own. Thus, *Midnight Robber* encourages a new kind of reading that Wilson Harris describes in his reflections on epic writing that following way:

We arrive backwards even as we voyage forwards. [...] To arrive in a place where we are not brings into play transitive chords within densities, transitive dimensionalities that unlock doors within the body of language itself. (Harris 180).

In the case of *Midnight Robber*, multiple instances of such transitive chords can be traced. Tan-Tan's identification with the *Robber Queen* of Caribbean folklore enables her to take a stand for social justice and to defend herself against her stepmother's allegations. Furthermore, Granny Nanny's nanomites that Tan-Tan passes on to her son Tubman can be read as the transitive chords that connect the "densities"— a term that Hamilton defines as "unstable spacetime properties" (Hamilton 97) — of Toussaint and New Half-Way Tree. On the extradiegetic level, the novel itself works as a transitive chord to link the density of readers' own world to the ones represented in *Midnight Robber* and invites them to relate to Tan-Tan's struggles and be inspired by her personal development. This chapter has shown how *Midnight Robber* uses both its setting and its narrative setup to subvert its readers' expectations and resist temporal classifications. The next chapter will analyze how Marcia Douglas's *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* goes even further in its experimental aesthetics and its encouragement of reader participation.

2. Remixing Jamaican His/Herstories in Marcia Douglas's *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* (2016)

In this chapter, I will show how the content and experimental aesthetics of Jamaican author Marcia Douglas's *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* work to destabilize conventional notions of history and temporality. Arranging short chapters like tracks on mixtape, the novel jumps back and forth between diverse historical settings, memories and Rastafari inspired spirit worlds. While Jamaica is clearly at the center of *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread*, the novel also makes transnational entanglements between Jamaica and Ethiopia as well as the United Kingdom visible. So far, *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* has not yet received a lot of scholarly attention. The main secondary text for this chapter is Njelle W. Hamilton's article *Jamaican String Theory* in which she connects questions concerning the engagement with temporalities in the novel to its use of "infrasonic disturbances" (89). Setting her focus on the soundscapes created in the novel, Hamilton pays particular attention to how the book uses inspirations from Jamaican music technologies to point to an interconnectedness of past, future and present. Building on her conclusion that the novel "illustrates the power of Jamaican music and sound to reconfigure space, time, memory and narration" (100), my

chapter will take a closer look at the narrative embedding of temporal disruptions within *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* and will dive deeper into how Wilson Harris' concept of *Rhythmic Time* can work to open up new interpretative dimensions for the book. While Hamilton already points out the presence of Rastawomanist ideology within the novel, my chapter will elaborate on the ways in which the book centers the experiences of Jamaican and particularly Rastafari women.

A first subchapter will set its focus on the narrative structure and aesthetics of *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* and show how the book transforms the traditionally European form of the novel as an act of anti-colonial resistance. The second subchapter will analyze how the book engages with Jamaican history, particularly through its myriad of female characters, hence the term *hisherstories*, while a third chapter will focus on the ways in which *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* interrogates the continuing relevance of transatlantic enslavement and its afterlife for its Jamaican characters.

a. The Novel as a Mixtape

The Marvellous Equations of the Dread is experimental in its engagement with the form of the novel: instead of the classic structure of chapters that build on each other, it features short segments that are only loosely connected to each other. Combining text in varying fonts and sizes with photos and drawn images, the book features a large number of storylines, which are told by various narrators, some of whom serve as external focalizers whereas others employ certain characters as internal focalizers. While the novel is predominantly written in Jamaican Standard English, the segments narrated by Rastafari narrators often include Iyaric, i.e. specific Rastafari vocabulary. What all storylines share is that they somehow engage with Jamaica as a nation, Jamaican history and/or the Rastafari movement. While some narrators only narrate one segment, there are a few recurring narrators whose storylines continue throughout the whole novel, such as a heterodiegetic, extradiegetic narrator using a fictionalized version of musician Bob Marley as their internal focalizer, Bob's (fictional) lover Leenah who serves as a homodiegetic, intradiegetic narrator and another heterodiegetic, extradiegetic narrator who is employing the fallen angel Negus as an internal focalizer. However, even the

storylines of those protagonists are not told in chronological order but jump back and forth between different spatiotemporal settings, sometimes intersecting. Thus, the narrative structure of *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* constitutes a temporal disruption in so far as it rejects conventional temporal modes of storytelling in novels. In fact, for most of the novel, it is impossible for the reader to tell whether a certain episode is a flashback or foreshadowing since a central temporal point of reference is missing resulting in what narratologists call achrony, i.e. “the events of a story cannot be transferred into a chronological order by the reader anymore” (Lange 159-160). According to West-Pavlov, such a narrative approach to temporality is typical for contemporary postcolonial novels that “mobilise non-linear narrative strategies to suggest alternative temporalities and thus emergent ontologies from the Global South” (West-Pavlov 258). The non-chronological narrative style of the novel and its multiplicity of narrators thwart readers’ expectations of novels following the personal development of either an individual or a limited cast of main characters. Instead, the structure of *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* encourages its readers to look for common motifs and other connections between the segments beyond just the identification of recurring characters and gain an awareness how Jamaican history is shaped by colonial violence and the resistance against it as many of the segments are concerned with the struggles of Jamaican and particularly Rastafari people in both colonial and postcolonial Jamaica.

Hamilton suggests that *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* necessitates a form of “atemporal reading” and that “[t]he novel’s invitation to read, listen and remember differently thus ultimately takes on an ethical imperative [...] it seeks to inspire the reader into action in the real world to interrupt the violent trajectories of colonial time” (Hamilton 101). Hamilton examines closely how the novel initiates reader participation through featuring a stand-in for the reader within its text: *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* includes the character of a girl wearing shirt with the words “Here-So” who is always sitting on a bench near the clocktower of Half-Way Tree reading a book and she stays the same throughout multiple temporal shifts which turns her into “a nodal point and constant in spacetime” (Hamilton 100). According to Hamilton, this “revelation of the reader as always-already a part of the narrative suggests that part of Douglas’s larger project is to remix the Caribbean novel form by unsettling the hegemony of linear narrative time”

(Hamilton 100). Hamilton's observation becomes even more obvious when looking at the second appendix of the book.

"Appendix II: Studio Pass" starts with a photo that depicts at its center three women with baskets on their heads and that according to the caption was taken at "Half Way Tree; circa 1899" (Douglas 276). However, the caption also draws the readers' attention to "the child and her mother (left), waiting for the doors of York Pharmacy to open" (276). The child and the mother would have to wait for about 70 years, before York Pharmacy opens for the first time in Half Way Tree which suggests that this is not something that is connected to photo itself, but rather a reference an earlier (earlier in the novel, not earlier historically speaking) scene in which Leenah and her daughter Anjahla are visiting York Pharmacy sometime in the early 1980s, thus turning the mother-daughter couple in the photo into an echo of Leenah and Anjahla's visit. Thus, the caption continues the employment of chronopolitical interventions that the non-chronological narrative structure has begun, creating a certain tension between visual image and written text that causes the readers to wonder which impression to prioritize.

The next photo shows a scene in front of the cotton tree that would be cut down to make room for a clock tower in 1913. Its caption positions it in about 1890 and directs the readers' gaze towards the two women sitting underneath the tree and the man walking down the road who "wonders at the far far-away vibration of bass — coming from over one hundred years in the future" (Douglas 276). Once again the readers' perception of the historical photo is complicated by the way in which the caption connects it to future (diegetic) events. The next two photos are close-ups of the previous picture: the first one shows the two women sitting underneath the tree whose relaxed posture is contrasted in the caption with a reference to the hanging of an enslaved boy on the very same tree in 1766. The second close-up shows the man "walking towards the strange music" (Douglas 276). In the final photo of the appendix, it looks as if the man from the previous picture has reached his destination and walked straight from 1890 into the contemporary Half Way Tree that is depicted here. A hand-drawn white arrow points at the man in question and the caption explains that he is "walking towards you [i.e. the reader]" (Douglas 276). The reader also recognizes the clocktower at the center of the photo as well York Pharmacy in the background. Although the tower has replaced the cotton tree on Half Way Tree, the caption underneath the photo reminds the readers that its

roots are still left underground, “calling” (Douglas 276). Hamilton reads the cotton tree as a “[s]ymbol of temporal continuity due to its centuries-long lifespan” and its “destruction [as...] a metonym for the genocide of indigenous peoples by the Spanish, and of precolonial ways of knowing by the colonial forces that succeeded them” (Hamilton 91). The perseverance of the tree’s roots can thus be read to signify the resilience of anti-colonial positions that have always been part of Jamaican society and may remain hidden, but firmly embedded within the actual land of the island.

Taken together, the series of photos emphasizes continuities throughout Jamaican history while their captions challenge readers to establish connections between photo, caption and the plot(s) of the novel. The title of this chapter “studio pass” suggests that the readers will find additional information here and casts Half Way Tree in the role of the studio, i.e. the place where the mixtape of *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* is/was recorded. It thus reaffirms Half Way Tree’s central position in the novel which Hamilton describes as “an interdimensional portal at the intersection of diverse moments in Jamaican history [... that] allows for time travel between them” (Hamilton 92). According to Hamilton, “the ability to time travel through the clock tower in *Marvellous Equations* suggests that all past, present and future events coexist on that site” (Hamilton 92), an impression that the photos and their captions in the second appendix support. This idea of Half Way Tree as a site of (temporal) convergence is reminiscent of Wilson Harris’ concept of living landscapes that should not be “perceived as passive, as furniture, as areas to be manipulated,” but instead as something that “possessed resonance [... that] possessed a life, because, the landscape [...] is like an open book,” in which a “[t]heatre of memory” unfolds (Harris 39). The novel’s unique combination of text, photography, illustration and references to music gives its readers the opportunity to catch a glimpse at the “theatre of memory” that resonates on Half Way Tree and enables them to read the spatiotemporal echoes of that place.

This subchapter has discussed how the narrative structure of the novel and its use of photography and illustration expand the ways in which *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* can intervene in conventional notions of temporality. The non-chronological structure and the use of multiple narrators and focalizers is indicative of how the novel privileges subjective points of view and experiences of

time over chronological clock-time and a fixed, limited cast of narrators. The use of photography and illustration in *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* further works to invite reader participation and to disorient their sense of time.

b. Rastawomanism and She-Magination

Although *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* features fictionalized versions of Bob Marley and Haile Selassie as central characters, it also recognizes the achievements of (mainly Jamaican) women. This starts at the beginning of the novel with a chapter focalized by a Taino woman set on Xaymaca (i.e. the Arawak name for Jamaica) in 1494. The (unnamed) woman predicts the arrival of Christopher Columbus, the subsequent colonization efforts by European empires as well as their ultimate failure. She also foresees the coming of slave ships and the eventual appearance of Bob Marley, urging the readers to “[l]isten [...] to what he cries” (6). This first chapter’s setting in 15th century Jamaica draws attention to the precolonial history of the island. It also acknowledges the impact that both colonialism and histories of enslavement have on Jamaica but maintains a sense of agency by presenting those as doomed to fail before they even started. The way in which this chapter interweaves events from different time periods foreshadows the novel’s non-linear treatment of time. The Taino woman is mentioned repeatedly by other characters in the novel, such as Leenah who – while thinking about her relationship to Bob – wonders if “Taino sister see that far” (9) or unnamed Jah prophets equating the woman with the mystical Riva-Mumma who “knows the history of the island backwards and forwards, and can answer any question put to her” (34). This idea of history as multidirectional is also reflected in the structure of the novel which not only jumps back and forth between several historical settings, but also features multiple re-tellings of the same event (i.e. Meharene’s affair with Hailee Selassie that is both told from her own perspective and the one of her colleague Riva-Man). This narrative technique enables the novel to include a diversity of voices which is often used to amplify the perspectives of marginalized people, such as women, children, adolescents, the homeless and/or Rastafari.

A special focus is set on matrilineal histories and on the struggles of mothers. The novel’s representation of mothers who lose their children and children who lose their mothers takes the stories of enslaved mothers as a major point of

reference: a segment set on the slave ship *Sarah* in the middle of the Atlantic in 1790 describes how a “child watches as her too-feverish mother is forced to jump” off the ship (204). The girl “shrieks an alarm, sounding all the way to yet-to-come” (204). The girl’s scream is read by Hamilton as creating a thread connecting “the echo of all the suffering children wailing for their mothers, from the slave ship to the future” (Hamilton 99). This thread is foreshadowed at the beginning of the novel when Leenah (in the first chapter narrated by her) tells her daughter Anjahla about their “kin”, “fierce babymothers who jumped off the ship and into the ocean” (8). By calling the enslaved mothers fierce and claiming that they “stayed strong inside” (8), Leenah honors their sacrifice. Anjahla, however, feels more inclined to rewrite their fate: “When I tell this story to my children, I am going to give it another ending. I am going to send the mothers a rescue ship to take them home” (8). This scene then unites some core elements of Afrofuturist storytelling: the retrieval and transmission of Afrodiasporic histories, the invoking of one’s ancestors and finally, the impetus to rewrite those histories. Anjahla’s statement also foreshadows the ending of the novel, when she manages to help her dying mother to find her way home in the figurative sense by re-uniting Leenah with Vaughn’s (i.e. Leenah’s mother) loc which enables Leenah move on to Zion. Enslaved mothers are also present in Jamaica itself, as the story of an enslaved woman who had run away with her lover in 1832 illustrates: the lovers are caught and whipped as a punishment which causes the woman to miscarry. The resulting “wail ricochets blood-red, into the yet-to-come” (116), thus, amplifying the earlier (historically earlier that is, not earlier in the novel) scream of the girl who lost her mother on the slave ship.

Through Leenah’s family history, the readers follow five generations of Jamaican women. In 1892, Leenah’s great-grandmother Murlina Shawn (who was originally from Guinea) migrated from Cuba to Jamaica at the advice of a Santeria priestess whom she consulted after six of her children died soon after birth and she wanted to make sure that her seventh child, Hector, survived. Once again, the topic of a mother losing her children is addressed and Murlina’s dangerous action of crossing the Caribbean sea in a small fishing boat is framed as a mother’s selfless deed to save her son. The presence of a “Spanish captain” who gave Murlina her name may be a hint that Murlina’s birthplace is not the country today known as Guinea, but rather the country today called Equatorial Guinea which used to be a Spanish colony (62). Murlina’s son Hector later marries Winnifred Beryl, Leenah’s

grandmother. Winnifred is “an obeahman’s daughter” (69) whose father Bro. Mo was opposed to her marriage to Hector and causes Hector to be haunted by “the duppy of one of them old-time overseer to whip” him (72). Bro. Mo’s power to conjure up the spirit of a dead overseer is significant in multiple ways: on the one hand, it shows how histories of enslavement continue to influence Jamaican people’s lives; on the other hand, though Bro. Mo’s authority to command the overseer’s ghost can be read as him reversing the historical hierarchy, it also exemplifies how anti-black violence can be internalized and persist even after the colonizers have left. When the overseer’s spirit whips Hector at night, the ghost of his mother Murlina is forced to watch the event without being able to intervene, echoing the suffering of the mothers of enslaved children who could not protect their offspring. The haunting leads to Hector’s interest in Marcus Garvey’s Black Star Line as he believes that the ghost would not be able to follow him to Africa. After the failure of the Black Star Line, Hector throws himself into his work as a tailor, eventually reaching Zion through his sewing. Winnifred is left behind and has to take care of her daughter Vaughn alone. Winnifred and Vaughn hope that Hector will return one day, but after Vaughn experiences a vision, they accept his abandonment of them.

At seventeen, Vaughn enters a romantic relationship with the Rasta Gully who becomes Leenah’s father. While Gully officially introduces Vaughn to Rastafari faith, she traces her becoming Rasta to her vision of Hector: “I didn’t follow nobody. I had a vision. *That’s* how I turn Rasta” (96). Vaughn is confronted with discrimination and violence because of her faith which causes to send eleven-year-old Leenah to live with Winnifred in 1965. One year later, Leenah’s father is murdered, and Vaughn dies after a stillbirth. Leenah is sent to live with her aunt and uncle. After a teacher forcibly cuts off her locs, Leenah loses the memories of her mother: “Violence will do that to you. Make you forget your mother’s name” (11). Leenah only regains those memories, when she meets Bob for the first time in London in 1977. She starts having an affair with him, until they both return to Jamaica in 1978. Back in Kingston, Leenah is impregnated by the fallen angel Negus and gives birth to Anjahla. Leenah raises Anjahla on her own, until Leenah is accidentally shot during a demonstration, where Anjahla invokes her female ancestors to communicate with her dying mother and help her find her way to Zion.

Through Murlina, Winnifred, Vaughn, Leenah and Anjahla, the novel explores the struggles of Jamaican women in the late 19th and the 20th century. Although *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* mentions some historical events (such as Garvey's Black Star Line or the election of Alexander Bustamante), its main focus is on the daily life of Anjahla and her (female) ancestors, struggling to provide for their family. This celebration of the accomplishments and the perseverance of Jamaican women is also emphasized in a scene that brings together the ghosts of significant historical figures of Jamaica who gather to inspire the people of Kingston to rise up against oppression. Apart from Bob himself, those ghosts include Marcus Garvey, Leonard Howell and Nanny of the Maroons. However, there is also an unnamed woman who joins them who points out how ordinary women like her contribute to Jamaican history:

We sew and we plant and cook and sweep and wash and scrub and reap and stir and cry and pray and bend over and scream and break we back and then hold it straight again to send the children to school with piece of pencil so they can learn to write the book of we story and never forget it (191).

Thus, *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* emphasizes the importance of reproductive labor while simultaneously criticizing its public disregard: By positioning the ghost of the unnamed woman alongside famous national heroes, her contributions are acknowledged as essential. However, by leaving her unnamed, because “[e]verybody forget it [i.e. the name] and now not even me can remember it” (191), the novel also makes visible the lack of public recognition of her work and raises awareness for the significance of reproductive labor.

This subchapter has explored how *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* engage with Jamaican historiography. At the center of the novel are the struggles of Jamaican women whose accomplishments tend to go unmentioned in conventional history-writing. *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* celebrates the resilience of Jamaican women by telling their stories from their own point of view.

c. Haunting the Clock Tower

In *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread*, the clock tower is haunted by various ghosts. This subchapter will focus on two of them, the enslaved boy who

was hanged at the site in 1766 and King Edward VII and analyze the temporal implications of their actions.

The readers learn about the enslaved boy's fate in Leenah's first chapter:

there was the big silk cotton at Half Way Tree, and later, the young boy hanged from it for singing freedom. They say he died with a word at the tip of his tongue; and even three hundred years later, is restless to remember it. He is the reason – centuries after his dancing feet, and a clock tower erected in place of the tree – that the hands of the clock always told the wrong time (8).

Hamilton reads this as “the ‘original sin’ that causes the clock tower’s temporal dysfunction” and argues that the “underlying colonial violence disrupts the clock’s ability to keep time and marks the site as an archive of the sonic memory of black and indigenous trauma” (Hamilton 93). I agree with Hamilton and would go even further and consider the murdered boy as a stand-in for both the disruptive power of transatlantic enslavement and for the legacies of anti-colonial, abolitionist resistance. Aptly called “Memorial Clock Tower”, the boy’s ghost hijacks the site and instead of memorializing King Edward VII, the tower’s inability to display the accurate time visualizes the temporal disjuncture that the boy’s death and by extension the enslavement of black Jamaican people has caused; additionally, the word on the tip of the boy’s tongue symbolizes ancestral knowledge that has been lost due to colonial/anti-black violence. This impression is reinforced when the readers learn more about the motivations for the killing of the boy through the angel’s recordings:

December 31, 1766: A young boy is hanged at the big cotton tree. Sundays, while master and family were at church, he played the black keys of the house piano, picking out rebellion – the sound so wail-and-war, it riled up the people, made them remember their true names [...] Seven men and three women have escaped to the hills (116).

The idea that music can encourage people to “remember their true names” and rise up against injustice, like the boy’s music did for other enslaved people, is revisited towards the end of the novel when Bob uses his music to inspire the young people of Kingston to stand up for themselves. Thus, although according to the angel, nobody remembers the boy on the 200th anniversary of his death, the boy’s actions have left their trace. When Jamaica gains independence in August 1962, the ghost boy went into the clock tower and “turned back time all the way to 1766, for two whole seconds — long enough to dance one more beat, and try, try to retrieve the

word at the tip of his tongue” (117). The boy’s act of turning back time blurs the borders between colonial past and independent present and the fact that the boy continues to haunt the tower even after 1962 makes clear that formal independence alone does not suffice to overcome the afterlife of slavery.

As a ghost, the boy seeks to serve marginalized people in Kingston, one of which is the homeless young man Delroy whose belongings are protected from thieves by the “duppy boy” (147). In his ghost form, the rope that was used to strangle him still remains around the boy’s neck, until he meets Bob in the clock tower and asks him to let him “play freedom song”; as he starts playing the guitar, the rotten noose falls from his neck (251). Thus, the novel emphasizes the potentially empowering qualities of music as it is playing the guitar and singing that eventually enables the ghost boy to get rid of the rope around his neck. Music is also the medium that finally helps the boy to remember the word at the tip of his tongue: At the climax of the novel, the young people of Kingston rise up marching the streets

with drum and guitar; bass and amp, bongo and trombone, dj and war maracas, they move decided as creatures in migration, answering a remembrance from the future. Their voices in fullticipation, they hum a bass so deep the island shudders; memem mem mem rememb ring/word, resting for 300 years at the tip of the tongue –

Ash.

Ash.

Ashe.

Ashe/ Ashe/ Ashe/ Ashe/ Ashe/ Ashe/ Ashe! (261)

Even before the novel explains the meaning of the word “Ashe”, the readers realize that the word holds power. The marching young people and their music coax the sound of “Ashe” from the Jamaican soil, reminiscent of Wilson Harris’ idea of “the implicit orchestra, of living landscapes when consciousness sings through variegated fabrics and alternations of mood, consonance as well as dissonance, unfathomable age and youth, unfathomable kinships” (Harris 34). A sense of kinship forms between the protesting young people and the ghost boy fueled by their yearning for freedom and just like the reveal of the word releases the ghost boy, the knowledge about “Ashe” empowers and inspires the protestors. As a chant, “Ashe” reappears multiple times on the following pages in chapters focalized by the angel, Bob and a choir of Rastafari sistren. *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* translates “Ashe” as “‘the power to make things happen’ / ‘the power to

create change' / 'and so it is'" and traces it back to the West African Yoruba people (273). The novel thus invokes not just the Taino people as ancestors of today's Jamaicans, but also the Yoruba, some of whom were forcibly transported across the Atlantic and enslaved in Jamaica. Hamilton reads the inclusion of "Ashe" as

illuminat[ing] the time-travel properties of Rastafari Word/Sound/Power, which breaks and remakes the English language to register Afro-Jamaican realities and to critique the colonial epistemologies that oppress and marginalize sufferahs (100).

This critique of "colonial epistemologies" in the novel is not limited to the representation of the ghost boy and the significance attributed to "Ashe", but also present in its characterization of King Edward VII who also appears as a ghost in the clock tower on Half Way Tree. King Edward's ghost takes up residency in the clock tower erected in his honor and moves the clock hands. However, on the day Jamaica gains independence, he is in a drunk stupor which gives the ghost boy the chance to mess with the clock. The representation of King Edward's ghost as drunk on whisky chanting English conjugation tables holds him up to the readers' ridicule and turns the former English king into a character used for comic relief. When Bob meets King Edward, he feels sorry for the ghost who "seems so forlorn and despicable trapped there in the clock tower" and talks to him (119). After Bob has shared some of his difficult childhood experience with Edward's ghost, the former king simply advises him to drink away his problems and disappears, further illustrating his dependency on alcohol to the readers. It is only after Edward's ghost has seen how Bob puts on the ring that used to belong to Hailee Selassie (which was given to him by Selassie's son Asfa Wossen), that he chooses to return to "Britanniaaaaa" (140). I read the presence of King Edward's ghosts as illustrating how the process of decolonialization does not simply end with independence but needs to continue afterwards as Edward's ghost is still inside the clock tower after 1962. Bob's ring then works as a visual signifier for his overcoming of colonial patterns of thought which sparks the realization in Edward's ghost that his time in Jamaica is over.

This subchapter has shown how *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* uses the characters of the unnamed ghost boy and the spirit of King Edward VII to visualize Jamaica's struggles with decolonization. The boy's story works to emphasize the empowering potential of music that includes not only human-made

songs, but also the music of living landscapes. Bob's banishment of King Edward's ghost paves the way for the eventual liberation of the ghost boy whose remembrance of "Ashe" empowers the young people of Kingston to rise up.

d. Anti-Clock Time

The Marvellous Equations of the Dread features chronopolitical interventions on both the aesthetic and the plot level. Its multiplicity of storylines, narrators and focalizers creates a diegetic web that offers readers insights into lives and thoughts of diverse characters: male and female, dead and alive, Jamaican and Ethiopian. The setting shifts frequently between various temporal and spatial locations, some of which are dated and assigned to specific places, while others are not. This departure from more conventional novelistic structures (chronological narration and limited number of main characters) underlines the novel's rejection of linear perceptions of temporality. Its use of photography and references music further serves to invite reader participation and encourage what Hamilton calls "atemporal reading", i.e. "engaging with the novel's sonorities, decoding its drawings, flipping between the photographs interspersed throughout to notice discrepancies between repeated images, even tracing the increasing implausibility of the track numbers appended to chapter titles" (Hamilton 101). Instead of adapting the content to fit into the traditional form of the novel, *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* reforms the form of the novel to meet the needs of its content.

By celebrating the accomplishments of ordinary Jamaican women, *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* counters androcentric tendencies in Jamaican historiography and highlights the significance of women's reproductive labor within Jamaican history. Its particular focus on Rasta women additionally works to emphasize the importance of women within the Rastafari movement which throughout its history has often marginalized women (for more information on women within the Rastafari movement, see Christensen). Through the ghosts that haunt the clock tower on Half Way Tree, the novel engages with questions concerning decolonialization which is represented as a lengthy process that does not only require official independence but also a resistance against colonial patterns of thought.

3. Conclusion: Rhythmic Time and Caribbean Past-Future-Presents

The previous chapters have analyzed how *Midnight Robber* and *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* connect Caribbean music, dialects and landscapes to negotiations of temporality. While *Midnight Robber* imagines Caribbean inspired culture in the future and *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* engages with Jamaican history, both novels share unconventional narrative structures that work to critique the constructedness of linear temporalities and open up spaces for temporal negotiations inviting their readers to think about Caribbean pasts, futures and presents in new ways.

Midnight Robber's secret eshu narrator tricks readers into believing that they are directly addressed by a neutral narrator, while *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread's* various narrators and focalizers overwhelm readers with their multitude of perspectives. The former novel's focus on the protagonist Tan-Tan who stays the focalizer throughout most of the story enables the readers to witness her personal development from a privileged, lonely little girl towards an independent and confident young woman and mother who revolts against injustice. In contrast to *Midnight Robber*, *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* features a large cast of characters that provide the readers with a vibrant picture of (mainly) Jamaican society and that puts a particular emphasis on the struggles and accomplishments of Jamaican women. Thus, both novels engage with the living conditions of women in the Caribbean and also address questions of precarious motherhood, albeit in different ways as *Midnight Robber* focuses on the individual fate of protagonist Tan-Tan, whereas *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* attempts to include a larger number of women's experiences to provide readers with a broader picture.

Both novel's settings create a sense of continuity between Caribbean pasts, futures and presents and project a certainty about the persistence of Caribbean cultures throughout the ages. Whereas *Midnight Robber* connects its far-future extraterrestrial setting to Caribbean histories via the presence of festivals such as Jonkanoo, *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread's* plot jumps back and forth between centuries, its climax and end point situated in the "Year of yet-to-come" sometime in the 21st century (257). West-Pavlov's interpretation of Wilson Harris' work that considers "[r]hythmic time as it is manifest in the landscape is equally

past, present, and future, in ways that recall the non-duality of particle-wave manifestations of quantum physics” (263) can help to make sense of both novels’ employment of temporal disruptions and their resistance against unambiguous temporal classifications. The locale of Half-Way Tree and particularly the cotton tree that used to stand there has a special role in this: In *Midnight Robber*, Half Way Tree not only lends its name to the penal colony of New Half-Tree, but the novel “also depicts a tree as the dimension portal” (Hamilton 92) between Toussaint and New Half-Way Tree. In *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread*, the clock tower on Half Way Tree is a site that connects diverse timespaces and allows travel between them. I read these re-interpretations of Half Way Tree as a location in which potential pasts, futures and presents converge as an example of what West-Pavlov describes as “when the specificities of local place produce autochthonous temporal structures” which he considers to be “radically corrosive of hegemonic Global Northern temporalities” (West-Pavlov 271). As such the use of chronopolitical interventions within both novels has implications that go beyond their specific Caribbean (inspired) settings and connect the questions that *Midnight Robber* and *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* explore (such as “How can one celebrate one’s history, even if it is inextricably linked to colonial violence and racialized oppression?”) to a wider corpus of postcolonial literatures.

7. Coping with the Afterlife of Slavery through the Use of Chronopolitical Interventions in Contemporary Speculative Neo-Slave Narratives

Reflecting on the past and transforming it for the purpose of envisioning different futures – these are the qualities that all of the speculative neo-slave narratives that I have analyzed in this dissertation share. They do so by including diverse forms of temporal disruptions in their narrative structure. These temporal disruptions can be read as chronopolitical interventions – “temporal complications and anachronistic episodes that disturb the linear time of progress” (Eshun 297). By referring to Eshun’s concept, I take the political dimension of constructions of temporality into account and examine how these constructions engage with real-world power structures.

This dissertation has categorized chronopolitical interventions according to their forms and functions. In the first part, I have shown how two authors of speculative neo-slave narratives use chronopolitical interventions to turn their protagonists into moral witnesses who transcend temporal boundaries and confront their respective societies with their embodied testimonies. Through the example of Octavia E. Butler’s *Kindred*, this project has examined how the chronopolitical intervention of time travel and the resulting figure of the moral witness are used in order to make the afterlife of slavery visible and deny closure. Whereas Phyllis Alesia Perry’s *Stigmata* also employs temporal disruptions that create a moral witness in protagonist Lizzie, their function differs insofar from the historical recovery mission of *Kindred* as the focus of this novel is more on explicitly coping with the afterlife of slavery, rather than just drawing attention to its existence. While *Kindred* illustrates and problematizes the loss of knowledge about the lives of the enslaved, *Stigmata* finds a solution to prevent this loss by featuring a reincarnated enslaved ancestor sharing a body with her descendant. Both novels employ contemporary protagonists who transcend temporal boundaries and move between the temporal spheres of enslaved past and supposedly free present. Although both protagonists are unable to bring about changes in the past and improve their enslaved ancestors’ lives, the knowledge that they gain through during their journeys through time influences their outlook on life by making them aware of continuities of anti-black (and misogynist) violence. This changed perception also

influences their future lives: while *Kindred*'s Dana is disillusioned and becomes pessimistic about her prospects in a society that is built on racialized oppression, *Stigmata*'s Lizzie is able to cope with her experiences and the resulting awareness of the afterlife of slavery through the creation of visual art leading to a more optimistic view on her future life.

In the second part of this dissertation, I have shown how the concept of chronopolitical interventions can open up new interpretative perspectives for neo-slave narratives that work within the genre of alternate history. *Lion's Blood* uses its alternate timeline to problematize and make visible the inevitable bias of historiography, suggesting that the voices of marginalized social groups should be included in history writing. Thus, *Lion's Blood* employs chronopolitical interventions to point out how actual historiography tends to focus on dominant social groups and is instrumentalized in order to maintain the power relations of the status quo. Simultaneously, the narrative strategy of the novel that features shifting focalizers from diverse social groups works to illustrate how the inclusion of multiple voices can redress the pitfalls of biased historiography. In contrast to that, *Blonde Roots* questions the very act of history making itself through the use of themes derived from historiographic metafiction and thereby threatens to invalidate identities that are rooted in historical conceptions. The two different approaches of these novels show how the genre of alternate history can be used to both make visible processes of history-making and criticize or even devalue them.

The third part of this dissertation has analyzed how speculative neo-slave narratives employ the trope of the black technoscientific genius to negotiate the empowering potential of scientific practice for Afrodiasporic people within white supremacist societies. Rivers Solomon's *An Unkindness of Ghosts* transposes the plantation setting of (neo-)slave narratives onto a multigeneration spaceship in the far-future. Despite its depiction of racialized enslavement as a problem that can return in the future which may be read as pessimistic about the future of Afrodiasporic people, the novel hits a hopeful note through its main focus on the resistance strategies that the enslaved engage in. At the center of the resistance is protagonist Aster Grey, a scientist whose portrayal is reminiscent of depictions of black technoscientific genius figures in earlier Afrofuturist fiction. The novel gives this trope a distinct 21st century twist and locates the potential for resistance and eventually revolution in both Aster's scientific knowledge and her ability to

mobilize and inspire her social environment. As such, *An Unkindness of Ghosts* employs the chronopolitical intervention of extending past practices of racialized oppression into the future to highlight the potential for resistance in the face of systemic oppression. In contrast to *An Unkindness of Ghosts*, *Washington Black* is set in mid-19th century Barbados, Canada and England. In spite of his childhood as an enslaved worker on a plantation in Barbados, Wash manages to discover his gift for scientific illustration which he develops further after his successful escape. At first, Wash perceives his scientific practice as exclusively empowering, however, in the course of the novel, he abandons this idealistic point of view, as his skills are exploited by a famous British scientist without Wash receiving any kind of public recognition for his work. Because of the constraints that a white supremacist society places on him as a black scientist, Wash cannot develop his full potential and thus, the black technoscientific genius in *Washington Black* is prevented from bringing about sustainable social change. Chronopolitical interventions in the novel take the form of shifting focalization between young Wash as an internal focalizer and adult Wash as an external focalizer re-evaluating his younger self's experiences. Thus, the novel gives protagonist Wash the opportunity to re-frame and take ownership over his own past.

The fourth part of this dissertation is also concerned with science. However, instead of focusing solely on black technoscientific genius characters, the chapters in this part analyze how scientific advancements in genetic engineering can lead to the commodification of the bodies of marginalized people. In Tenea D. Johnson's *R/Evolution*, the availability of human enhancement techniques has led to social fragmentation between those who can afford such enhancements (mostly white wealthy citizens) and those who cannot and instead need to perform clinical labor in exchange for access to healthcare (mostly impoverished people of color). Dr. Ezekiel Carter, the protagonist of *R/Evolution*, sets out to level the playing field by providing marginalized people with genetic enhancements for free. He situates his work within the discourse of reparations for slavery and describes his biopolitical anti-racist activism as genetic reparations. Although Dr. Carter's activities eventually fail to lead to more social justice, the novel ends on a hopeful note with an invitation to readers to stand up against anti-black violence. Chronopolitical interventions in the novel include a re-emergence of the violent oppression of African American citizens, Dr. Carter's use of enslaved Africans' DNA for his

genetic reparations as well as a reversed re-enactment of the Middle Passage by militant reparations activists. They serve to emphasize the longevity of anti-black violence and create a continuity between the racialized enslavement of the past, future incarnations of racist oppression and present practices of discrimination. Stephanie Saulter's *Gemsigns* uses the existence of genetically modified workers as an allegory for racialized enslavement and examines the roles of science and technology in processes of racialization and racialized oppression. The new technology does not simply replace discriminatory practices of the past, but instead is used to reinforce racialized inequalities that are present already today. Similar to *An Unkindness of Ghosts*, *Gemsigns* employs the chronopolitical intervention of having racialized enslavement reappear in the future, albeit in a different way, since *Gemsigns* is set right after the abolition of the enslavement of genetically modified workers. This post-abolition setting allows the novel to address social conflicts erupting due to the efforts of marginalized people to assimilate into mainstream society or anxieties concerning passing and thereby shows that abolition itself is just the first step towards achieving equality between racialized groups.

The fifth part of this dissertation is concerned with two novels that approach the topic from a specifically Caribbean perspective. *Midnight Robber* takes place on planets colonized by people from the Caribbean on which practices of remembering racialized enslavement form the foundation on which their new society is built. The extraterrestrial Caribbean settlers of *Midnight Robber* have managed to cope with the afterlife of slavery through AI technology that results in making their lives easier (albeit at the expense of the indigenous flora and fauna of the colonized planets). However, practices of racist oppression continue on the prison planet New Half-Way Tree in the relationship between its indigenous inhabitants, the Douen, and the settlers from Toussaint who are exiled to their planet. The settings of *Midnight Robber* resist easy temporal classifications and hint at what Wilson Harris calls a "simultaneity in the imagination of times past and future" (Harris 180). Similarly, *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread* remixes various spatiotemporal settings in a disorientating manner and emphasizes the plurality of perspectives that exist at any given moment through its large cast of focalizers. Its experimental aesthetics serve to illustrate a multidirectional understanding of temporality. Through the novel's focus on (Rasta)women throughout Jamaican history, *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread*

critiques the androcentric emphasis of conventional Jamaican historiography. Its inclusion of the Yoruba concept of “Ashe” highlights interconnections between West African and Jamaican cultures and conceives of a recollection of ancestral knowledge as empowering.

This dissertation has used the concept of chronopolitical interventions as a tool to examine temporal disruptions in various forms. First, this has resulted in the realization that novels featuring protagonists who transcend temporal boundaries can be said to turn those protagonists into moral witnesses thereby creating a physical connection between past suffering, present inequalities and future aspirations. This result is certainly transferable to other speculative neo-slave narratives (and potentially also fictional texts of other genres) that employ protagonists that are able to cross between different temporal spheres. A second insight that emerged from this project is how alternate history novels can engage with historiography in different ways, focusing either on the recovery and integration of marginalized voices into official historiography or challenging the entire discipline itself. This also has implications for the visions of potential futures that these neo-slave narratives imply: do they imagine a future in which official historiographies contain multiple perspectives (as in *Lion’s Blood* and *Washington Black*) or do they envision a world in which historiography has lost its importance and its influence on people’s identities (as suggested by *Blonde Roots*)? Whenever an alternate history novel reverses historical events, there is the potentially problematic use of a member of a real-world dominant group as a stand-in for a real-world marginalized group which is handled in different ways in *Lion’s Blood*, *Blonde Roots* and *R/Evolution*: while *Lion’s Blood* evokes a sense of interracial solidarity by using an Irish protagonist in place of an African American, *Blonde Roots* employs humor and satire to destabilize unambiguous readings and *R/Evolution* represents the reparations activists’ plot to (ab)use white adolescents as a means to inspire empathy for African Americans’ suffering as doomed to fail. Third, the analyses of *An Unkindness of Ghosts*, *R/Evolution*, *Gemsigns* and *Midnight Robber* have shown how neo-slave narratives that are set in different futures engage with questions concerning the afterlife of slavery by imagining a reappearance of racialized enslavement and/or a world in which the ritualized remembrance of transatlantic enslavement serves as the foundation upon which a new, apparently more egalitarian society is built. All four novels emphasize the

importance of social commitment and community action: Aster Gray in *An Unkindness of Ghosts*, Dr. Ezekiel Carter in *R/Evolution*, Ariel Morningstar in *Gemsigns* and Tan-Tan in *Midnight Robber* do not only help marginalized groups through their individual social activism, but also manage to inspire their communities to advocate for social change. Fourth, my analyses of *An Unkindness of Ghosts*, *Washington Black*, *R/Evolution* and *Gemsigns* have outlined the role of technoscience in processes of racialization. The black technoscientific genius protagonists of *An Unkindness of Ghosts*, *Washington Black* and *R/Evolution* exemplify the empowering potential of black scientific practice. Yet, the novels do not idealize science, but also point out possible problems: while *Washington Black* illustrates the difficulties of black scientists to receive public recognition for their work, *R/Evolution* and *Gemsigns* emphasize the danger of marginalized people becoming commodified through technological progress. These insights encourage readers to demand both the recognition of the scholarly achievements of black scientists in the past, future, and present and additionally to think through the ethical implications of technological progress for marginalized groups.

This project has established the usefulness of the concept of chronopolitical interventions as way of evaluating and contextualizing the ways in which speculative neo-slave narratives employ temporal disruptions. However, the potential of using chronopolitical interventions as a conceptual tool for analyzing fiction that destabilizes established notions of temporality and history is far from exhausted: It would certainly be interesting to analyze older (proto-)Afrofuturist texts regarding their negotiations of temporality and assess the effectiveness of the concept in tracing the forms and functions of temporal disruptions therein. Further possible uses include the analysis of realist Afrodiasporic fiction as well as other forms of artistic practice, such as film, music, or visual art. The longevity and unceasing popularity of the employment of chronopolitical interventions in speculative neo-slave narratives is a clear testament to the continuous need for finding new ways to engage with the afterlife of slavery that include interrogating and eventually unraveling conventional concepts of temporality.

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9. CV of Alena Cicholewski

Alena Cicholewski (née Ruether)

Education

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PhD at the Institute for English and American Studies
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Dissertation:

“Chronopolitical Interventions in the Afterlife of Slavery:
Forms and Functions of Temporal Disruptions in Contemporary Speculative Neo-Slave
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Grade: Magna cum Laude

10/2010 – 09/2012

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“Negotiating the Relevance of Paul Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic* for the Construction of Black
Identities in Contemporary Speculative Fiction”

Grade for Masterthesis:

- 1,27

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- 1,37

09/2009 – 02/2010

Semester Abroad
Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

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Carl-von-Ossietzky-University Oldenburg, Germany

Bachelorthesis:

“Tell me about rajahs!” - The Representation of India in Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *A
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Grade for Bachelorthesis:

- 1,3

Final Grade:

- 1,65

Teaching

since 09/2019

Adjunct Lecturer in English and American Studies

Carl-von-Ossietzky-University Oldenburg, Germany

Introduction to the Critical and Scholarly Discussion of Literature (Seminar)

Key Concepts in Cultural Studies (Seminar)

04/2021-09/2021

Adjunct Lecturer in American Studies

University of Bremen, Germany

Muslim American Cultures in Visual and Textual Products (Seminar)

Publications

- “Negotiating Cultural Hybridity through Marvel’s Kamala Khan: Reading the Secret Superhero Identity *Ms. Marvel* as a Third Space.” *Liminality and Beyond: Conceptions of In-Betweenness in American Culture and Literature*, edited by Iwona Filipczak, Blossom Fondo and Agnieszka Mobley, Zielona Gora University Press, 2021. 27-41.
- “Entering the Chthulucene? Making Kin with the Nonhuman in Amie Kaufman and Meagan Spooner’s *Starbound Trilogy*,” *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures* 12.2 (2020). 86-102.
- “‘She was standing on the edge of a new world and so ready to jump’: Renovating the Black Technoscientific Genius Trope in Rivers Solomon’s *An Unkindness of Ghosts*,” *SFRA Review*, 329 (2019). 99-103.
- “Reading Time Travel in Octavia E. Butler’s ‘Kindred’ as Sankofa,” *COPAS—Current Objectives of Postgraduate American Studies*, 18.1 (2017).

Mentoring

07/2015 – 10/2020

PhD candidate network: *Perspektiven in der Kulturanalyse*

University of Bremen, Germany

Official Speaker of the Network (2018-2020)

Organization of Workshops

Peer Support

Conference Presentations

09/2021

GfF Annual Conference

Online conference of the Gesellschaft für Fantastikforschung

“We had wanted to change the world” – Militant Environmental Activism as Retributive Justice in Cindy Pon’s YASF novel *Want* (2017)

06/2021

SFRA Annual Conference

Online conference of the Science Fiction Research Association

“We had wanted to change the world” – Militant Environmental Activism as Retributive Justice in Cindy Pon’s YASF novel *Want* (2017)

05/2021

GAPS Annual Conference

Online conference of the Association for Anglophone Postcolonial Studies

Science as an Empowering/Exploiting Force in Esi Edugyan’s *Washington Black* (2018)

03/2021

International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts (ICFA) #42

Online conference of the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts

“Something here is completely, horribly, unnaturally wrong” – Eco-Horror in Amie Kaufman and Jay Kristoff’s *Aurora Rising* (2019)

06/2019

SFRA Annual Conference

Chaminade University, Honolulu, USA

“She was standing on the edge of a new world and so ready to jump”:
Renovating the Black Technoscientific Genius Trope in Rivers Solomon’s *An Unkindness of Ghosts*

03/2019

Timepieces: A Comparative Literature Conference

University of Toronto, Canada

Drifting along the Circle of Time: Dimensions of Temporality in Phyllis Alesia Perry’s *Stigmata*

10/2018

Postcolonial Narrations – Moving Centers & Traveling Cultures

Goethe-University Frankfurt am Main, Germany

Negotiating Hybridity through Marvel’s Kamala Khan: Reading the Secret Superhero Identity *Ms. Marvel* as a Third Space

10/2017

Postcolonial Narrations – Memory and Media

University of Erfurt, Germany

Exploring (Post)Colonial Legacies of Enslavement through the Genre of Alternate History

Memberships

Since 2016

German Association for American Studies (GAA)

Since 2017

Association for Anglophone Postcolonial Studies (GAPS)

Since 2019

Science Fiction Research Association (SFRA)

Since 2020

International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts (IAFA)

Non-Academic Working Experience

11/2015 – 01/2021

Pedagogical Assistant

CVJM Sozialwerk Wesermarsch e.V., Berne, Germany

05/2014 – 07/2014

Substitute Teacher

Grundschule Marienschule, Delmenhorst, Germany

11/2012 – 04/2014

PR-Trainee

PR-Agency Corinna Fromm, Bremen, Germany

Further Skills

Languages:

German – native speaker

English – fluent

French – basic language skills

Dutch – basic language skills

Latin proficiency certificate

Software:

MS Office – very well

Stud.IP – very well

HTML/CSS – basic skills

JavaScript – basic skills