

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

MEMORY, SILENCE AND RESISTANCE IN GAYL JONES'
CORREGIDORA AND EVA'S MAN

by
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for the degree of Master of Arts
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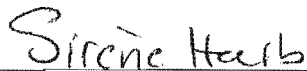
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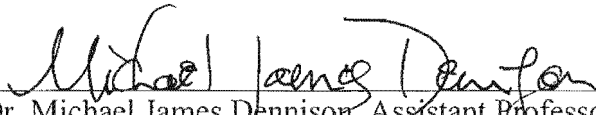
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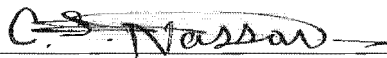
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: Memory, Silence and Resistance in Gayl Jones' *Corregidora* and *Eva's Man*.

Framed by Black Feminism, trauma theory and memory studies, this thesis investigates the complex relationship between memory, silence and resistance in Gayl Jones' two novels *Corregidora* and *Eva's Man*. It explores, in a comparative vein, the ways in which the novels' protagonists, Ursa and Eva, who share a similar history of sexual, racial and social violence, cope with their individual and collective memories and their fragmented personal histories. This study argues that Ursa, by means of communicating her painful memories, manages her trauma in a more constructive way than Eva, who chooses silence and murder to face male oppression and domination. By giving voice to her traumatic memories, Ursa manages not only to work through her pain and trauma, but also to define herself against sexist and racist discourses. Eva, on the other hand, ends up participating in her own destruction, as she internalizes her own objection, suppresses her voice and falls into a self-imposed silence. In its comparative study of the way the two protagonists deal with their memories, this thesis is inspired by phenomenological approaches that tie memory to the body. As such, memory is characterized as having a physical dimension, in the sense that it can be translated corporeally into lived space through physical acts that stem from traumatic experiences and from memories of those experiences. Focusing primarily on sexual acts of aggression and resistance as corporeal and intercorporeal manifestations of the protagonists' unconscious body memory, this thesis shows how Ursa's act of resistance is informed by her understanding of the importance of speech and action whereas Eva's is not. It is actually through this violent act, mediated by modes of speaking and listening, that the protagonist of *Corregidora* manages to unwrap a disturbing family secret and rewrite her traumatic history. As such, she reclaims her agency and subjectivity, in the spirit of the Black Feminist tradition.

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*To
My Beloved Family*

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Characterized by carefully wrought narratives that provide insight into the disturbing mental processes and emotional states of their characters, Jones' *Corregidora* (1975) and *Eva's Man* (1976) continue to dazzle and confound readers, evoking responses that are ambivalent and at times cathartic. *Corregidora*, in particular, has received high praise for its quality and Jones, in turn, has been rightfully commended for writing with both strength and grace, for knowing her heroine Ursa Corregidora inside out and for skillfully using the language of seduction and betrayal. She has also been commended for her mastery of combining improvisational story-telling with sophisticated formal concerns.

Eva's Man, unlike *Corregidora*, has received very little critical attention. In fact, it has suffered harsh political attacks and critical condemnations from critics such as Addison Gayle, Audre Lorde, Darryl Pinckney, Ishmael Reed, John Updike and June Jordan¹. Jones, in this regard has been denounced for her negative portrayals of black men and lesbians and for her strong emphasis on sexual oppression (as opposed to racial oppression). Moreover, she has been accused of writing outside black history and outside the racial fold² (duCille 1993, 559-573).

In both novels, however, Jones establishes a powerful dialectic between

¹ For more on this topic, please see: "All About Eva: *Eva's Man*" by June Jordan (1976); *Black Women and Black Men: The Literature of Catharsis* by Addison Gayle (1976); *Eva and Eleanor and Everywoman* by John Updike (1976); *I am Your Sister: Collected and Unpublished Writings of Audre Lorde* by Audre Lorde (2009) and "Review of *Eva's Man*" by Darryl Pinckney (1976).

² See Watkins' "Sexism, Racism and Black Women Writers" and Hogue's *Discourse and the Other* (1986), especially chapter 5 in his book.

aesthetic experimentation (which is reflected, for instance, in her use of African-American elements such as ritual, myth and repetition and her focus on the blues as form) and the socio-cultural investigation of what it means to be a modern African-American woman. In addition, she portrays violently negative and troubling aspects of African-American culture (such as violence and abuse) alongside its beautiful and graceful qualities. This particular characteristic of Jones' fiction is precisely what alienates her texts from the rather idealistic, self-affirming works of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960's and 70's³ (Clabough, "Afrocentric Recolonizations" 243-251).

In fact, *Corregidora*, which was written in the early 70's, coinciding with the crest and waning of the Black Power Movement, questions the very bases of this movement and challenges Black Aesthetic ideology⁴. Moreover, it provides the basis through which Jones critiques Black Power intellectuals such as Addison Gayle, Amiri Baraka, Huey Newton, Imamu Baraka, Lorraine Hansberry, Maya Angelou, and

³ Some examples of Jones' fictions that work against the political agenda of the Black Arts Movement include the plays *Chile Women* (1974) and "Beyond Yourself (The Midnight Confession) for Brother Ah" (1975) and the short-story collection *White Rat* (1977).

⁴ "The Black Aesthetic," which was initially constructed in the late 1960's and 70's during the Black Art's Movement, refers specifically to the ideologies and perspectives of art that centers around black life and culture. In fact, as the progenitors of "Black Aesthetics" note, it stems from and is enrooted in black history, black culture, black social life and black political behavior (Wright 144-5). Moreover, it provides (along with black artistic production such as literature, music, dance, theatre) black people with the opportunity not only to counter white claims regarding black art and culture, but also to revise their perception of themselves and to find economic, political and cultural empowerment (Wright 149). When it comes to the various connotations pertaining to "Black Aesthetics," Larry Neal suggests first, that the basis for such an aesthetic already exists. As such, it consists of an Afro-American cultural tradition and it encompasses, by implication, most of the useable elements of Third World culture. The main motive behind "Black Aesthetics," he adds, is the destruction of white ideas, white thoughts and white ways of perceiving the world ("The Black Arts Movement" 30). Moreover, the reading codes of this approach, argues Baker, are based on a distinct Afro-American tradition as well as the theoretical standpoint that enables others to see and speak about this tradition (*Blues, Ideology and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* 81).

W.E.B. DuBois who proclaimed cultural forms such as the blues as invalid and non-functional because it imprisoned blacks in their painful past and hindered them, in the process, from addressing the problems of the present (Rushdy 2000, 287-288).

That said, it cannot be denied that both of Jones' fictional works remain essentially Afro-centric, in the sense that they are committed not only to exploring Afro-American consciousness, but also to representing a universal black experience⁵. In particular, *Corregidora*, demonstrates the amalgamation of various cultures; it also demonstrates Jones' ongoing and formative interest in Brazilian history and in the experiences of African-descended people, which she places at the heart of her fictional works.

Corregidora opens with Ursa, a blues singer from Kentucky, recounting the beginning and end of her brief marriage to Mutt Thomas twenty-two years before. As the plot unfolds, it becomes clear that Ursa is descended from a line of women who trace their ancestry to an African woman who was a slave in Brazil. The Portuguese slave owner Corregidora raped Ursa's great-grandmother, an African slave. As a result, Great Gram gave birth to a daughter, Grand mama, whom Corregidora also raped. Eventually, Great Gram left the plantation, but returned years later for her daughter, by that time pregnant with Corregidora's child. They migrated to the United States, eventually settling in Kentucky. There, Grand mama gave birth to a daughter, Mama, who became Ursa's mother.

Ursa's female relatives are committed to the oral transmission of the horrifying tales of enslavement and sexual violence that Great Gram and Grand mama endured in

⁵ For more on this aspect of Jones' work, see: "Afrocentric Recolonizations: Gayl Jones's 1990 Fiction" by Casey Clabough (2005); "An Interview with Gayl Jones" conducted by Charles H. Rowell (1982) and "Gayl Jones: An Interview" conducted by Michael S. Harper (1977).

Brazil. They are determined to keep the story of their oppression alive because there are no official documents that acknowledge their history. They are also committed to “making generations,” meaning giving birth to children who will continue the obsessive narration of the slave master’s atrocities. The novel’s plot involves Ursa’s inability to conceive, the result of an accident caused by her first husband who, in a fit of jealous rage, pushed her down a flight of stairs. Ursa’s barrenness precipitates a multidimensional crisis. She feels sexually neutered, emotionally betrayed and psychologically injured. Above all, she can no longer fulfill the imperative to “make generations,” a tragic reality she must contend with. She explores her traumatized sexuality through a relationship with a second husband as well as two lesbian characters, Catt and Jeffy, who represent an alternative sexuality that attracts yet repels Ursa.

Not unlike *Corregidora*, *Eva’s Man* is told in retrospect and captures in turn, the painful recollections of a psychologically maimed woman. The novel which takes place in upstate New York, centers on the life of Eva, a child who frequently experienced sexual abuse. Through her recollections, we are transported back in time to her early life when she was first sexually abused by Freddy Smoot, a neighborhood boy who used a dirty popsicle stick to deflower her. We later learn of other encounters throughout Eva’s life that also abuse and silence her. The novel ends with Eva killing Davis, a man she met at a bar and had an affair with over the course of a few days. The murder is extremely brutal. Eva first poisons Davis with arsenic and then cuts off his penis, an act that leads to her final incarceration in a prison psychiatric ward.

In its exploration of Jones’ novels, this thesis argues that the protagonist of *Corregidora*, unlike that of *Eva’s Man*, engages with memory in a constructive way that actually helps her resist and forge an identity for herself against the intersecting systems

of oppression that subjugate her. Because she gives voice to and communicates her memories (through the blues and through dialogue with Mutt), she is able to work through her trauma and define herself according to her own terms. In contrast, Eva, by repressing her memories, thoughts and feelings, rather allows and invites the institutional forces to define and circumscribe her. This thesis also argues that the protagonist of *Corregidora* (as opposed to that of *Eva's Man*) reclaims herself by the end of the novel despite the fact she, not unlike the protagonist of *Eva's Man*, resorts to sexualized acts of resistance against her perpetrator. This is because her acts are accompanied by voice, language and action.

In probing the impact of trauma and silence on both protagonists, this thesis benefits from contemporary trauma theories developed by Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, Dori Laub, Judith Lewis Herman, Marianne Hirsch, Maurice Blanchot, Roberta Culbertson, and Bessel A. Van der Kolk and Onno Van Der Hart. It also follows a phenomenological approach when it comes to investigating the ways in which both protagonists deal with and respond to their individual and collective memories and traumatic histories. Finally, this thesis, in evaluating the different approaches used by each protagonist, brings into focus many of the ideas pertaining to Black Feminism, especially those related to the subject of voice, healing and self-definition.

The first chapter reviews the critical scholarship on trauma, silence and resistance in both *Corregidora* and *Eva's Man*. I begin with the critical studies of *Corregidora* that place emphasis on locating psychic and sexual trauma in the novel, focusing specifically on the social and psychological repercussions of having experienced and inherited brutal experiences that are centered on sexual violence and domination. I then move on to the second part of the review on *Corregidora* that is concerned primarily with highlighting the theme of healing, resistance and

reconciliation in the novel.

The second section of the literature review focuses on critical studies of *Eva's Man* that demonstrate the traumatic effects of sexual, racial and patriarchal oppression, particularly on notions of memory and identity. The final part of the review is dedicated to studies that highlight the various ways in which the protagonist resists her objectification and marginalization within the criminal patriarchal system.

After reviewing the body of relevant scholarship, I briefly explain the theoretical methodology I apply in the thesis in order to explore, in a comparative vein, the intricate relationship between memory, silence and resistance in both novels. In the process, I highlight the crucial role of voice and action specifically when it comes to achieving agency and reclaiming black female subjectivity. I begin by offering a brief overview of contemporary trauma theory and survey the fundamental characteristics of trauma which are used to probe *Corregidora* and *Eva's Man*.

I then briefly introduce Thomas Fuch's theory regarding unconscious body memory within the context of trauma so as to further emphasize the disruptive impact of trauma (particularly its infiltration into and contamination of present life) and to compare the different ways in which both protagonists, in their resistant struggle, deal with and respond to the atrocities they have suffered. Taking into account the varied implications of this comparative study, I finally discuss some of the major theories related to Black Feminism in order to highlight the connection between voice and self-definition and to emphasize the importance and necessity of transforming silence into speech and action.

The third chapter commences the structural and thematic analysis of *Corregidora*. In this chapter, I explore the effects of intergenerational trauma on the protagonist's perception of time, memory and self. In this respect, I draw attention to

the disjointed narrative structure, highlighting in the process, the textual and structural patterns that correspond to the narrator's experiences with trauma and her reflections on identity. Continuing with the structural analysis, I specifically explore the belated nature of trauma, highlighting its various manifestations such as nightmares, hallucinations, flashbacks, amnesia, and behavioral reenactments etc., all of which are suffered by the protagonist.

This chapter also shows how the protagonist's personal sense of identity is transformed as a result of the ways in which she deals with trauma and allows it to inform her sense of self. In this chapter, I pay special attention to the role of voice, speech and action, noting how these different notions interact, within the context of trauma, in order to liberate and empower the protagonist.

The fourth chapter of the thesis provides a separate in-depth analysis of *Eva's Man*. In this chapter, I focus on the structural analysis of the novel in order to trace the devastating effects of trauma and silence on the protagonist. I also draw attention to the progressive breakdown of the narrative structure in the novel, capturing the correlation between the collapse of the narrative and the deterioration of the protagonist's mental, emotional and psychological health. The concluding chapter presents the major challenges and limitations that I faced in terms of novel analysis and with reference to my theoretical framework. This chapter also includes a close comparative study of both *Corregidora* and *Eva's Man*. In essence, I compare the disparate ways in which both protagonists, who have been scarred by their traumatic pasts, deal with their individual and collective memories and with their fragmented personal histories. I pay particular attention to how the presence and absence of voice and action play a significant role in terms of determining how each protagonist survives and reclaims herself. This chapter also brings into focus the importance of my study, explaining how it expands an already

existing framework pertaining to the study of trauma and memory and how it adds to the existing scholarship on both *Corregidora* and *Eva's Man*.

The exploration of trauma, silence and resistance in Jones' *Corregidora* and *Eva's Man* reveals important links between memory, history, and storytelling in the context of the Black Feminist tradition. Probing the social and psychological repercussions of psychic and sexual trauma (as suffered by both primary and secondary victims) unravels multiple layers of oppression related to racial, sexual and patriarchal violence that heavily mark the protagonists of both novels. The critical approaches to the analysis of these themes and connections will be surveyed in the next chapter in order to provide an overview of the literature on these topics and examine the relationship between trauma, silence and resistance in the novels under discussion.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW OF *CORREGIDORA* AND *EVA'S MAN*

This chapter provides a review of the literature on *Corregidora* and *Eva's Man* in order to highlight the literary/critical conversations revolving around the issues of trauma, resistance and silence in both novels. In the first section, I review critical studies of *Corregidora* that demonstrate how psychic and sexual trauma (whether experienced directly or indirectly) affect the personal and social lives of individuals and distort in the process notions of identity. I then review critical studies that encapsulate the interplay of trauma, resistance and reclamation in *Corregidora*.

In particular, I focus on how certain notions such as voice, memory and sexuality interact to catalyze processes of healing and self-definition. In the second section, I review critical studies of *Eva's Man* that highlight the traumatic repercussions of being victimized by racial, sexual and patriarchal violence, as suffered by the black female subject. I then review studies that highlight some of the unique strategies of resistance employed by the protagonist in her quest to combat oppression and achieve autonomy.

A. Trauma, Resistance and Reclamation in *Corregidora*

1. Trauma in *Corregidora*

Numerous *Corregidora* scholars, relying on contemporary theories pertaining to trauma and memory studies, psychoanalysis, and black feminism, address the issue of trauma in the novel. They focus majorly on the social and psychological repercussions that trauma has on those who are direct victims of traumatic events and those who are

witnesses to those events. Accordingly, this section of the literature review examines studies that reference critical approaches to sexual and psychic trauma within the context of racial slavery in *Corregidora*.

A group of critics such as Abdennebi Ben Beya, Amy S. Gottfried, Ashraf H. A. Rushdy, Camille Passalacqua, Gil Zehava Hochberg, Jennifer Griffiths, Joanna Lipson Freed, Joyce Pettis, Madhu Dubey, Sirene Harb and Stephanie Li, link trauma to maternal memory and history (filtered through the memory of traumatized victims) and identify the black female reproductive body as a locus of traumatic memory and physical violence. They note how the bodies of Ursa and Mama, in particular, suffer pain and objectification under the mandate of their maternal ancestors. They also note the physical, emotional and psychological suffering that Ursa and Mama go through, as a result of bearing witness to a history that is dominated by sexual violence and victimization. Passalacqua, for instance, argues that the black female reproductive body is a site of traumatic memory because it serves as means by which the *Corregidora* women (who rely on biological reproduction and repetitive story-telling) can remember and preserve their traumatic past.

Griffiths concurs that Ursa and Mama, impacted by the traumatic narratives of their ancestors, suffer not only mentally and psychologically (especially as past memories permeate and interrupt their present life) but also physically. This holds true as their bodies function primarily as vehicles for the transmission of traumatic stories. These stories, Griffiths explains, are hazardous in that they are “fixed within a cultural framework that implicates the female body in its own trauma” (2006, 353-4). Ursa’s body in particular, suffers from the numbing effects of trauma. In her sexual encounters with men, she is unable to feel or enjoy sexual pleasure, hence her alienation from her own sexuality.

Li (2006) similarly argues that the bodies of Ursa and Mama suffer objectification through their maternal ancestors' injunction of procreation, which in turn, "convert[s] the female body into a form of documentation" (2006, 132). Burdened by machine-like reproduction, the bodies of the Corregidora descendants thus become objectified and reduced to a "political commodity" (Gottfried 1994, 561) as their ancestors continue their abuse in their injunction to "make generations" and crystallize the past. As Hochberg further states: "In witnessing, Ursa 'inherits' her mothers' trauma, which literally becomes her own" (2003, 4). Haunted by the past in every aspect of her present life (social and personal), Ursa suffers the repercussions of being a Corregidora descendant.

Because their memories depend on modes of reproduction and compulsive repetition, Ursa and Mama become entrapped in a cycle of abuse and in a violent history to which they actually have no real claim to. Their entire identities become centered upon their ability to reproduce and perpetuate the histories of their ancestors (Dubey 1994; Harb 2008; Hochberg 2003; Rushdy 2000). Stressing the traumatic impact of maternal memory on those who act as witness, Dubey contributes that it "imprison[s] the Corregidora women in a history that is not of their making...their possession of history gives them...nothing other than the history of their own dispossession"(1994, 6).

Beya, Freed, Horvitz, Li and Pettis concur that the history of the Corregidora ancestors is traumatic and even damaging to the life of Ursa. Li (2006), however, suggests that these historical tales can be constructive in the sense that they, nevertheless, provide Great Gram and Gram with the opportunity to vent their frustrations, articulate their pain and consequently, work through their trauma. Not unlike Li (2006), Freed argues that traumatic narratives can, paradoxically, provide the opportunity for the re-narration and retelling of a traumatic past. Offering a fresh

perspective in her analysis of trauma, she claims that the language of trauma in the novel is gendered and provides insight into the traumatic legacy of black men.

A few critics such as Gottfried, Li and Rushdy locate forms of silence within ancestral narratives as the major source of the Corregidora descendants' psychic trauma. Rushdy describes this silence as "the phantom [that] haunts not only the Corregidora family but also the family narrative" (2000, 279). Li (2006) similarly argues that the narrative silence regarding the reason that Great Gram had to flee the Corregidora plantation is the major reason behind the emotional stress and the psychological pain that her descendants suffer. Gottfried (1994) also identifies this narrative silence as one of the main sources of Ursa's objectification.

Horvitz identifies two major sources of Ursa's trauma, which mark her physically, mentally and psychologically. These sources include "[the] culturally instituted and legally sanctioned sadomasochism –slavery" and "[the] individual and psychological sadomasochism –domestic violence and incest" (1998, 238). Horvitz refers to the first as "external trauma" and the second as "internal trauma" (1998, 239). This two folded sadomasochism present in her life informs both her personal identity and the relationship that she has to the social world.

When it comes to evidence of psychic trauma, Griffiths argues that the non-linear structure of the novel, whereby lines demarcating past and present are obscured, is evidence of Ursa's traumatic memories. On another level, Beya argues that the very language of traumatized victims, which is often "filled with holes and digressions" (2010, 99), is indicative not only of their traumatic memory but their overall traumatic state.

Probing Ursa's mental and psychological state, Bruce Simon asserts that Ursa, in her final return to Mutt, regresses rather into "a hopeless entrapment in a vicious

cycle of abuse” (1997, 102-3). Goldberg (2003), however, suggests that it is not so much Ursa’s final return to Mutt that raises concern, but rather the silence that accompanies that return. The fact that Ursa remains silent towards the very end—whereby she does not voice her desire for cunnilingus—is indicative not only of her divorce from erotic pleasure, but more importantly of her return to trauma.

2. Resistance and Reclamation in Corregidora

This thesis aims to examine the role of voice/speech and action in achieving agency and reclaiming black female subjectivity. Presumably, the protagonist is expected not only to recuperate from trauma, but also to resist oppression and finally, to achieve reconciliation with the past. Many scholars concur that the protagonist manages to overcome trauma and define herself through the blues songs.

Some stress the importance of speech and memory, while others foreground the expression and liberation of sexual love and desire as indispensable to the process of self-reconfiguration. This section of the literature review evaluates key studies that highlight issues of identity reclamation in the novel, especially concerning how the protagonist challenges dominant narratives and achieves a full sense of self.

A group of critics such as Bernard W. Bell, Donia Elizabeth Allen, Freed, Gottfried, Griffiths, Harb, Horvitz, Houston Baker, Janice Harris, Jennifer Cognard, Keith Byerman, Li, Melvin Dixon, Passalacqua, Pettis and Rushdy concur that voice (expressed through song and speech) and memory (particularly of traumatic events) function as powerful and effective tools that enable Ursa not only to undermine her silence and objectification, but also to heal and reconfigure herself. They note how the blues help Ursa—who is no longer able to “make generations” through procreation after her tragic fall—document and share her experiences. The blues also provide Ursa with

the medium necessary to communicate and manage her pain.

Gottfried (1994), for instance, asserts that the blues enable Ursa to work against the political agenda of her maternal ancestors who rely solely on reproduction and story-telling as a means to preserve their brutal past. Through singing, Ursa is able to give testimony to her past (in her own terms) and to transgress the enforced silence of her family's history. She is also able to "retell the Corregidora family history," (Passalacqua 2010, 157) and to stop the cycle of abuse perpetuated by her ancestors.

Rushdy (2000) similarly argues that the blues serve as an effective strategy of resistance since it allows Ursa to communicate and translate her pain into an art form, hence the transformation of the inherited traumatic tales. This articulation of trauma is constructive precisely because it "seeks the development of a unified self...through the struggle for agency" (Li 2006, 138). Moreover, the blues offer Ursa the opportunity to liberate, express and even celebrate her (non-reproductive) sexuality which had long been repressed under her maternal ancestor's mandate (Dubey 1994, Li 2006, Rushdy 2000).

Allen, Dixon, Gottfried, Horvitz and Li agree that speech (which is manifested through Ursa's imaginary conversations and final "ritualized dialogue" with Mutt) serves as a catalyst to the process of Ursa's psychic healing and to the transmutation of her ancestor's narrative. These imaginary conversations, as Li (2006) argues, provide Ursa with important arenas for self-expression and for the exploration of pain. According to Horvitz (1998), they also help Ursa create a narrative for herself, which consequently allows for the control and management of the intrusive past.

Dixon concurs that Ursa's speech (which she uses openly and artistically) actually stands as "evidence for the *regeneration* [she] and Mutt experience" (2006, 112; original emphasis). Cognard-Black (2013, however, argues that it is rather Ursa's

rhetoric of silence that offers resistance to the patriarchal, racial and sexual violence that dominates her life.

On another note, Ursa's integration of past memories into her present life, though traumatic at times, actually allows for the rewriting of the Corregidora history and for Ursa's ensuing liberation from the patterns of abuse implicit in the pledge of her maternal ancestors (Cognard-Black 2013; Dixon 2006; Freed 2011; Harb 2008; Pettis 1990; Rushdy 2000). It is only when Ursa, upon fellating Mutt, revisits the past (particularly the story of Great Gram and that of Palmares) that she is able to "redefin[e] her position vis-à-vis the Corregidora intergenerational tale and rerea[d] the history of her present..." (Harb 2008, 127).

Few critics such as Ann duCille, Dubey, Gottfried, Horvitz, Li and Rushdy concur that Ursa manages, in the end, to reclaim her body and empower herself through her sexual union with Mutt. Taking into account the fact that Ursa's maternal ancestors discouraged her from engaging in any heterosexual relationship that did not fulfill reproductive needs, Dubey (1994) argues that Ursa's choice to relate her stories to a male addressee and to create space for the possibility of an enduring relationship with Mutt signifies not only her break from the matrilineal paradigm but also her more basic need for masculine love and desire.

In agreement, Rushdy asserts that Ursa's final decision to forgive and love Mutt—despite her privileged position of sexual power over him during oral sex—is what makes it possible for her to change "her own position within the family narrative from a state of debilitating possession...to a state of healthy intersubjectivity" (2000, 286). Li similarly argues that Ursa gains strength and empowerment by turning to action (sexual as it is) that ultimately "reflects the contradiction of her desire" (2006, 147).

By contrast, duCille (1993) suggests that Ursa's sexual act is one of self-

silencing since she trades in actively singing the blues for silently fellating and pleasing Mutt. Offering a fresh perspective on resistance and reclamation, Robinson suggests that Ursa reclaims herself by mimicking and subverting the stereotypical images that are usually associated with black women. As Ursa threatens to fellate Mutt, she mimics the jezebel figure; however, it is through situating herself within this very cultural stereotype that Ursa actually subverts the structures of domination that subjugate her (Robinson 1991).

B. Trauma and Resistance in *Eva's Man*

1. Trauma in *Eva's Man*

A group of critics such as Biman Basu, Byerman, Casey Clabough, Clara Escada Agusti, Dubey, Françoise Lionnet, Hershini Baha Young and Quashie link trauma to acts of witnessing (pertaining particularly to sexual violence and domination) and to notions of memory, identifying the black female body as a locus of sexual, racial and patriarchal violence .

In their study of *Eva's Man*, they note how the body of Eva, in particular, suffers pain and objectification as a result of the societal expectations of race and gender. They also note the impact of Eva's experiences of sexual abuse and exploitation on her mental, emotional and psychological health.

Young (2005), for instance, argues that Eva, living in a society structured by racism and sexism, suffers the harsh consequences of racial indignities and patriarchal violence. In her attempt to defend herself against sexual harassment and violation, Eva, in fact, ends up brutally confined and incarcerated. Due to the prevailing social constructions regarding black women, black crime and black sexuality, Eva's resistant agency is reinterpreted by the State as brutal criminality.

In addition, her body suffers objectification under the powerful white gaze of the male authorities who, in resorting to simplistic explanations regarding the motive behind her crime and associating her black body with deviancy, “disciplin[e] Eva’s body, subject[t] it to surveillance and erasure and also ‘epidermalize’ it...” (Young 2005, 387).

Eva is objectified by other female characters as well who, in their sexual overtures, prove as fierce as the abusive men in her life. In addition to physical trauma, Eva suffers mental and emotional trauma, exacerbated otherwise by the traumatic act of witnessing her father’s violent rape of her mother (Agusti 2005). In witnessing this rape, Eva is taught (by her father) “the violent inevitable consequences of her womanhood” (Byerman 1980, 96).

Clabough (2006) and Ward (1982) concur that Eva’s traumatic experiences of sexual abuse and violence affect both her social and personal life. These experiences not only shape her notions of identity, but they also determine her relationships with men and weaken, in the process, her ability to resist oppression.

These traumatic experiences, moreover, lead to Eva’s constant struggle with memory. Quashie, in this respect, asserts that the non-linear structure of Eva’s first-person narrative (which is marked by continuous shifts between past and present) reflects nothing other than “the indisputable truth of one woman’s struggle with memory...” (2004, 117). Not unlike Quashie, Dubey (1994) argues that the structure of the novel—whereby scenes are duplicated and phrases are repeated by different characters—stands as a powerful reflection of Eva’s imprisonment in her traumatic past. Taking Eva’s traumatic history into account, her crime (represented by her murder and castration of Davis) actually speaks her defiance against the brutalities she has suffered under the criminal patriarchal system that represses and objectifies her (Agusti 2005;

Basu 1996; Byerman 1980; Young 2005).

2. Resistance in Eva's Man

In her article “Geographies of Pain: Captive Bodies and Violent Acts in the Fictions of Myriam Warner-Vieyra, Gayl Jones, and Bessie Head,” Lionnet encapsulates the interplay of trauma and resistance in the novel. She contends that, “though victimized by patriarchal social structures that perpetuate their invisibility and dehumanization, black female characters actively resist their objectification to the point of committing murder” (1993, 133). This section of the literature review, accordingly, examines critical analyses of the novel which focus on ways in which the protagonist negotiates prevailing structures of power and domination.

A group of critics such as Agusti, Basu, Clabough, Gayl Jones, Janelle Wilcox, Lionnet, Quashie, Robinson and Young concur that silence, as employed by the protagonist, functions both as an effective strategy of resistance against patriarchal control and violence and as a strong affirmation of self, particularly against the sexist and racist definitions imposed by the hegemonic discourse.

Lionnet (1993), for example, argues that Eva intentionally resorts to silence (especially as she refuses to provide her own statement to the police and to answer the psychiatrist’s questions after her murder of Davis) in order to refute the phallogentric representations assigned to her by the State and to protect her autonomy. As a black female, Eva knows that the odds are against her and that she will always be viewed, despite the truth, not as a victim of sexual abuse, but rather as a sexual predator. Moreover, she knows that her story will never be believed. Speaking about it, in fact, would not only provide others with the opportunity to control her, but it would also compromise the complexity of her actions. Her silence therefore is her power and her

way of keeping others at bay (Lionnet 1993, 144).

Robinson concurs that Eva's silence, though seemingly passive, is her way of subverting the dominant discourse because by choosing what to say and what not to say, she manages to "weav[e] her own narrative that follows its own logic," (1991, 169) and to remain in a position of power. Not unlike Robinson, Clabough argues that Eva's silence strengthens her position of power because "her enigmatic story and motive(s) for murder remain all her own" (2006, 649). Young (2005), agreeing with the above critics, adds that Eva's silence also serves to protect her body from the objectifying gaze of the white male authorities who associate her phenotype with deviancy and savagery.

By contrast, Audre Lorde, Dixon, Michael Cooke and Ward argue that Eva's silence is a form of passivity that rather invites and encourages the very patriarchal representations that demean her. By refusing to speak, as these critics argue, Eva accepts the words and definitions of others and compromises, in the process, her own integrity.

Dixon (2006) and Ward (1982) also argue that Eva's blind mimicry of the debilitating stereotypes often associated with black women (such as the image of the jezebel and sapphire) is what leads to her downfall. Lionnet (1993), Robinson (1991) and Quashie, on the other end of the spectrum, argue that Eva's resistance is rather achieved through mimicking those very hegemonic representations. Robinson (1991), for example, argues that Eva, literalizing the image of the sapphire in her castration of Davis, actually undermines the dominant discourse. Eva's over-identification with the mythological representations associated with black womanhood is precisely what catalyzes her agency.

A group of critics such as Agusti, Basu, Byerman, Davison, duCille, Henderson, Lionnet and Young concur that Eva's violence (particularly her murder and

mutilation of Davis) is actually an expression of her fierce rejection of patriarchal and sexual violence and of her will to define herself according to her own terms. Basu, for example, argues that Eva, abused by every man in her life and oppressed by a legal system that judges her on the basis of her race and sex, resorts to violence as a “response to the violence inherent in the logic of explanatory categories” (1996, 203).

Eva’s dismemberment of Davis in particular signifies an attack not only on the penis, but more importantly on the entire patriarchal system, represented otherwise by the omnipresent phallus (Agusti 2005; duCille 1993). This dismemberment also serves as a type of “redemptive ritual” in the sense that it heals the social illness of society (which is basically misogyny) and restores (through sacrificing Davis) the health and well-being of its members (Davison 1995, 399).

On a related note, the lesbian exchange that takes place in the prison cell between Eva and Elvira—whereby the former manages, for the first time, to feel and speak her sexual pleasures—is viewed by a number of critics, including Basu, Byerman, duCille, Lionnet and Sweeney, as a form of resistance to the criminal patriarchal system that regards heterosexual relations as normative. This alternative woman-identified space, they argue, actually allows Eva to escape the politics of male aggression and power and to find the peace and empowerment she has long been seeking.

In addition, a number of critics including Basu, Claudia Tate, Davison and Sweeney agree that Eva’s first-person narrative—whereby she recalls and relates the traumatic events of her life—helps her subvert the dominant discourse and maintain some degree of agency. Davison, for example, asserts that Eva’s narrative, though inconsistent, undermines the dominant discourse since it stands as a testimony to her history and survival.

Sweeney concurs that Eva’s agency is achieved precisely through her endeavor

to “tell her story in her own terms and on her own time” (2004, 463). Alternatively, Byerman (1980), Clabough (2006) and Dubey (1994) suggest that Eva’s narrative, which is characterized by its cyclic structure, points to nothing other than her hopeless regression into madness.

The above discussion shows the complex interplay between sexual, racial, psychological and social tensions permeating literary analyses of *Corregidora* and *Eva’s Man*. In their examination of the manifestations and dramatic repercussions of trauma and history on black female subjects, these analyses demonstrate the connections between trauma and resistance. In the process, they also highlight the various implications of such connections, particularly when it comes to healing, self-definition and empowerment. After this brief overview of the literature on Jones’ novels, I offer in the next chapter an explanation of the theoretical framework I use to analyze both novels. I also highlight the most salient features of trauma, memory, and resistance in *Corregidora* and *Eva’s Man* and discuss some of the major notions related to black feminism so as to provide context for the analysis of the protagonists’ disparate approaches and clarify the connection between voice and self-definition.

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This comparative study on the intricate relationship of memory, silence and resistance in Jones' *Corregidora* and *Eva's Man* is framed by trauma theories, memory studies and Black Feminism. Tracing the impact of trauma in both novels, this study relies on contemporary theories related to trauma, particularly those developed by Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, Dori Laub, Judith Lewis Herman, Marianne Hirsch, Maurice Blanchot, Roberta Culbertson, and Bessel A. Van der Kolk and Onno Van Der Hart.

In this study, I explore the ways in which both protagonists, who have been scarred by their abusive and traumatic pasts, deal with their individual and collective memories and with their fragmented personal histories. In this context, I show the impact of trauma and silence on the black female subject, revealing in the process the sheer force and power of past traumas to invade and contaminate present life and to fragment notions of memory, reality and identity.

When it comes to the subject of memory, this study follows Thomas Fuch's phenomenological approach, which, by and large, ties memory to the body. In this respect, memory is said to have a physical dimension; it can be translated corporeally into lived space through physical acts that are tied to traumatic experiences and to memories of those experiences. Situating Jones' novels within this framework, this study focuses on sexualized acts of resistance as corporeal manifestations of the protagonists' unconscious body memory.

It also compares the ways in which both protagonists, who resort to sexualized

acts of resistance, endeavor to reclaim themselves and their lives. Their approaches, as this comparative study shows, differ in terms of presence and absence of voice and forms of agency. The varied implications resulting from these disparate approaches foreground the interconnection between voice and self-definition. It is precisely this interconnection between voice and self-definition, particularly against racism and sexism that constitutes the core of black feminism.

Many black feminist scholars, in fact, such as Audre Lorde, Barbara Christian, Barbara Smith, bell hooks, Mae Gwendolyn Henderson, Patricia Hill Collins and Toni Morrison have stressed the importance and necessity of transforming silence into speech and action as a form of resistance against oppressive structures and forms of exclusion from literature, history and memory. They have also probed the role of voice and language in mediating processes of healing, self-definition and forms of empowerment in the context of the Black Feminist tradition.

In her seminal book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*, Collins, for instance, discusses Black Feminist Thought as a critical and social theory and underlines the theme of resistance and self-definition (particularly against the intersecting systems of oppression) as integral to the literary tradition of black women. Black women, she argues, have had to struggle against socially constructed images of their womanhood that originated from the slavery era.

These images, advanced by elite groups, have been used to provide ideological justification for gender, racial and class oppression. They have also been used to provide justification for the sexual exploitation and commodification of black women's bodies. Nevertheless, these images have simultaneously motivated black women to find a voice and to use that voice to deconstruct stereotypical images of black womanhood. This process paved the way for the reclamation of the uniqueness and specificity of their

lived experience and struggles (2008, 69-70, 93).

Because black women recognize the contradictions that exist between those controlling images and the truth of their daily lives and experiences, they endeavor not only to resist internalizing their objectification (a process that requires tremendous strength in the face of the prevailing systems of oppression) but also to define themselves and their realities in their own terms. This process of self-definition (which calls for the active use of voice) is urged and encouraged by black women writers who themselves rely on the authority of concrete and lived experiences in order to portray (through their fictions) the truth about who they are and how they live (2008, 99).

Committed to the creation of “oppositional knowledges,” (2008, 10) these black women writers stress the importance of and even encourage other black women like themselves to seek out “institutional sites” (2008, 101) such as the extended family, black churches and organizations and the blues music. These “institutional sites” are actually paramount to the Black Feminist tradition since they offer strategies of resistance to the ideologies of the dominant group and provide important arenas for self-expression and empowerment.

Not unlike Collins, hooks highlights the importance of voice and language as a prerequisite to the definition and reclamation of self (particularly against the social constructions that objectify black women). Language, she argues, though used to oppress and dominate, can actually be used for the expression of creative power and more importantly, for the fostering of resistance in situations of domination. Speaking, she postulates, is “an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges the politics of domination that would render us nameless and voiceless” (“Talking Back” 2008, 8).

It is a courageous act that provides black women and other colonized groups with the opportunity to name themselves, to heal from victimization and finally, to

“mov[e] from object to subject” (“Talking Back” 2008, 9). hooks herself, inspired by the world of “woman talk,” as she was growing up, resolved to break her own silence and make speech, voice and authorship her birthright (“Talking Back” 2008, 6).

In her public meditation on silence regarding breast cancer, Lorde, not unlike the above scholars, underlines speech as vital to the processes of self-construction and definition. Speech is also vital when it comes to bridging differences with other women across different national and cultural borders. It is true that speech carries the risk of misunderstanding and misjudgment; however, it does equally offer the possibility of naming and defining the self, a privilege that cannot be sacrificed.

Language, moreover, represents freedom whereas silence provides only the illusion of protection. “Your silence will not protect you,” Lorde asserts in *I am Your Sister* (2008, 41). Silence, she adds, “immobilizes us” and amounts rather to self-destruction and betrayal especially when it is preserved by violence (“I am Your Sister” 2008, 44).

Sharing the same opinion with the above scholars, Toni Morrison and Barbara Smith equally stress the importance of breaking silence particularly in the literary world. In “Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature,” Morrison, for instance, discusses how the traditional literary canon initially excluded works of minority groups (particularly African Americans) on grounds of race. Because black art and black people were viewed as inferior, their works were neither recognized nor viewed as worthy of being incorporated into the canon.

The canon, however, eventually expanded and came to include the literary works of black writers who, given the opportunity of voice and representation, spoke out against racial oppression and other forms of subjugation pertaining to black (2008, 6, 8-9). Morrison finally concludes her discussion by stressing the importance of black

people coming to voice and using that voice to tell their stories and to represent themselves. Black people, she asserts, are the subjects of their own narratives and the participants in their own experience and only they can and must define who they are.

Not unlike Morrison, Smith underlines the importance of black women coming to voice and using that voice to represent themselves and their experiences, especially in the literary world. The issues of black women, she argues, have been either ignored or misrepresented in both mainstream and African-American literature due to racism and sexism. To rectify the situation, however, it is vital that black women break their silence and speak up and for themselves. Moreover, there has been a silence regarding the concerns of black lesbian literature (even within the works of black women writers).

This silence is the result of the homophobia that exists in black communities. It is also the result of black women's efforts to preserve the only privilege that they have in the face of the intersecting systems of oppression, which is their "heterosexual" privilege. Nevertheless, these silences, Smith argues, need to be broken for the sake of healing, liberation and empowerment, all of which merge to constitute the major goal of Black Feminist Thought.

In relation to *Corregidora*, this study benefits from the theories of Caruth and Hirsch, particularly when it comes to explicating how the protagonist is impacted (physically, mentally, psychologically and socially) by intergenerational trauma. Trauma, as these scholars demonstrate, does not have to be experienced directly; it can be inherited, in fact, through the mere act and process of simply listening to the trauma of another. In other words, listening to the trauma of another can actually evoke (in the listener) a traumatic response.

Laub, in this respect, argues that acts of testimony actually bind listeners to tellers of traumatic narratives. Listeners, who join in the struggle of victims, eventually,

come to feel and know from within all of latter's victories, defeats, conflicts and silences. As such, listeners come to incorporate the event within themselves and end up, in the process, so emotionally and psychologically involved that they even experience (to some degree) the trauma from within.

Laub and Felman actually describe the situation of listening to traumatic narratives from the perspective of traumatized subjects as (to those who listen) running the risk of having "suddenly—without a warning—one's whole grip on one's experience and one's life shake[n] up" ("*Testimony* xvi-xvii). Incorporating the traumatic event may come with an emotional cost; however, it is the only way that listeners can actually deliver and carry out their function as listeners.

Caruth's and LaCapra's notion of the belated reception of trauma and its diffusion into new spaces and time also informs this study. According to these scholars, traumatic events are not fully experienced at the moment they occur. The trauma is usually experienced after a period of delay. When it transpires, it takes on various manifestations such as dreams, flashbacks, hallucinations and behavioral reenactment, all of which function to further traumatize the victim. This particular structure of the reception of trauma is precisely what leads Caruth to describe it as "the narrative of a belated experience... [that] rather attests to its endless impact on a life" (*Unclaimed* 7).

In *Corregidora*, the protagonist's trauma is manifested (belatedly) through intrusive dreams, memories, thoughts, hallucinations, flashbacks and episodes of dissociation. Her sense of time, memory and self suffer fragmentation as well, evident in the incoherent structure of her first-person narrative, which actually functions as a memory process.

Trauma scholars such as Caruth, Culbertson, Herman, LaCapra and Van der Kolk and Van der Hart, in fact, emphasize that traumatic experiences usually have the

power to distort ordinary notions of memory, time and narrative. These experiences, moreover—as Caruth, Blanchot, Herman and LaCapra note—are never final; they continue to resurface and live on in the present, making survival almost unbearable. As Caruth puts it, “[F]or those who undergo trauma, it is not only the moment of the event, but of the passing of it that is traumatic; ... *survival itself*, in other words, *can be a crisis*” (*Explorations* 9; italics original).

The protagonist’s post-traumatic experience actually demonstrates this point. As she is unable to neither exorcize the brutal past nor comprehend the tragic present, her life becomes a constant struggle to return to death or oblivion. The protagonist, however, manages to find a means of escape and a source of healing from the traumatic legacy she has inherited. She turns to the comfort of the blues, which eventually becomes her way of remembering and testifying to the past. Through the blues, in fact, she investigates her trauma and communicates her most heart-felt feelings and emotions.

This method of remembering and communicating the pain of the past is actually espoused by trauma scholars such as Caruth, Culbertson, Herman, Hirsch, LaCapra and Laub. In fact, these scholars vehemently stress the importance and necessity of communication (after encountering trauma) in the presence of an active and empathic listener. This process, they argue, is vital to the process of recovery and survival; it helps the victim acknowledge the realness of the traumatic event and of his/her feelings.

Moreover, it gives the victim the chance to step back and examine his/her feelings, providing clarity and perspective; it also allows for the production of a social discourse and for historical transmission. This interplay of trauma, history and testimony is precisely what leads to Caruth’s conclusion that “the history of a trauma, in

its inherent belatedness, can only take place through the listening of another”

(*Explorations* 11).

When it comes to the protagonist’s engagement with memory and with acts of resistance (as a response to the traumas that she has suffered), this study relies on a combination of Fuch’s phenomenological theory regarding the unconscious and body memory and on contemporary trauma theories. In this part of the study, I incorporate Fuch’s theory regarding corporeal and intercorporeal manifestations of the unconscious (related otherwise to traumatic experiences and memories of those experiences) in order to show the impact of trauma on the protagonist and to underline the basis of her sexualized act of resistance.

From this standpoint, I specifically argue that the protagonist, though involved in sexualized (potentially violent) acts of resistance, manages in the end to reclaim herself because she engages with memory constructively and with acts of resistance that are accompanied by voice and speech. Because the protagonist had already given testimony through her music, upon reuniting with her husband/perpetrator, she is able to return to and reconnect with her ancestral past without replicating it.

Because her exchange with her husband/perpetrator, moreover, is based on modes of listening and speaking—as encouraged by contemporary trauma scholars who emphasize that communication prevents the resurgence of past traumas—she is able to rewrite her family history and actually find liberation and empowerment in a potentially destructive, lethal act.

Not unlike *Corregidora*, *Eva’s Man* is informed by contemporary trauma theories and Fuch’s phenomenological theory regarding the unconscious. In my comparative study, I juxtapose the protagonists’ engagement with memory and trauma, arguing that *Eva’s Man* protagonist’s method is destructive since it prevents processes

of self-definition and recuperation from trauma. In this study, I link the protagonist's experience of trauma to her deliberate acts of silence and violence, which come to shape not only her response to her traumatic history (of sexual and patriarchal violence) but also to her overall perception of self and world.

I draw on the theories of Blanchot, Caruth, Culbertson, LaCapra, Laub and Van der Kolk and Van der Hart who actually foreground silence not only as a consequence of trauma but also as its perpetuation. Silence, they concur, must be broken; the traumatic event needs to be told and transmitted to another person outside the self. If silence is retained, the victim will be at risk of suffering severe ruptures in their perception of memory, time, narrative and identity.

The protagonist, as this study shows, exhibits this very symptom. Her first-person narrative—whereby she recalls and narrates the traumatic events of her life—actually provides insight into her fractured memory and sense of time and direction. Moreover, as the above scholars concur, when victims repress their memories and emotions, they end up compulsively repeating and perpetuating their own trauma. The trauma, in fact, returns literally to them (after a period of delay) in various forms and manifestations, hence the notion of trauma's belatedness.

This study shows how the protagonist's trauma manifests through intrusive dreams, flashbacks, hallucinations and even behavioral reenactments. The non-chronological structure of the novel, in this regard, serves to provide insight into the protagonist's tortured mental, emotional and psychological state and her ensuing possession by her traumatic past. This study also shows (through the protagonist) the consequences of traumatic recall and how it affects the precision and accuracy of narrative.

Trauma scholars such as Caruth, Culbertson and Laub, in this regard, actually

foreground that traumatic recall and narrative is characterized by the lack of accuracy, veracity and authority. Nevertheless, the traumatic story, as they argue needs to be remembered and told (in the presence of an empathic listener), an action that the protagonist of *Eva's Man*, unfortunately, does not take.

In this comparative study, I juxtapose the protagonist's final act of resistance (against her perpetrator) with that of *Corregidora's* protagonist. I argue specifically that *Eva's Man* protagonist's sexual act of resistance does not help her define or reclaim herself (as opposed to *Corregidora's* protagonist) because her acts are devoid of voice/speech. Her life-long repression, in fact, encourages acts of resistance that only perpetuate her trauma, leading to her final downfall and destruction.

Borrowing from Fuch's theory regarding corporeal manifestations of unconscious body memory, I focus on silence and (sexual) violence as corporeal manifestations of Eva's unconscious. I argue that her repressed trauma, which stems from her traumatic experiences and memories, eventually finds release through physical acts of sexual violence and aggression. Her repressed trauma, moreover, invades her present life, dictating her present and future actions. It is precisely what inspires her to kill and mutilate her perpetrator, which she also does in silence.

Her initial silence (throughout her years of sexual abuse and patriarchal violence) actually initiates her into further silence and trauma. This notion, in fact, is emphasized by trauma scholars such as Caruth, LaCapra and Van der Kolk and Van der Hart who concur that repression leads to traumatic repetition, a consequence that *Eva's Man* protagonist faces and suffers.

Establishing a dialogue between Jones' two novels *Corregidora* and *Eva's Man*, this study probes both the impact of trauma and silence on the black female subject and the interconnection between voice and self-definition. This interconnection

between voice and self-definition in particular actually constitutes one of the major tenets of Black Feminism. In the Black Feminist tradition, in fact, coming to voice is viewed as an effective way for black women to engage in active self-resistance and definition against the social constructions that objectify them.

Speech and action, moreover, are believed in the Black Feminist tradition, to provide black women with the tools necessary to create an oppositional discourse and to disrupt public truths about who they are and how they live. They are also believed to help black women reclaim their humanity in a system that, unfortunately, gains strength from objectifying them.

Speech and action are precisely the tools that the protagonist of *Corregidora* resorts to in her struggle to discover and define herself. Her journey towards self-definition, however, was not without hardship and pain. In fact, she suffered many trials and tribulations which actually motivated her to find her voice within. It was her tenacious search for and use of voice that gave her the strength not only to challenge her oppressors but also to define herself and rewrite her history.

The same, however, cannot be said of the protagonist of *Eva's Man* who actually participates in her own destruction. By choosing to repress her speech, memories and thoughts, she resorts to impulses of anger and revenge which eventually lead to the perpetuation of her trauma. Her silences, in other words, fixate her in her own trauma, paralyzing her will to resist oppression and to define herself. In contrast, the protagonist of *Corregidora* transforms her silence into speech and action, a brave gesture that hooks describes as one of “defiance that heals [and] that makes new life and new growth possible” (“Talking Back” 2008, 9).

In its structural and thematic analysis of *Corregidora*, the third chapter uses the above mentioned theories in order to demonstrate the manifold manifestations and

repercussions of trauma (especially on notions of memory, time and identity) on the protagonists. It also probes the repercussions of the interplay between trauma, memory and voice and their significance in shaping the protagonists' sense of self.

CHAPTER IV

TRAUMA, MEMORY, AND RESISTANCE IN *CORREGIDORA*

Caruth's theory that, "the traumatized... carry an impossible history within them or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess" (24) actually encapsulates the relationship between trauma and history, explicating in the process the mental, emotional and psychological pain that the narrator of *Corregidora* suffers. The narrator's experience of trauma is, in fact, a direct result of her being intimately connected to, and even obsessed with, not only her personal history but also with that of her ancestors. Imprisoned and implicated in the latter's historical traumas (tied to outrageous experiences of sexual violence and domination), the narrator, herself, admits: "Shit, we're all consequences of something. Stained with another's past as well as our own" (*Corregidora* 45).

As the inheritor of a matrilineal legacy of slavery, Ursa was brought up with the conviction that it was not only her duty but fate as a *Corregidora* descendent to transmit and preserve the family legacy of sexual abuse and violence. She was taught and instructed, in fact, on how to pass on the tragic tales of her foremothers who rely strictly on verbal transmission and biological reproduction. These two means of historical preservation, with time, prove rather traumatic to Ursa, who, upon acting as witness to her foremothers' brutal tales, ends up inheriting not only their memories and experiences (as her own) but also their psychological pain and suffering.

The memories of her foremothers, in fact, prove so powerful that they overwhelm Ursa to the point where she actually confuses their memories and experiences with her own. These memories, moreover, which constantly intrude into her

present life, fragment not only her perception of the world (affecting both her social and personal relationships) but also her perception of time, reality and self. Ursa herself, in the privacy of her thoughts, admits to the power inherent in the collective memories of her ancestors and to the impact that these memories have on her life. In an imaginary dialogue with Mutt, she confesses: “I never told you how it was. Always their memories, but never my own” (Corregidora 100).

It is true that Ursa is not directly victimized by Corregidora himself. However, her close relationship with her foremothers ties her to their history and trauma, implicating her in the process. In fact, through the mere act and process of listening to their tales of abuse and victimization—which with time become redundant and even formulaic—Ursa becomes traumatized (physically, emotionally and psychologically) and lives (for the most part of the novel) haunted by the painful and at times repressed memories of her foremothers.

Trauma, after all—as contemporary trauma scholars such as Caruth and Marianne Hirsch argue—unfolds intergenerationally. Its aftermath lives on in the family and affects those who have not directly experienced the traumatic event. It may even affect those who do not share bloodlines with the victims. In fact, witnesses to traumatic events—as *Corregidora*'s protagonist shows—tend to adopt the memories and experiences of the first generation as though they were their own. In many cases, these witnesses even become inhabited (to the point of possession) by the traumatic event(s) related to them. The memories of these traumatic events or narratives (usually related to the second generation by the first) tend to be “so powerful, so monumental as to constitute memories of their own right” (Hirsch 2001, 9).

Moreover, as Caruth and Laub concur, listeners to traumatic events—through the mere act of listening—tend to become so emotionally and psychologically involved

that they end up experiencing (at least partially) the victim's trauma within themselves. In fact, the more the victim is traumatized, the more the listener—who joins in the victim's struggle—feels the trauma. This is what leads Caruth to conclude that trauma usually involves the encounter with another “through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound” (*Unclaimed* 8).

The novel itself, which functions as a memory process, provides insight into Ursa's struggle with the demons of the past, which come to dominate her present life. It also, with its resistance to chronological time, reflects the disruptive power of Ursa's familial legacy and its disturbing consequences. Traumatized by her historical tales as well as her own personal history, this does not come as a surprise. In fact, trauma scholars such as Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, Judith Lewis Herman and Roberta Culbertson emphasize that traumatic event (whether experienced directly or indirectly) usually lead to ruptures in a person's perception of time. In post-traumatic situations, whereby the past is uncontrollably relived in the present, victims feel “as if [they] were back there reliving the event and distance between here and there, then and now, collapses”(LaCapra 2001, 89).

Ursa's present narrative—which is constantly interrupted by her memories of the past (particularly the stories related to her by her foremothers of their experiences on the Corregidora plantation)—demonstrates this point. Overshadowed by the collective memories of her foremothers, Ursa conflates past with present and in doing that, unconsciously perpetuates her own trauma. By compulsively and constantly injecting the past into her present life, she complicates her own personal relationships (specifically her marriage to both Mutt and Tadpole) to the point where she actually contributes to their extermination. Tired and frustrated by Ursa's relentless remembering and speaking of the past, Mutt, even at one point, reproachfully tells her:

“Shit, I’m tired a hearing about Corregidora’s women. Why do you have to remember that old bastard anyway?” (*Corregidora* 154). Moreover, Ursa’s inability to respond sexually to either husband—the consequence of inheriting a violent history that categorizes all men as sadists and rapists—leads Mutt into forming wild speculations that culminate into acts of domestic violence. It also precipitates Tadpole’s ensuing infidelity.

Ursa was very young when her foremothers first related their horrific experiences on the Corregidora plantation to her. In fact, she states: “I was five years old then” (*Corregidora* 14). She remembers back then how Great Gram, sitting on the rocker, robotically and compulsively repeated the stories of Corregidora’s violations to her. It was almost as if, Ursa observes, “the words were helping her [Great Gram], as if the words repeated again and again could be a substitute for memory, were somehow more than the memory” (*Corregidora* 11). She even vividly recalls how Great Gram slapped her across the face when she questioned the veracity of her narrative. Ursa may have been affected then by the emotional and psychic trauma suffered by her foremothers but was in fact too young to realize it.

Moreover, the conditions and circumstances for the manifestation of her trauma, which may have been subtle then, become more prominent much later during Ursa’s adulthood. In fact, the symptoms of Ursa’s trauma-- which reveal themselves belatedly (at the age of twenty-five)—become most tangible through the course of her personal and social relationships, particularly with Mutt and Tadpole. Her trauma takes on different manifestations which include nightmares, flashbacks, hallucinations, intrusive thoughts and behavioral reenactments. Ursa’s recurring nightmares, for instance, which revolve around the atrocities of Corregidora, intrude constantly into her present life, reflecting the lasting legacy of her foremothers’ violent history and her own

embedded trauma. At one point, Ursa, who is in bed recuperating from the fall, admits to Tadpole that she was dreaming. When the latter asks her what the dream was about, she answers: “I’ve already told it” (*Corregidora* 12).

The “it,” in this context, refers to the nightmarish tales of *Corregidora* which Ursa had related to Tadpole earlier. In fact, she had told him about her foremothers’ mandate and how it was passed down from one generation to the next through storytelling and reproduction. She had even showed Tadpole a picture of *Corregidora* which she occasionally “[took]...out every now and then so [she] [wouldn’t] forget what he looked like” (*Corregidora* 10). Ursa suffers another nightmare of *Corregidora* which also occurs after her surgery. This time, she says: “I dreamed with my eyes open.... All the *Corregidora* women dancing. And he wanted me. He grabbed my waist” (*Corregidora* 61).

In these haunting nightmares, Ursa experiences the trauma of *Corregidora*’s violations and becomes, like her foremothers, a victim of sexual abuse. She is so traumatized by her foremothers’ brutal memories that she unconsciously reproduces and re-experiences in the present their historical trauma. Terrified of the traumatic consequences of sleep, moreover, she decides to stay awake as much as she can, “dream[ing] with her eyes open” (*Corregidora* 61).

On another occasion, she dreams of suddenly becoming pregnant and of “giv[ing] birth without struggle, without feeling.” During the birth process, as Ursa recounts, she felt a penis inside her and “the humming and beating of wings and claws in [her] thighs.” (76). As she questions the phantom-like rapist about his identity, she comes to the fearful realization that he, with “his hair like white wings” was *Corregidora* (77). Moreover, Ursa herself admits—after discovering Tadpole’s infidelity—that she had suffered disturbing dreams of being sexually numb while she

was still at the hospital. In a dramatic monologue that reveals the intensity of her trauma, she reflects: “And all those dreams I had lying there in the hospital about being screwed and not feeling anything” (*Corregidora* 89).

Ursa eventually becomes so overwhelmed and even stupefied by these dreams that at one point, she concedes: “The shit you can dream” (*Corregidora* 47). These recurring dreams are actually a belated manifestation of the ongoing trauma that Ursa, unfortunately, inherits from her foremothers. In addition to these nightmares, she suffers flashbacks (represented in italics) which take her back to some of the disturbing memories of her childhood. Memories of her foremothers’ experiences of violence and rape at the Corregidora plantation haunt her as well. After her accident and hysterectomy, she begins to suffer hallucinations (during recuperation) which, occurring belatedly as well, take the form of imaginary dialogues that she has with her estranged husband, Mutt.

In these dialogues, she confronts him about the accident and blames him for her sterility and her ensuing inability to carry out her foremother’s mandate. At one point, she tells him bluntly: “But it’s your fault all my seeds are wounded forever” (*Corregidora* 45). She even reveals her fears to him of not being able to conceive or enjoy sexual relations with men. She also reflects on the complexity of both their relationship and the woman that she has become.

Ursa’s experience of trauma, which she actually experiences later as an adult, demonstrates both Caruth and LaCapra’s description of the pathology of PTSD: that trauma occurs not during the moment of the traumatic event, but rather belatedly “in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it” (Caruth, *Explorations* 4). The belated occurrence of the trauma usually takes the form of nightmares, hallucinations, intrusive thoughts and behaviors etc., all of which are experienced by Ursa belatedly.

For instance, Ursa, while recuperating at Cat's place after the fall—all of a sudden becomes seized by the intrusive past once again. She remembers her mother's instructions: "*But you got to make generations, you go on making them anyway*". She also remembers her mother warnings not to "*bruise any of [her] seeds*" (*Corregidora* 41; italics original).

Throughout the novel, in fact, Ursa experiences many instances where past memories (of both personal life and that of her foremothers) intrude into her present narrative. Some of these memories, at times, overlap and she ends up haunted by disembodied voices: "*I bet you were fucking before I was born*" (*Corregidora* 42; italics original). Even after the accident, she goes through a period of amnesia—whereby she finds herself unable to recall the details of the accident or the trip to the hospital. She admits herself that she does not remember what she said in the hospital, let alone how the accident took place. In this respect, she states: "I don't remember what I said in the hospital, but Tadpole told me later that I kept saying something about a man treat a woman like a piece a shit" (*Corregidora* 167).

However, it is much later (during the recuperation period) that she begins to remember and relate the story. It is also much later that the devastating effects of the hysterectomy manifest themselves in the form of imaginary dialogues that she has with both Mutt and Corregidora. In these dialogues, Ursa articulates her frustration and pain of not being able to procreate. She actually describes her loss as "*silence in [her] womb*" (*Corregidora* 99; italics original). She also articulates her fear of sexual and emotional withdrawal from men, a consequence that she suffers after her hysterectomy. In this respect, she concedes (at least to herself): "*Afraid only of what I'll become...*" (*Corregidora* 89; italics original).

According to Caruth, this is exactly where the historical power of trauma lies.

In fact, she states, “[it] is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its forgetting that it [trauma] is experienced at all” (*Explorations* 8). Ursa’s experience of trauma, which occurs belatedly, manifests through her repeated hallucinations of Mutt; in these hallucinations, she expresses her anger, pain and hopelessness as a woman who is unable to reconcile with herself or the world.

Living with the fact that she can no longer bear children nor carry out her “mission” in life proves catastrophic to Ursa. In fact, her survival not only becomes meaningless to her but also traumatic. She sees her inability to procreate as a personal failure. Not only has she failed her ancestors, but also herself. Even her self-image becomes tainted as a result. She begins to feel less of a woman, especially as she finds herself unable to connect emotionally and sexually with either Mutt or Tadpole. She lives her life in fear of not being able to feel or enjoy her sexuality. Living in fear, doubt and pain, her life becomes a constant struggle, especially as the past further tightens its grip on her. This struggle to live and even cope, especially after experiencing trauma, is what leads Caruth to probe: “Is the trauma the encounter with death or the ongoing struggle of having survived it?” (*Unclaimed* 7).

According to trauma scholars such as Maurice Blanchot, Caruth and LaCapra, survival itself can become traumatic, especially as victims are forced to live with the dreadful consequences of having survived their trauma. Because they did not experience the traumatic event at the moment of its occurrence (due to shock) nor did they directly confront death (except the possibility of it), they spend the rest of their lives suffering nightmares, hallucinations etc. (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 62). Unable to reconcile the past with the present, victims often live with “the paradox of silence and the present but unreachable force of memory and a concomitant need to tell what seems untellable”

(Culbertson 1995, 171). This is precisely what leads to Caruth's conclusion that survival, to victims of trauma, becomes an "endless testimony to the impossibility of living" (*Unclaimed* 62).

Ursa's survival becomes even more unbearable, especially as she finds herself unable to fathom or comprehend many of the crucial events that marked and changed her life. After the accident, she spends the majority of her time in agony, mourning over her loss and speculating over the possible causes of her fall. Exhausted and antagonized, she comes to blame Corregidora, believing that his intention was to thwart her foremothers' efforts to transmit the familial legacy. "Even my clenched fists," she says perturbingly, "couldn't stop the fall. That old man still howls inside me" (*Corregidora* 46). During and after her recovery, Ursa, in deep contemplation, finds herself also unable to understand the complexity of her relationship with Mutt. If Mutt really loved her, she wonders, then why did he hurt her the way that he did?

She also wonders about the conflicting forces of pleasure and pain that exist in and complicate her relationship with Mutt. She also muses over why her foremothers are so psychologically attached to Corregidora (the very man that abused and terrorized them) and why her own mother denies her her private memory. All of these unanswered questions haunt Ursa's existence and perpetuate her trauma. Caruth herself argues that trauma is located not merely in the 'brutal facts' which reappear unexpectedly but more profoundly "in the way that their [traumatic events] occurrence defies simple comprehension" (*Explorations* 153).

Ursa's struggle with memory is also a consequence of both her personal and maternal memory and history. Her first-person narrative, in fact, provides insight into her bleeding memory and unconscious. Her trauma, as it is, lives on and within her, distorting her memory, narrative and even her sense of self. Culbertson, in fact, explains

this point by asserting that victims often live side by side with their traumas especially in ways that “confound ordinary notions of memory and narrative, or to which ordinary narrative is simply inadequate”(1995, 171).

With regard to traumatic memories, Van der Kolk and Van der Hart add that they “may return as physical sensations, horrific images or nightmares, behavioral reenactments or a combination of these” (164). Ursa does experience all of these symptoms; not only does she see unnatural and violent images of Corregidora, but she also feels his violations internally and externally. She concedes herself that Corregidora “still howls inside [her]” and that “[her] veins are centuries meeting” (*Corregidora* 46).

Though burdened by memory, Ursa decides and manages to communicate and vent her anger, pain and suffering through the blues. After realizing that she can no longer testify to the past through procreation nor walk forever in her foremothers’ footsteps, she decides to turn to the blues. Her visit to her mother in Bracktown actually triggers her desire to construct an alternative narrative, separate herself from her foremothers and reconnect with the world. With the accident and two failed marriages behind her, Ursa, searching for a sense of purpose and direction and for inner peace, resolves to visit her mother. She hopes to find answers to the questions that have haunted her whole life.

In fact, she believes that coming to a full understanding of her past (and that of her mother’s) would actually free and help her cope with the present. Ursa herself asserts that she is determined to discover her mother’s private memory; she will not stop until she “feel[s] satisfied, alone, and satisfied that [she] could have loved” (*Corregidora* 103). During the visit, Ursa discovers the truth behind her conception; she was born out of her foremothers’ compulsion and need to perpetuate the family history. She also discovers that her mother’s sexuality (like hers and her foremothers’) has been

shaped and ruined by the Corregidora legacy. Ursa, in this regard, tells Mutt that Corregidora “*made them [Great Gram and Gram] make love to anyone, so they couldn’t love anyone*” (*Corregidora* 104; italics original).

Devoid of sexual desire and the ability to love, Mama (as Ursa discovers) exploited Martin for procreative purposes; she was, in fact, taught to do so by her foremothers. Terrified of ending up empty and lonely like her mother, Ursa decides to find her own path, one which would allow her to testify to the past and to heal inside. The blues, as Ursa discovers, eventually become her new path and the means by which she gives testimony and finds freedom. Through the blues, in fact, she manages to engage with the past (in a constructive way) and to form a narrative, which in turn, helps her cope with her pain and redefine herself.

In fact, her songs, which are inspired by her painful memories as well as those of her ancestors’, convey her pain. She admits that her songs are mostly about “trouble in mind” (*Corregidora* 150). She even reveals—in an imaginary conversation with Mutt—that she sings the blues “[e]verytime [she] ever want[s] to cry” (*Corregidora* 46). Her new narrative, unlike the one she had inherited, communicates not only the tragic memories of her foremothers’ but also her own memory and that of her mother. Through the blues she manages to express and embrace her sexuality as well and to finally come to terms with the fact that sexuality is not tied to reproduction.

Many trauma scholars such as Caruth, Culbertson, Laub, Herman, Hirsch, LaCapra stress the importance and necessity of remembering and communicating, especially after encountering trauma (whether directly or indirectly). In fact, it is important that communication take place through the presence of an emphatic listener; for survival depends on “the creative act of establishing and maintaining an internal witness who substitutes for the lack of witnessing in real life” (Laub 71). Testimony is

important because it helps the victim acknowledge that the experience did happen; it also allows for the restoration of self and for historical transmission.

Moreover, it helps the victim reestablish a relationship with the world and gain—according to LaCapra—some “measure of conscious control, critical distance and perspective...” (2001, 90) The blues, in this respect, becomes Ursa’s new way of giving testimony and exorcizing the ghosts of the past. It provides her with the means to communicate and search for an identity for herself outside the family narrative. The blues is a source of remembrance for her and a way to counter the devastating effects of traumatic repetition, the curse that her foremothers have, unfortunately, fallen into. Remembering and expressing (which Ursa does through the blues) are actually “prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims” (Herman 1992, 1).

The blues is Ursa’s way of mourning (through testifying). Her songs, in fact, convey the pain of the past (her own and her foremothers’ memories of the past) and the present. Giving testimony, in fact, (regardless of the form) is, as Laub states: “...a process of facing loss—of going through the pain of the act of witnessing and of the ending of the act of witnessing—which entails yet another repetition of the experience of separation and loss” (2001, 74). In giving testimony, one is compelled not only to remember but also to confront the pain of the past. This confrontation usually brings back the force of the trauma, causing the victim to re-experience the pain. This re-experiencing of the pain, however, is precisely what allows for the recovery process to take place.

With regards to *Corregidora*, it is true that Ursa re-experiences pain by means of testifying through the blues. In fact, it is this very pain that informs her art. Cat even notices the change in Ursa’s voice after her tragic hysterectomy. Although still

beautiful, Ursa's voice sounds "like [she] been through more now" (*Corregidora* 44). However, it is precisely through the experience and expression of pain that Ursa is guided towards a more secure and complete self. This pain inspires her to reach out to others and to share her story. Ursa herself admits that when she sang, it was as if she "wanted them [blues audience] to see what he'd done, hear it. All those blues feelings" (*Corregidora* 51). Her act of reaching out to others and voicing out her pain actually gives her the opportunity to investigate her feelings (through mourning) and to find her voice.

Through the process of singing/mourning, Ursa is able to gradually step back (for the first time) from the shadows of her foremothers and to reassert herself. "I am Ursa Corregidora," she finally announces. "I have tears for eyes.... Let no one pollute my music. I will dig out their temples. I will pluck out their eyes" (*Corregidora* 77). Demonstrating the interconnection between testifying and mourning, LaCapra concludes: "Mourning brings the possibility of engaging trauma and achieving a reinvestment in, or recatharsis of life, which allows one to begin again" (2001, 66).

Because Ursa's foremothers repress their memories, they compulsively repeat the past, perpetuating their own trauma. They hardly find peace within themselves because all they are concerned about is repetition and transmission (of the historical tales). Ursa, on the other hand, makes an effort to stand back from what is being related and to look at things objectively and critically. After her visit to her mother—whereby she encourages acts of speaking and listening—she revises the family narrative, a decision prompted by her fear of ending up like her mother (voiceless and sexless) and her desire to create a life of her own. After revising the narrative, Ursa realizes that it is not one of pure victimization and that her foremothers did have some form of agency (though they never admitted it).

Moreover, they are, (like their perpetrators) guilty of abusing and objectifying others as well, particularly the men in their lives who they exploited for procreative processes and for the continuation of the familial legacy. Once Ursa comes to this realization—through the process of engaging with memory—she is able to incorporate that into her music, which enables her healing and ensuing transcendence of the familial legacy.

Ursa's acts of resistance and reclamation, however, extend beyond the blues. In fact, she resorts to other physical acts which are tied to that of sexual aggression and resistance against her perpetrator. These physical/sexual acts of resistance function as corporeal and intercorporeal manifestations of the traces of her traumatic experiences, particularly her memory of those experiences (i.e. her memory of both her foremothers' historical tales and her own personal tragedy). The repetition of Ursa's traumatic experiences eventually lead to their being anchored in her unconscious body memory, which in turn, translate into certain behaviors and attitudes that she adopts (unconsciously).

Her deep insecurities, sexual numbness, and fear and distrust of men are just some of the corporeal manifestations of her unconscious body memory, which not only take place in her lived place, but which also surround and permeate her conscious life (Fuchs, *Body Memory* 69-70). These particular behaviors and attitudes, which stem from her traumatic experiences, are obvious to others (especially Mutt and Tadpole) though not to her. They actually trigger feelings of anger, confusion and frustration from those around her who constantly implore her to detach herself from the past. Fuchs himself argues that the corporeal manifestations that stem from traumatic experiences are not only “interwoven in the lifestyle [and] in the bodily conduct of a person,” but they are also “visible to others because... [they] [are] always implicitly directed to those

other themselves [traumatized individuals]”(79).

When Ursa finally reunites with Mutt after twenty-two years, she is already a changed woman. She has already reached that stage in her life where she has come to a full understanding of both her personal history and that of her foremothers. She has also come to a full understanding and acceptance of who she is as a person. She has managed, by means of engaging with memory and trauma (via communication through the blues) to create a narrative which has given her both perspective and control of the past. Her newfound freedom and power guide her towards making an important decision as she and Mutt indulge in physical intimacy.

As Ursa takes the initiative to fellate Mutt, memories of Great Gram’s past come to her. As she ponders what it is “a woman can do to a man that make him hate her so bad he wont to kill her one minute and keep thinking about her and can’t get her out of his mind the next” the answer automatically and naturally comes to her like an epiphany (*Corregidora* 184). She knew “in a split second of hate and love” (184) that it was something sexual; Great Gram had bitten Corregidora’s penis (without emasculating him) producing in the process, an unspeakable tension of pain and pleasure. At that moment, she realizes her sexual power over Mutt and his vulnerability.

However, she chooses not to exploit her power and castrate Mutt. She also chooses not to fully reenact what Great Gram did, which is biting the skin off Corregidora’s penis. Because Ursa had already engaged constructively with memory, exorcizing the ghosts of the past, she is able to reengage with memory (evident in the memory work that takes place as she recalls what Great Gram did) and reconnect with the past without replicating it. Ursa actually demonstrates the point made by many trauma scholars such as Caruth, Culbertson, LaCapra, and Laub. They concur that engaging with memory and integrating traumatic events into a narrative prevents the

uncontrollable resurgence of the past and actually allows for healing and survival.

Though Ursa's unconscious body memory takes on a dramatic and potentially dangerous physical manifestation, she manages to control her urges and prevent herself from engaging in destructive acts of revenge. This is because she engages with memory constructively and communicates openly with Mutt. In fact, when they reunite, they engage in a heart-to-heart discussion, recalling their pasts (personal and ancestral) and relating their present. Mutt tells Ursa about his great grandfather whose wife was repossessed into slavery; crazy with grief, he resorted to "eat[ing] nothing but onions and peppermint" (183).

As Ursa, listens emphatically to Mutt, she becomes inspired to investigate her ancestral past and search for answers. Their exchange, which is based on modes of speaking and listening, proves useful; it precipitates Ursa's constructive engagement with the past, allowing her, in the process, to discover the family's secret. This secret behind what Great Gram did to Corregidora that made him want to kill her, causing her to flee the plantation, haunts the Corregidora women from one generation to the next. In fact, these women spend their entire lives pondering over the unanswered question about what it is a woman can do to a man to make him love and hate her at the same. As they wonder and ponder over the answer to the familial secret, the Corregidora women end up suffering and transmitting, in the process, their emotional anxiety and stress to their descendants.

However, Ursa's verbal exchange with Mutt which inspires her to go back to her ancestors' past, leads her into reenacting Great Gram's historical act. This process, in turn, allows for the unwrapping of the familial secret and for the inhibition of intergenerational pain. Moreover, when Mutt tells Ursa he wants her to come back, she opens up and reveals her fears and doubts, telling him: "I don't want a kind of man

that'll hurt me neither" (185). She speaks her pain and agony; she tells Mutt of the woman that she has become.

When Mutt tells her: "I don't want a kind of woman that hurt you," she answers back: "[t]hen you don't want me" (185). She concedes that she still feels the pain of the past within her and returning to Mutt may mean hurting him in the process. Because Ursa speaks her mind and heart for the first time, she becomes overwhelmed with emotions and cries before Mutt, who responds by holding her. Mutt acts as a listener to Ursa, who, by opening up and speaking, comes to give testimony and to reclaim herself.

This is the moment that defines Ursa and that frees her from the cycle of pain and abuse that she has been imprisoned in. It is this crucial moment of speech and action and of giving testimony that actually marks her independence from her ancestors. This independence lies precisely in the fact that Ursa, despite her position of power and wish for revenge, chooses not to fully reenact Great Gram's historical act of resistance by biting the skin off Corregidora's penis. She also chooses to communicate and share her pain not only through the blues but also through direct contact with Mutt. Her ancestors, on the other hand, continually repressed their memories and desires, encouraging their descendants to do the same. Ursa, despite what she has been taught, manages (through speech and action) to break the silence of the past and to stop the cycle of pain perpetuated by her ancestors.

It is precisely Ursa's active use of voice and her reclamation of the power of language (which she expresses through the blues and through direct communication with Mutt) that allow for her ensuing healing and self-reconstruction. In regard, major black feminist scholars such as Audre Lorde, Barbara Christian, Barbara Smith, bell hooks, Toni Morrison and Patricia Hill Collins identify voice/language as an effective

and powerful tool of resistance that provides African-American women with the opportunity of naming and defining themselves against the stereotypical images that degrade and dehumanize them. They also concur that the expression of self (especially in situations of domination or trauma) is essential to the process of healing and recuperation.

Through the production of counter-hegemonic discourses, notes Collins, individual African-American women, have been encouraged to reclaim their voice and to use it to deconstruct the controlling images that permeate U.S social structures. They have also been encouraged to seek out “institutional sites” that in turn provide them with the opportunity to speak and express themselves freely. These “institutional sites” mainly include the black family, the black church, black organizations and the blues music (“Black Feminist Thought” 2008, 99-101).

In addition to seeking out “institutional sites,” African-American women are encouraged to communicate with one another and to share their stories, thoughts, ideas and feelings, hence the tradition of sisterhood. This tradition (which is paramount to Black Feminist Thought as a critical and social theory) relies on the underlying connection between listener and speaker; it also serves to nurture the consciousness of African-American women, providing them in the process with strength, support and empowerment (*Black Feminist Thought* 102).

In conclusion, the subject of resistance and self-representation through the use of voice and language is a core theme in Black Feminism; its portrayal in *Corregidora* attests to Ursa’s powerful reclamation of agency. In the spirit of this tradition, Ursa’s quest to remap her experiences through her voice and resistance to oppressive structures allows her to engage in the transformation of her reality to reinscribe her individual history in an alternative narrative of black feminist empowerment and resistance.

In contrast to Ursa Corregidora, the protagonist of *Eva's Man* is unable to carve spaces of empowerment and resistance in order to resist the silencing impact of trauma and racial, sexual, and social violence. Focusing on the narrative structure of the novel, the next chapter traces the devastating impact of trauma and silence on this protagonist. It also demonstrates, in the process, the direct correlation between the disintegration of the Eva's first-person narrative on the one hand and her sense of self on the other.

CHAPTER V

TRAUMA, MEMORY AND SILENCE IN *EVA'S MAN*

Laub's statement that, "[n]one find peace in silence, even when it is their choice to remain silent" ("Truth and Testimony" 64) resonates and actually informs—partially at least—my overall analysis of *Eva's Man*. The protagonist's experience of trauma, which comes to define her existence, is, in fact, inextricably linked not only to her violent history (one dominated by sexual and patriarchal violence) but also to her personal response to that history. Her deliberate silence and act of violence serve to actually exacerbate her experience of trauma, entrapping her in endless cycles of pain and abuse.

The structure of Eva's first-person narrative—whereby she obsessively recalls and chronicles the traumatic events of her life whilst in a psychiatrist prison after murdering and mutilating Davis Carter—serves to provide deep insight into her antagonizing and debilitating mental, emotional and psychological state. As the narrative continually and drastically shifts between various plots (past and present) and multiple narrative voices, the lines of demarcation between past and present collapse, leaving readers perplexed and lost in Eva's world of pain, chaos and dysfunction. Eva's narrative, moreover, provides insight into her fragmented memory and sense of self, time and reality. Aware of the impact of her trauma, she actually admits to the fallibility of her memory (overwhelmed otherwise by the brutal events of her life) and the consequent unreliability of her narrative as a whole. Realizing that her memory betrays her continuously despite her attempts at narration, she states: "I tell them [the psychiatrist and police officers] it ain't me lying, it's memory lying" (*EM* 5).

Moreover, as she relates the traumatic story of how she was abused as a child and even as an adult by multiple men in her life, it becomes clear that she is completely overwhelmed and even haunted by the past. In fact, she compulsively relives the past in the present—evident in the sudden appearances of repetitive and intrusive thoughts, images and memories from the past—and is unable, consequently, to distinguish between the two time zones. In this respect, as she recounts her story, she suddenly finds herself transported to, and seized by, the tyrannical past. The disturbing voices and offensive words of her perpetrators return to her (literally and continuously) as flashbacks that pervade and haunt her existence. For instance, whilst in the midst of her narration, she suddenly hears the terrifying voice of Freddy Smoot (a young boy who deflowered her with a dirty popsicle stick and terrorized her almost all throughout her childhood) seducing her into sexual submission: “*You let me do it once.... When you gon let me fuck you again, Eva?*”(EM 15; italics original).

When she resumes her narration, she hears the penetrating voice of another perpetrator (her mother’s boyfriend/musician Tyrone) asking her, “[w]hen [she] going to feel [him] again?” (EM 124). She also hears the frightened voice of her mother (who is being raped) calming and reassuring her father of her love and desire for him despite her infidelity. “*Ain’t no man I wont but you. Ain’t no penis I wont but yours,*” (EM 124; italics original). These intrusive voices and memories from the past—which, interrupt Eva’s present narrative—represent the traumatic flashbacks and hallucinations that she suffers, a direct consequence of her repression over the years. Eva also suffers from memory gaps as she relates her story, a fact that she herself admits. In fact, there are times when she even contradicts herself (as she relates certain past events) and doubts the veracity of her own narrative, another consequence of the powerful impact of her traumatic experiences and of her repression of those experiences.

Moreover, she often experiences—especially after her murder and mutilation of Davis—traumatic dreams which, haunting her narrative as well, involve unnatural images of sex, violence and abuse. In prison, for instance, she dreams of being caressed by a thumbless man except she “can’t feel the thumb gone.” She kisses the man and realizes later that “[h]e has an iguana’s tongue.” When he eventually leaves, “her memory turns into blood” (*EM* 143). Her inability to feel the missing thumb is a clear indication of her experience of numbness, a symptom that is associated with victims of trauma. Her memory turning into blood—though figurative—corresponds to Eva’s actual experience of memory fragmentation, a reality that she suffers in the present. Eva also dreams of a male owl that talks to her. The owl, after telling her that it had “come to protect this woman,” immediately “turns into a cock and descends” (*EM* 144). This talking owl is actually representative of another abuser of Eva, Mr. Logan, an elderly man whom she later refers to as “an old owl perched on the stairs” (*EM* 125). In these traumatic dreams, Eva’s abusers take the form of wild and predatory creatures, which is exactly what they are to her. These dreams, moreover, inform her narrative which, in its incoherence and resistance to chronological time and order, serves to paint a clear picture of Eva’s wounded psyche and tortured memory.

It comes as no surprise that Eva, scarred by a brutal past of sexual harassment and patriarchal violence, suffers many of the symptoms associated with the experience of trauma such as silence, hallucinations, flashbacks, dreams, behavioral reenactments and memory and identity fragmentations etc. Though her experience of trauma began at the early age of five, it is only during her late teen and adult years that the trauma actually manifests through lethal and self-destructive acts of silence and violence. Eva herself asserts that she was only “five and wasn’t in school yet” (*EM* 11) when the sexual harassments began. Her first encounter with sexual violence was with the young

Freddy Smoot who penetrated her vaginally with a dirty popsicle stick. He also used to corner her and rub himself against her; at times he would gang up on her with his friends and terrorize her for sex. She was also harassed by her neighbor Mr. Logan who would often show her “[h]is stick [that] [had] a bubble in it,” and frighten her till she ran back in the house (*EM* 42).

At the age of twelve, she was molested in her own house by her mother’s boyfriend Tyrone who would call her a “little evil devil bitch” when she showed any kind of resistance (*EM* 35). At the age of twelve, she witnessed her father’s violent rape of her mother, a traumatizing incident that came to shape her notions of love, sex and relationships, scaring her for life. Throughout these encounters, Eva remained silent; despite her feelings of fear, pain, shock and humiliation, she still “didn’t say anything” (*EM* 34). It was not until the age of seventeen that she actually pulled out a knife and threatened to stab her cousin Alfonso who tried to sexually harass her at the back alley of a bar. This threatening act, which comes as an automatic response to the long-term trauma she has endured, escalates into actual violence when she ends up stabbing Moses Tripp (the next man who sexually harasses her). This violent manifestation of her trauma (which is the result of her accumulated silences) leads eventually to her incarceration.

Before her incarceration, however, Eva refuses, at the detective’s office, to speak in defense of her action or to explain the motive behind her crime. Despite constant interrogation, she “didn’t tell anybody. [she] just let the man [Moses Tripp] tell his side” (*EM* 98). Satisfied with her silence, she says (rather proudly): “Nobody knew why I knifed him because I didn’t say” (*EM* 99). Eva even refuses to open up to her concerned parents who, perplexed by her violent action, question her. After her release from prison, she marries a man named James Hunn whom she eventually leaves on

account of his possessive and abusive ways. Although scarred by yet another traumatic experience, she refuses to speak or verbalize her pain and frustration. “I didn’t talk about my husband,” Eva herself admits. “He was the part of my life I didn’t talk about” (*EM* 103).

When she finally meets Davis Carter at the age of thirty eight, she admits (to herself at least) that she had repressed all of her feelings and emotions (related to her trauma) throughout the years. In this respect, she states: “... I hadn’t said anything to any man in a long time” (*EM* 9). Yet, despite Davis’ relentless efforts and desperate pleas for Eva to open up to him, she refuses to reveal anything, asserting simply that, she “[doesn’t] like to talk about [herself]” (*EM* 73). When he asks her why she dislikes talking about herself, she responds by simply saying: “There’s nothing to say” (*EM* 101). Angry and frustrated, he begins to verbally abuse her and even attack her sexuality.

He keeps her confined in a hotel room where he uses her for his sexual pleasure and satisfaction, preventing her from even combing her hair. Moreover, he constantly bombards her with private questions about her life in an effort to gain tighter control of her and hopefully, manipulate her. He also makes it a habit of constantly demeaning and degrading not only Eva but her entire sex as well with his misogynistic remarks and comments. Inconsiderate of her feelings and emotions, he bluntly tells her about his wife, stressing that oral sex is something he would only share with her and no one else, let alone a stranger he just met at a bar. Frustrated and resentful, she retaliates by brutally murdering and mutilating him.

During the carter-trial, Eva (again) refuses to speak, despite the constant interrogation and the simplistic explanations offered by the authorities regarding her crime. As “a motive was never given,” (*EM* 53) Eva ends up incarcerated on account of

her “insanity.” A psychiatrist is finally brought in to question her. Though his voice was soft and sweet “like cotton candy,” (*EM* 76) his efforts to get her to speak prove futile as well. Frustrated by her lack of cooperation, he eventually tells Eva: “You’re going to have to open up sometime, woman, to somebody” (*EM* 77). In the prison cell, Eva remains silent as well, refusing to speak to Elvira who pesters her with questions about how she felt when she bit Davis’ penis off. The only response that Elvira actually elicits is Eva angrily telling her “not to fuck with [her]” (*EM* 49).

Eva’s silences are obviously a consequence of the traumatic experiences that she has suffered throughout her life. Trauma scholars such as Caruth, Culbertson, LaCapra, Laub, Maurice Blanchot, Van der Kolk and Van der Hart note that when people are exposed to trauma, that is an event “outside the range of usual human experience” (Caruth, *Explorations* 3) they usually experience a type of “speechless terror” and find themselves unable to organize their thoughts and emotions on a linguistic level (Van der Kolk qtd. in Van der Hart 172). They find it, in fact, very difficult and sometimes impossible to articulate their experiences and feelings. Their telling of their traumatic stories is often impeded by the incomprehensibility characterizing the event of their survival (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 64). Speech could also be impeded by other factors as well such as the victim’s fear of not being listened to or understood or simply their inability to express themselves in words (Culbertson 169). They might also be silenced by culture, particularly by what they think their society may see as acceptable or not acceptable (Culbertson 170). A phobia of recalling traumatic events and of re-experiencing them once more may be another underlying factor (Janet, qtd. in Van der Hart 176).

Whatever the reasons may be for silence, it is nevertheless important that it be translated into action if healing and self-reclamation are to take place. Caruth, Herman

and Laub, in this respect, concur that victims who remain silent after experiencing trauma, often suffer memory distortions and raptures in their perception of time, self, emotions and reality (as experienced by Eva). Silence, as Laub argues, leads only to the perpetuation of trauma (“Truth and Testimony” 64). For as victims forgo speaking, “the [traumatic] events become more and more distorted in their silent retention and pervasively invade and contaminate [their] daily life.” In fact, the longer victims remain silent, the more distorted their conception of the event becomes, so much that the victim comes to even “doub[t] the reality of the actual events” (“Truth and Testimony” 64).

Eva remains silent from the beginning of her ordeal till the very end and consequently suffers severe memory distortions. Her sense of time, self and reality is fractured as well. As explained above, the structure of the novel, with its resistance to chronological time and order, provides insight into Eva’s fragmented memory process. There are so many instances in the novel where she seems to suffer gaps in her memory (as she relates her traumatic story), hence the loss of her authority as a narrator. She also seems to doubt what she is saying and often contradicts herself, a consequence of the powerful impact of her traumatic memories. In fact, when Eva recounts the story of how her husband beat her one day when he saw her working on an assignment with a fellow male student in their home, she changes some important facts. Initially, she claims that her husband “reached over and grabbed her shoulder, got up and started slapping [her].” She then changes the plot (within seconds of narration) claiming that, “[n]aw, he didn’t slap [her],” and that he only “pulled [her] dress up and got between [her] legs” (*EM* 163).

Eva’s tendency to forget and even distort certain facts related to her experience is common among victims of trauma. In fact, Caruth, in this respect, argues that the stories related by victims of trauma, in most cases, “lose both the precision and the force

that characterizes traumatic recall.” The capacity to remember, she postulates, correlates with “the capacity to elide or distort and in other cases...may mean the capacity simply to forget” (*Explorations* 153-4). This is why the stories related by victims of trauma may lose certain dimensions of truth and accuracy. Nevertheless, it is still essential that their story be told. In addition to Eva’s fragmented memory, her sense of time is fragmented as well. The incoherent structure of the novel actually demonstrates this point. With the sudden intrusion of voices, thoughts and memories from the past into her present narrative, it becomes obvious that Eva is not only stuck in the past, but that she is also haunted by it. In fact, Eva herself concedes that, “the past is still as hard on [her] as the present” (*EM* 5).

Because she had repressed her feelings, emotions and memories for so long, her trauma literally comes back to her through these disturbing phenomena. In fact, Van der Kolk and Van der Hart emphasize that, “the compulsion to repeat the trauma is a function of repression itself” (“The Intrusive Past” 116). The belated return of Eva’s trauma which manifests through the appearance of repetitive hallucinations, dreams and flashbacks is what constitutes the real experience of trauma. Caruth encapsulates this point in her description of the pathology of PTSD. In this regard, she states: “[T]rauma is...locatable....in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way that it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on” (*Unclaimed* 4; italics original).

Eva’s experience of trauma, moreover, is exacerbated by the fact that she has no empathic listener. According to trauma scholars such as Blanchot, Caruth and Laub, communication of feelings and of the traumatic tale in the presence of an active and empathic listener is actually essential to survival and recovery. In Eva’s case, however, the option of having an empathic listener does not exist. In fact, every time she tries to

relate her story to someone, she is either misjudged or misunderstood. She is also either dismissed or accused of mere fabrication. For instance, when she tries to relate the stories of the Queen Bee (an influential figure in her life) to Davis, he shows complete disinterest, telling her that he prefers she talk about herself. . He even at one point accuses her of lying and fabricating. The Queen Bee, he accuses Eva, is “somebody [she] just made up” (*EM* 74). Even her cellmate Elvira jumps into making assumptions and conclusions regarding the motive behind her murder. She tells Eva that she knows why she murdered Davis. It is because she knew he had other women and she just couldn’t stand “to think about who’d be next” (*EM* 161). Nevertheless, Eva’s repression eventually leads to her loss of control over her voice, memories and feelings; she even becomes disconnected from time and from her own subjectivity.

Eva’s re-experiencing of trauma goes beyond traumatic nightmares, flashbacks and hallucinations. Her life-long repression of traumatic memories, feelings and emotions, in fact, eventually translates into physical acts of sexual aggression and resistance, which ultimately lead to her downfall and destruction. Her brutal experiences of sexual and patriarchal violence and her ensuing repression of her traumatic feelings and memories (resulting from those experiences) become incorporated into her body memory and manifest corporeally into her lived space. Fuch’s theory regarding body memory and the unconscious, in the context of trauma, demonstrates this point. In this respect, the unconscious of body memory is characterized as “the absence of forgotten or repressed experiences and at the same time [as] their corporeal and intercorporeal presence in the lived space and in the day-to-day life of a person” (70).

Eva’s repressed trauma actually finds bodily or physical outlets that happen to be destructive by nature. She resorts to silence, emotional withdrawal and physical and sexual violence, all of which are dangerous and destructive manifestations of her

unconscious body memory. Fuchs states that whatever victims repress is bound to find physical release in the outside world. This is precisely what happens to Eva. Because she had repressed her emotions, memories and speech for so long (from the age of 8 till 38), the forces of her repression (stemming from her traumatic experiences) eventually “interpos[e] [themselves] unnoticed before every new situation and thus impriso[n] [her] in a past which is still present” (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 87; qtd. in Fuchs 78). These living forces of repression, which manifest corporeally in Eva’s lived space, go on—to use Fuch’s term—living “in a general style of existence” (78). Eva’s silence, fear and distrust of men, emotional withdrawal and sudden acts of violence become a way of life for her.

Her traumatic experiences, moreover, not only cause injury to her body and mind, but they also shape and determine her future actions and behavior, leaving her with a “permanent responsiveness [and] [with] a readiness to defend [herself]” (Fuchs 78). In fact, as Fuchs argues, every step that the victim takes in life may take him or her back to the moment of trauma whether or not they are conscious of it (78). This proves true in Eva’s case. For when she meets Moses Tripp at the bar and he tries to harass her, she is reminded of former perpetrators and responds automatically by stabbing him in defense. Even when she meets Davis many years later, he (with his possessive and abusive ways) comes to remind her of the other men in her life who had used and abused her. In turn, she concedes: “It’s funny how somebody can remind you of somebody you didn’t like, or ended up not liking and fearing” (*EM* 9). Being with Davis reawakens the repressed trauma in her and leads her into murder, no doubt a violent manifestation of her injured unconscious body memory. Her crime, an attempt to circumvent “shaming situations similar to the trauma,” is a form of resistance “directed to a certain area of experience, a certain category, a certain type of memory” (Fuchs 78).

Eva's repressed trauma finds yet another outlet, evident in her physical act of misspeaking which takes place just a few hours before the murder. Before Davis leaves the hotel room to the restaurant to get some food, Eva tells him on his way out to "bring *home* some brandy" (*EM* 122; my emphasis). Though the hotel room signifies imprisonment, degradation and the perpetuation of her abuse, Eva (subconsciously) refers to it as "home" (supposedly a place of comfort and belonging). It is only after a few seconds, however, that she catches herself and asserts that "[she] hadn't meant to call the place home" (*EM* 122). Eva may have realized that she had a slip of tongue, but the truth is that she remains completely oblivious to the actual trauma that underlies such minute an act. This simple act of misspeaking actually signifies Eva's (unfortunate) internalization of her own pain and trauma. To her, there is no difference between the filth and emptiness of the hotel room (where she is reduced to sex and defecation) and the peace and comfort of home.

This comes as no surprise since Eva's home has never really been home to her; it has never been a place of safety, comfort or love. In fact, most of the harassments that she has been subjected to (especially as a child and a young teen) have taken place at home and right before the eyes of the very people who were supposed to protect her. With no sense of home or belonging, Eva lives her life on the edge, believing that all the evil that comes her way is not only fated but also deserved. This probably explains the reason why she remains at the hotel room despite Davis' mistreatment. Eva's misspeaking represents another corporeal manifestation of her unconscious body memory, which is mediated by and through the course of the many traumas she has suffered. Fuchs actually states that the traces of traumatic experiences may take on different manifestations including "'blind spots', 'empty spaces' or curvatures in the lived space: in the 'slips in speech and action'" (80).

When Davis eventually leaves the hotel room, Eva contrives a way to murder him. She resolves to “[go] into the janitor’s closet and [get] the rat poison,” which she later uses to spike his drink (*EM* 122). Watching the effect of the drug take place (upon Davis’ return), she notes how “the glass had [suddenly] spilled from his hand” (*EM* 128). Before mutilating him, however, she takes the time to enjoy his body, kissing his teeth. As she performs this necrophilic act, the ghosts of the past return to her, whispering voices in her head. “*That kiss was full of teeth*” the voice of her abusive ex-husband resonates (*EM* 128; italics original). Inspired with anger and revenge, she proceeds with the mutilation of the corpse.

Her kissing of Davis’ body can be interpreted as a reenactment of her ex-husband’s act of intimacy. The latter, she remembers (upon kissing Davis) used to kiss her teeth her as well. “*That kiss was full of teeth,*” he would say to Eva before “he stood back and laughed and then kissed [her] again” (*EM* 128; italics original). Trauma scholars including Caruth, Culbertson, Laub and LaCapra note that the past may return to traumatized victims (especially when they repress their memories, speech, thoughts and emotions) in various forms including dreams, hallucinations, flashbacks, and even behavioral reenactments, all of which are manifested by Eva.

Even as Eva mutilates Davis’ corpse in the privacy of the hotel room, it is obvious that she is still haunted by her silent and traumatic past. As she opens Davis’ trousers and begins to dentally castrate him (after poisoning him), the voices from the past (once again) invade her mind, polluting her thoughts and corrupting her actions. These voices (represented in italics) correspond to those of her former abusers including David himself; they reawaken her fury and pain and guide her towards further silence and imprisonment. As soon as she bites down hard on Davis’ penis, she hears, as though in a ghostly whisper: “[*h*]ow did it feel?” (*EM* 128; italics original). She also hears the

sarcastic voices and laughs of Davis and Alfonso, mocking and demeaning her.

The past as it is, comes to dominate and confuse Eva's present. Though in a position of power and control for the first time in her life, she finds herself at a complete loss of what to do and how to feel. With Davis' "swollen plum in [her] mouth," she turns (in the chaos and confusion of her thoughts and emotions) to the reader for some sort of guidance or clarity. "What would you do if you bit down and your teeth raised blood from an apple?" she asks. Enveloped in and suffocated by her own silence, she asks again (even more desperately): "What would you do? Flesh and blood from an apple. What would you do with the apple? How would you feel?" (*EM* 128).

The only answers Eva gets, however, are from the very people who abused her. Their voices, in fact, come to her (once again) in her moment of weakness and desperation, patronizing and mocking her. "*All women need the fork in their road,*" she hears Alfonso laughing. "*Come home with me*" another abuser urges (*EM* 128; italics original). In a desperate effort at circumvention and retaliation, she climbs over Davis' corpse and exploits it for her sexual pleasure and satisfaction. She also makes sure that she leaves his corpse behind with the smell of flatulence.

It is as this desperate moment (where Eva finds herself lost and confused at the crime scene) that all the past traumas (evident in the intrusive voices of her perpetrators) return, re-traumatizing her. Her violent response to the traumas she has suffered may be delayed; however, her re-experiencing of trauma (which occurs many years later at a strange hotel room) is inescapable. In fact, Caruth notes that traumatic events are not experienced at the time that they occur; they are only and usually "evident in connection with another place and in another time." This is precisely, she postulates, where the impact of the trauma lies, which is in its belatedness and in its "insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time" (*Explorations* 8-9).

Returning to the crime scene, Eva leaves the hotel room after committing the horrific deed. Upon leaving, she utters her first word, “bastard” (*EM* 129). But even this utterance is one addressed in a moment of anger and retaliation to a corpse that cannot hear or respond. Eva’s murderous act is one shaped by impulses of anger, revenge and self-destruction, a consequence of her traumatic repression. Freud himself emphasized that when memory and emotions are repressed, victims are obliged to “reproduc[e] [them] not as a memory but as an action” that they repeat without being conscious of it (“Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety” 150, qtd. in Van der Hart). This is precisely what Eva does; she reproduces (through violent action) what she had repressed over the years.

Even in the seclusion of the prison cell, Eva’s past haunts her. She becomes possessed by violent and grotesque images that include diabolic images of herself and of animals preying on her. For instance, she dreams of an owl “corner[ing] her, laying [her] on the floor [and]... dig[ging] [and] peck[ing]” at her. She also dreams of a man “on [her] breasts, sucking blood” (*EM* 135-6). These recurring images and dreams are actually a common occurrence with traumatized victims. Caruth herself characterizes victims of trauma as those haunted or “possessed by an image or event” (*Explorations* 4). In the prison cell, Eva is paired with Elvira, a black, elderly woman with crooked teeth. Interested in and curious about her new cellmate, Elvira begins to initiate conversations with Eva despite the latter’s reticence. Using a gentle approach, she questions Eva about her name and crime, sharing her stories along the way. She tells Eva that she got into jail herself simply because she gave a group of men some bad whiskey that made them sick.

Elvira obviously has a good understanding of how the system works against and oppresses black women on account of their race and sex; she tells Eva that it’s

enough for a black woman to “look at them [the authorities] funny” to be thrown into jail (*EM* 149). Resistance of any kind, moreover, is usually met with either violence or punishment by law. She asserts: “I ain’t never raised my hand against a man myself, cause if you don’t get them, they get you, and if you do get them, the law get you” (*EM* 150). Men, she assures Eva, “ain’t nothing but bastards” (*EM* 150). Even the doctors who are sent to their patients for rehabilitation are nothing but greedy, racist and materialistic “Dr. Frauds” who don’t really care about the well-being of their patients (*EM* 148).

Elvira seems to speak Eva’s language and shows, in turn, a deep understanding not only of Eva’s situation but also of her inner thoughts and feelings, especially those she does not dare to articulate. She also shows (remotely at least) a kind of motherly care for Eva, especially during her times of solitude and distress. “You be awright, though,” she reassures Eva. “They didn’t execute you, did they? What I say is as long as you alive and fucking, you awright” (*EM* 149). Feeling somewhat at ease in the presence of someone who “seems” to care and understand Eva slowly begins to open up, disclosing to Elvira things that she had long concealed and suppressed. For instance, she reveals to Elvira her name, the nature of her crime and her opinion about sex visits for women prisoners.

With time, however, Elvira’s intentions become clearer. Her seemingly caring ways prove to be a means to an end, which is to seduce Eva into sex. When her sexual overtures are rebuffed, she tries to get back at Eva by constantly re-opening the subject of the latter’s crime and imposing her simplistic explanations. She tells Eva that she knows all about her and her story; she killed Davis (Elvira asserts) because she knew he would eventually leave her and she just couldn’t stand to see him with another woman. Angry and hurt, Eva responds by telling her “to go to hell” (*EM* 161). Wanting to

provoke Eva further, Elvira pesters her with questions about how it felt when she bit Davis' penis off. "How did it feel?" she continually asks Eva (*EM* 158). This question is one that resonates powerfully with Eva because it reminds her of her former abusers who constantly asked her how it felt when they harassed her as well.

Sensing Eva's sexual frustration, Elvira (filled with revenge) begins to annoy and provoke Eva, insisting repeatedly that "[she'll] do it for [her]". "Afraid I won't go deep enough?" she bullies Eva who dismisses her each time (*EM* 161). She also interrogates her about details of her sex life with Davis, hoping that she would (by remembering) get sexually excited and finally give in. Moreover, when they are put together in the same cell, Elvira—in an attempt to frighten and threaten Eva—reminds her of the crime that she had committed. The whiskey (she tells Eva) which she had given the men didn't just make them sick. It actually "killed about three of them," she evilly confesses (*EM* 166). Elvira's words and actions eventually come to mirror those of Eva's perpetrators. Even her voice, Eva recognizes, began to sound "husky even in the whisper" (*EM* 156). Like Davis, Elvira ends up extremely irritated by Eva's silences. In a cutting remark (very similar to one made by both Davis and the psychiatrist), she tells Eva: "You won't help yourself, that's why can't nobody else help you, cause you won't help yourself" (*EM* 156).

Like all the men in Eva's life, Elvira pushes Eva into further silence and trauma. Her deceptive and abusive ways prove to Eva (once again) that she cannot trust anyone even those who seem to understand and empathize. More convinced than ever that her silence is her only means of protection, Eva retreats further into herself, perpetuating her own pain and trauma.

By the time the psychiatrist comes in to see her, Eva has already reached a stage where she is completely lost to the world and to herself. The structure of the

novel, in fact, becomes even more disjointed (especially towards the end), providing disturbing insight into Eva's final mental and emotional breakdown. In this regard, scenes are duplicated; words and sentences repeat themselves and different narrative voices coincide. The conversation that takes place between Eva and the psychiatrist is hard to follow since it is continually interrupted by Eva's hallucinations, primarily her imaginary dialogues with the deceased Davis (represented in italics).

Moreover, her answers to the psychiatrist's questions are either contradictory or irrelevant. For instance, when he asks her why she killed Davis, she first answers that she was lonely and that killing him "filled in the spaces and feelings" (EM 169). A few minutes later, however, when the psychiatrist asks: "You were a lonely woman, weren't you?" She contradicts herself, saying "no" (EM 170). He then questions her about her relationship with Davis. Initially, she claims that, "she can't remember. Things he [Davis] said" (EM172). When the psychiatrist finally agrees with her that she can't, in fact, remember everything, she contradicts herself again, asserting that she does remember everything. During their exchange, other intrusive voices from the past (most of which are anonymous) seize Eva. "*You know you the woman. Kill him, but don't make him bleed*" she hears repeatedly (EM 175; italics original). Her imaginary dialogue with Davis resumes, interrupting the dialogue between she and the psychiatrist. "*What do you want, Eva?*" the imaginary Davis asks her. "*Nothing you can give,*" she answers (EM 176). Her answers, however, are never really articulated, only thought out loud.

Violent images and scenes return to Eva even at the final scene of the novel. This time, however, she dreams of her own death; she dreams of drowning in a river where "*the sand is on [her] tongue [and] [b]lood under her nails*" (EM 176; italics original). This death signifies Eva's actual mental, emotional and psychological death.

All things considered, it is true that Eva's trauma initially forced her into silence. However, her choice to remain silent is what forces her into further trauma. Her re-experiencing of trauma lies precisely in her self-destructive acts of silence and violence. Her violence may be read as a form of resistant agency but the fact that her silence takes over eventually leads to the negation of that agency. In fact, as she maintains her self-imposed silence, she not only loses the authority to define herself, but she also gives others the opportunity to define and objectify her as "other."

In this respect, many black feminist scholars such as Audre Lorde, Barbara Christian, Barbara Smith, bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins and Toni Morrison emphasize the importance and necessity of transforming silence into speech and action as a form of resistance and empowerment in the face of the intersecting systems of oppression. They concur that the use of language and voice (especially in situations of domination) is vital to the process of self-definition and to the emergence (of black women and other colonized groups) into personhood and freedom. Language, these scholars note, can be a space of resistance and "a gesture of defiance that heals [and] that makes new life and new growth possible" (hooks, "Talking Back" 9). In fact, the intellectual works of these scholars—which often document the growth (of black women) towards positive self-definition—aim at fostering black women's resistance and encouraging activism. Their social theories, moreover, are purposefully designed to encourage individual black women not only to break their silence and speak out against their oppression, but more importantly to define themselves according to their own terms.

Eva's life and choices fail to adhere to such models of reclamation and empowerment. For even after she satisfies her desire for revenge by killing Davis, she refigures herself within the very definitions assigned to her by her abusers. Looking at herself in the mirror in the toilet of a filling station after the murder, she thinks: "I'm

Medusa...Men look at me and get hard-ons I turn their dicks to stone...I'm a lion woman" (*EM* 130). Even towards the end of the novel, she still suffers severe fragmentations in memory, emotions and desires. After killing Davis (supposedly her worst enemy), she goes off to a bar to enjoy a quiet celebration. There, however, she finds herself "want[ing] to be fucked" by the very man who abused her. She concedes, "I wanted him [Davis] to fuck me up my ass" (*EM* 130). Her desires suffer distortion as a result of her traumatic silences. She finds herself attracted to, yet repulsed by, the very man she killed. Her traumatic dreams and flashbacks, moreover, return to her in the literal and psychological prison that becomes her life. There is no escape for Eva. In the end, she finds no other choice than to succumb to the sexual overtures of her cellmate Elvira. Sex may provide her with some sort of pleasure and release, all of which are only temporary. But the reclamation of self remains a quest unfulfilled. Her silence is precisely what hinders this process of self-reclamation and what ultimately leads to her self-destruction. This destruction is one that Culbertson herself describes as "a social act" that results primarily from "pushing the self back into this cellular, nonsocial, surviving self" (179).

Eva may believe that her silence is her source of power and protection, but her silence provides only the illusion of protection and leads ultimately to her downfall. In order for this protagonist to counter the dominant power structures governing her existence, it is critical that her silence be transformed into language and action, in the spirit of Black Feminist Thought. In "The Transformation of Language into Silence and Action," Lorde notes that silence is usually a response to internalized shame and to the misuse of power by dominant groups. It is, she adds, as detrimental and as devastating as cancer is to the body. In a statement that seems to aptly describe Eva's situation, Lorde equates silence with acquiescence, surrender and even death.

It is true, she concedes, that the transformation of silence into speech and action “always seems fraught with danger” (42). This is because speech usually holds the risk of miscommunication, misunderstanding and misjudgment. As humans, we have also been socialized to respect fear more than our need for language (44). But this fear, Lorde asserts, must be overcome or else “the weight of [our] silence will choke us” (44). Black women in particular, she adds, must transgress their silence and make speech their ultimate priority. They must use their voices to actively speak and construct themselves against the social constructions that dehumanize them.

hooks also stresses the importance of transforming silence into speech an action. This step, she asserts, is vital to the definition and reclamation of self. In fact, she calls on individual African-American women (oppressed by racism and sexism) to break their silence and begin “sharing with one another ways to process pain and grief.” She also encourages them to overcome their fear of language and exposure and to “challenge old myths that would have [them] repress emotional feeling in order to appear ‘strong.’” Black women, she asserts, must speak up and for themselves not only for the sake of self-representation, but also for their mental, emotional and psychological well-being. For “bottled-in grief,” she argues, “can erupt into illness” (*Between Voice and Silence*; qtd. in Jill McLean Taylor 50).

In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*, Collins similarly emphasizes the power of self-definition and the necessity of a free mind. African-American women, she asserts, have been assaulted with various stereotypical images that have been used in turn to reinforce racial and class oppression (2008, 69-70). However, challenging and deconstructing these images, she asserts, is a core theme in Black Feminist Thought. In this respect, it is worth noting that black feminist scholars have adhered to an Afro-centric feminist epistemology

(whereby they rely on the authority of concrete experiences) in order to counter the controlling images associated with black womanhood and to re-define themselves (99).

These scholars have also inspired individual African-American women to resist their objectification by speaking out and giving public testimony particularly within the context of unequal power relations. As Collins affirms, speaking out to denounce various forms/situations of oppression is key to individual healing, survival and empowerment. She states: “By speaking out... formerly victimized individuals not only reclaim their humanity but they also empower themselves by giving new meaning to their particular experiences” (“Fighting Words”; 2008, 48). Eva, unfortunately, fails to define herself or give meaning to her experiences. By remaining silent, she rather allows and even invites others to define and misrepresent her.

It is true that Jones’ protagonists (Ursa and Eva) share a similar history of sexual and patriarchal violence. It is also true that they both suffer intensely from the harsh consequences of their traumatic pasts. In fact, the narrative structure of both novels (characterized by their non-linearity) provides insight into the tortured minds and souls of these two protagonists. It also demonstrates the extent to which the past can affect and even dictate their present and future. With that said, these two protagonists (despite the traumatic impact of their painful histories) differ in terms of how they respond and relate to their traumas, hence the varied implications regarding their quest for self. Ursa manages to find a vehicle to communicate and express her pain. Through the blues, in fact, she manages to construct a narrative that helps her work through her trauma and gain control over the intrusive past.

Eva, on the other hand, resolves to remain silent, repressing her speech, memories and emotions. She refuses to reach out to others or find some sort of outlet for her pain and distress. Her repression eventually leads to the distortion of her memories,

emotions and even her perception of self and reality. As she loses control of the past and of her self, she resorts to violent and self-destructive acts that stem from her traumatic experiences and from her memory of those experiences. Her silence, in other words, initiates her act of violence, which in turn precipitates the return and perpetuation of her trauma. Not unlike Eva, Ursa (fueled with anger and revenge) resorts to violent acts of resistance, which also stem from her memories of abuse. However, because she has gained control over the past through engaging constructively with memory via the blues and through open communication with Mutt, Ursa manages to circumvent the full execution of her violent act. In fact, her engagement with memory and with acts of speaking and listening is precisely what allows her to rewrite her familial history and re-define herself.

If Eva were to find some vehicle for the expression and exploration of her pain (as opposed to suffering in silence and solitude), she would have been able to create the conditions necessary for her survival and growth. She would also have been able, not unlike Ursa, to refigure herself and create space for the possibility of love, not only loving others but more importantly, loving herself. In the end, as Lorde asserts, despite what black women and other oppressed groups have been taught to believe, silence saves no one. As such, she urges black women to “learn to respect . . . [their] selves and . . . [their] needs more than . . . [their] fear of differences” and to “learn to share . . . [their] selves with each other” (*Black Women Writers* 105).

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This thesis serves to expand an already existing framework pertaining to the study of trauma and memory by introducing Fuch's analysis of the corporeal and intercorporeal manifestations of the unconscious body memory within the context of trauma and relating it to the reclamation of voice and agency in the context of Black Feminism.

First, I provide a separate analysis of each novel, analyzing the structure of the narrative as a whole and then specific scenes within the narrative. I begin with the analysis of *Corregidora*, probing first, the impact of trauma and history on the protagonist. I focus specifically on the traumatic effects of intergenerational trauma and note how it impacts notions of memory and identity. I also note how it impacts the protagonist's social and personal relationships. In addition, I focus on the mental, emotional and socio-psychological impact of having directly experienced trauma, especially when it is tied to experiences of sexual domination and violence.

I then focus on how the protagonist responds to her trauma, taking into account the different methods she adapts and tracing, in the process, her ensuing mental, emotional and psychological growth and development. I pay particular attention to the role of voice and speech, noting how they precipitate constructive engagement with memory and trauma. I also probe how sexualized acts of resistance (when predicated on modes of speaking and listening) catalyze processes of healing and self-reconfiguration.

I then proceed with the analysis of *Eva's Man*, probing the impact of both silence and trauma on the protagonist. Focusing on her first-person reflections

(particularly how they are structured), I trace the devastating effects of her long-term silence and repression on her memory, narrative and perception of events and reality. The breakdown of the narrative structure, as this thesis shows, correlates with the emotional and mental breakdown of the protagonist. Moreover, I note how the protagonist's silence over the years eventually manifests into violent and self-destructive acts that serve only to exacerbate her experience of trauma, imprisoning her in a past that becomes both her present and future.

By juxtaposing the disparate ways in which Jones' protagonists engage with and respond to their relative traumas (personal and historical), this thesis shows the importance and necessity of transforming silence into speech and action, particularly when it comes to processes of healing and self-reconfiguration. As my analysis shows, the protagonist of *Corregidora*—despite her tragic and painful history—manages to find a vehicle with which to communicate her traumatic memories and feelings. She turns to the blues as a means by which to explore and express her feelings of anger, pain, humiliation and fear. The blues, in fact, enable her to remember and engage with her personal and ancestral past, a process which gives her both perspective and control of her memory and emotions. The blues also gives her the freedom needed to liberate her mind and body and to embrace her sexuality.

Having already engaged constructively with memory through the blues, Ursa (upon reuniting with Mutt), manages to return to and reengage with her ancestral past without being overpowered by it. She also manages to unwrap a disturbing family secret that had long haunted and traumatized the *Corregidora* descendants (herself included). Moreover, her verbal exchange with Mutt (based on modes of listening and speaking) plays a significant role in precipitating her reengagement with the past and in rewriting her family history. It also provides her with the opportunity of giving testimony to her

brutal past and of paving a new road towards positive self-definition and empowerment.

Unlike the protagonist of *Corregidora* who manages to reclaim herself in the end by finding her voice within, the protagonist of *Eva's Man*, unfortunately, loses herself and even participates in her own disintegration and downfall. By refusing to speak or reach out to others—despite the intensity of her pain and trauma—she unconsciously turns to violent and self-destructive acts that are based on pure impulses of anger, hatred and revenge. Were she to find some outlet for the expression of her thoughts and emotions (like the protagonist of *Corregidora*), she would have been able to gradually work through her trauma and save herself. However, her stubborn refusal to speak or open up (despite the efforts of those around her) eventually dominates, precipitating her act of violence and imprisoning her in a past that becomes both her present and future.

It is true that both protagonists share a similar history of violence and abuse. It is also true that they both suffer the consequences of their ongoing traumatic experiences. However, the protagonist of *Corregidora* manages her pain in a wiser and healthier way than the protagonist of *Eva's Man*. Through her active search for and use of voice, the former comes to discover, heal and empower herself in ways previously unknown to her. She does resort to acts of sexual resistance and aggression (like the protagonist of *Eva's Man*). However, her acts differ in that they are informed and directed by speech and action. In her final reunion with her ex-husband Mutt, she manages to let down her guard and communicate her emotions and thoughts to him, despite her feelings of hatred and resentment and her fear of exposing her own vulnerability. She also manages to resist the urge to emasculate him during their act of physical intimacy. Her engagement with memory and trauma (through the blues and through open communication with Mutt) is precisely what prevents her from replicating

the past and what encourages her towards finding a new life for herself.

The protagonist of *Eva's Man*, on the other hand, resorts to acts of sexual resistance completely devoid of speech. It must be emphasized, however, that her long-term silences are precisely what lead her to this point. In her last scene with Davis Carter, she reaches a stage where she completely loses control of her past and of her emotions. Abandoned by reason and logic, she eventually gives in to her impulses of anger and revenge. Because she had avoided engaging with her memory and trauma and had consequently repressed all of her thoughts and emotions (unlike the protagonist of *Corregidora*), she ends up resorting to the extreme act of murder and re-experiences the pain of the past. Even after satisfying her hunger for revenge, she suffers an inescapable loneliness and emptiness. Moreover, she becomes further estranged from herself to point where she, sadly, internalizes her own objectification and pain.

Despite its careful attempt to account for various aspects of the protagonists' experiences, this thesis is not without its challenges and limitations. Given the disjointed narrative structure and time of both novels, it was somewhat tricky to locate specific and exclusive scenes with which to focus my analysis. The scenes chosen are actually without reference to any specific date or time, an issue which problematizes an accurate tracing of the protagonists' mental and emotional progression over a steady period of time.

The theoretical framework also bears its own challenges. Applying trauma theory to a fictional text can be problematic since the characters are themselves fictional. This is important to note because psychological theories are usually reserved for and intended for humans. This begs the question of whether or not psychological theories can be applied to a fictional context. To complicate matters, the characters that I focus on in my analysis have a very complex relationship with "reality." Their

narratives are not fully reliable since these characters suffer many symptoms of trauma such as hallucinations, flashbacks, memory gaps and behavioral reenactments.

The framework that I employ to examine the subject of memory and resistance has its limitations as well. It is true that Fuch's theory focuses on the corporeal and intercorporeal manifestations of the unconscious body memory within the context of trauma. It is also true that my study focuses on the same context as well. However, the trauma that I focus on is more gender and race-specific, pertaining to the historical and contemporary oppression of black women. This is not to say that Fuch's theory is limited to a specific category of victims; however, the question of theoretical specificity can be raised when applying this theory to a specific group of people (primarily black women) who have a specific history (that of slavery and marginalization) and who suffer until today problems that are exclusive to their lived realities (such as racism and sexism).

Many scholars who analyze the theme of resistance in both novels focus majorly on the blues in *Corregidora* and on silence in *Eva's Man*. This study, however, shows the other side of the coin by probing the traumatic impact of silence on Eva. It also extends the theme of resistance to that of sexuality. This is not to say that scholars have not investigated the theme of sexual resistance in these novels; however, their approaches to this theme did not emphasize the political, reclamatory and revisionary dimensions of the presence and absence of voice, as this study does. When it comes to the theme of resistance and reclamation, moreover, scholars focus on the importance of engaging with memory and trauma as a way to recuperate from trauma. This study, however, proposes the notion of verbal exchange, demonstrating how this very exchange can actually precipitate the engagement with memory and trauma and catalyze, in turn, processes of healing and self-definition.

The importance of this study lies in its expansion of an already existing framework which provides insight into how trauma is enacted both thematically and structurally, especially in the presence and absence of voice and speech. By probing forms of psychological and textual layering, this study thus provides an illustration of the interplay between trauma, silence and narrative structure. The importance of this study also lies in the fact that it participates in highlighting the ongoing struggle of black women/female protagonists to break silence and achieve power. As such, this thesis politicizes narratives and narration as forms of resistance aiming, in the spirit of black feminism, to challenge oppressive structures and processes of valuation and devaluation based on normative ideologies and dichotomies.

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