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Spatial Orphans: Cultural Mobility and the Extranatural in Black American Literature

Kelsey Nichole Flint-Martin

SPATIAL ORPHANS: CULTURAL MOBILITY AND THE EXTRANATURAL IN BLACK AMERICAN LITERATURE

by

Kelsey Nichole Flint-Martin

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Accepted by:

Qiana Whitted, Major Professor

Catherine Keyser, Committee Member

Michael Dowdy, Committee Member

Kimberly Simmons, Committee Member

Tracey L. Weldon, Interim Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

DEDICATION

To my father for encouraging me to reach for the stars, no matter how far away they seemed to be.

And to B for helping me reach those stars and beyond.

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ABSTRACT

In his 2005 book *Conjure in African American Society*, Jeffrey Anderson notes that America's historical and academic interest in conjure has come in waves with each wave correlating to a different significant period in the fight for Black equality: Reconstruction, the Great Migration, and the Civil Rights Movement. In each of these movements, Black people have fought to find a way to belong in the United States as an equal, often undergoing travel and moving to different towns where they could have better economic, physical, or other freedoms. Since the start of the 21st century, there has been another revival of literature involving the extranatural (spiritual and magical elements including conjurings, hauntings and premonitions). In my project, I explore this new wave of interest in the extranatural, particularly analyzing the way characters' relationships to the extranatural shifts as they move through different spaces as a means of finding spaces of belonging. My chapters will focus on figuratively orphaned characters that move through a variety of spaces as they work to discover, challenge, and accept their ancestry through extranatural guidance. To facilitate this analysis, my project draws attention to a trope I coin the "spatial orphan." Within this project, I analyze various spatial orphans in 21st century texts to show how African American and Afro-Caribbean authors are using literature to discover a space of belonging amidst and in response to the post-Black movement whilst dealing with conflicts between individuality and community. Reading texts by Colson Whitehead, Nnedi Okorafor, John Keene, and Jesmyn Ward among others showcases a variety of extranaturally-guided movements –

both accepted and disparaged – to show where safe spaces of belonging are being imagined and where they still need to be created.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"Black matters are spatial matters" – Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*

In her 1981 novel, *Tar Baby*, Toni Morrison presents a controversial protagonist in Jadine Childs. The highly educated, Black American fashion model, orphaned at twelve and placed in the custody of her aunt and uncle in the Caribbean, grows up in European boarding schools paid for by her aunt and uncle's white employers. Upon her return to the Caribbean from Paris and as she travels throughout the United States as a young adult, a variety of extranatural forces attempt to influence her identity and compel her to take pride in her identity markers – being a Black American woman – and the numerous cultural roles that she should fulfill accordingly. Jadine ultimately declares, "[I want to] be only the person inside – not American – not black – just me" (*Tar Baby* 48). At the time, scholars almost universally panned Morrison's protagonist for what they saw as anti-Blackness on the heels of the Black Arts Movement and the gainful recognition of Black women writers.[1] Morrison may have been more prophetic than anyone knew, however, by reigniting a concern Zora Neale Hurston explored in her 1928 piece, "How It Feels to be Colored Me." Jadine serves as a fictionalized embodiment of Hurston's own statement that "I have no separate feeling about being an American citizen and colored. I am merely a fragment of the Great Soul that surges within the boundaries"

[1] Scholars include Phillip Page, Gurleen Grewal, and Karla Holloway among others.

("How it Feels" 216). By troubling Jadine's, and by extension Hurston's, connection between her race and the expectations others place upon her, Morrison creates the tension between being what scholars have historically viewed as anti-Black and what we now consider to be post-Black.

Starting at the turn of the 21st century and highlighted once more after the election of Barack Obama in 2008, national media perpetrated the idea that a Black president meant America was suddenly a post-racial society. More Black people were educated and reaching higher class statuses, suggesting that America was a colorblind land of equal opportunity. This definition of the post-racial, while common during Obama's presidency, troubled scholars. For example, bell hooks writes the post-racial discourse "diffuses the representation of whiteness as terror in the black imagination. It allows for assimilation and forgetfulness." Post-racial ideology "perpetuates the terror" of whiteness but prevents Black people from "articulat[ing] the various ways we are terrorized" (345). Yet, in a way, the national media co-opted a conversation already existing in scholarship on Black American culture and literature: the identification of the 21st century as a "post" era. Beginning as early as 1989 with "The New Black Aesthetic" by Trey Ellis and later in *Soul Babies: Black Popular Culture and the Post-Soul Aesthetic* (2002) by Mark Anthony Neal, scholars were diagnosing a divide between "early successes of the traditional Civil Rights Movement" and "nostalgia associated with those successes" that allowed this newer generation – authors publishing in the 2000s – to "critically engage… from a state of objectivity" (Neal 103). Rather than a post-racial era in which America had gone beyond race, scholars were, as Cameron Leader-Picone describes in his book *Black and More than Black: African American Fiction in the Post Era*, "map[ping]" a

"transnational period" within a "dialogue" that highlights "individualistic concerns" amidst "entrenched structural racism" (4). In other words, the propagation of terms arising in the 21st century – post-Black, post-racial, and post-post-modern to name a few – represented the struggle by Black artists and scholars to distinguish themselves from the monolithic identity of Blackness stemming from the Black Arts Movement and the Civil Rights Movement, movements which, for many, were not memories but histories.

While some still consider the idea of the "post-race" problematic, a point I will touch on in Chapter Five, Ramón Saldívar's conceptualization of "post" provides a more productive discussion that I will adopt through the use of the term "post-Black." Mainly, the "post" prefix does not mean America as a society and culture has managed to do away with Blackness and racism. Instead, the addition of "post," similar to its use in postcolonialism, draws attention to what Saldívar describes as "the consequence of racism… and how life experiences such as migration, diaspora, the history of economic, social, and legal injustice, constant surveillance, and access to safe living and working conditions in the Americas [are] represented in fiction" (15). Leader-Picone extends this definition, explaining that the "post" period involves a complex relationship to the past of "rejection and indebtedness," one that evokes an "anxious assertion of individual liberation from racial prescriptiveness… [and] questions the validity of the collective as coherent whole" (4, 7). The post-Black era, then, refers to how the consequences of past racism against the collective "Black" community continue to impact the newer generations of Black individuals; this has led to a conflict between the desire for the continuation of community healing in response to racist socio-cultural practices and the ability to exist and be viewed as an individual be it through different impacts on gender,

culture, diasporic background, and/or class. In other words, the reappearance of Hurston's Great Soul and Jadine's "just me" in the post-Black era attends once more to the question of responsibility: to what extent can one improve the present and future for the "Black" community that they are placed into on the basis of skin color while also recognizing the heterogeneity of Blackness? Is an individual identity outside of this monolithic idea of Blackness even possible within the current sociocultural climate?

These questions showcase the emphasis on identity in the post-Black era – even as there is an instinct to search out the individuality, particularly one separated from a racial group or movement, there is the potential for a disruption of the community, which can be used as a place of safety, strength, and collective recovery. Indeed, I use the word Black American to refer to authors in my title and throughout this project, yet this term creates complications. Blackness in America has traditionally been associated with descendants of bondspeople being brought to the U.S. through the slave trade. Yet diasporic movements extend far beyond the Africa-U.S. trade route. Blackness in the U.S. includes (and has historically included) migrants from other diasporic movements from the Caribbean and continues to include diasporic movements from African countries. Hence, the problematics of the specific yet widely used marker of African American become even more apparent. Authors, such as Colson Whitehead, have explicitly identified this tension in interviews and within their work. In his 2013 interview with *Guernica*, Whitehead explained that he does not want to be "pigeon-holed, ghettoized, held in a different category [than] other authors. And when people ask me if I'm a [B]lack writer, or just a writer who happens to be black, I tend to say that it's either a dumb question or a question which happens to be dumb. I'm an African-American

writer, I'm a lazy writer, I'm a writer who likes to watch *The Wire*" (Shukla). The idea of being a "Black writer," particularly a prose writer, still draws connotations to authors of the Black Arts Movement.[2] Using Leader-Picone's earlier construct, then, these authors must face an indebtedness to the Black community while simultaneously rejecting those same ideas to highlight individuality.

This conflict between the individual and the collective community has led to the reemergence of a character trope I am coining the spatial orphan. I argue that the trope of the spatial orphan in 21st century Black American literature identifies and attempts to resolve this struggle: How does one manage to be an individual amidst a community and does that space of both individual and collective safety exist? This trope, appearing cyclically in Black American literature as shown in my brief references to Hurston and Morrison, refers to the character's attempts to find a space of belonging. Reflecting the traumas of separation that have come from (often times forced) diasporic movement and migration, the spatial orphan engages with the extranatural whilst undergoing a series of movements – be it cross continent, country, town, or building – which creates the potential for a safe space of belonging or, in many cases, the acknowledgement that these spaces do not exist. Scholars, including Farah Jasmine Griffin, analyze migration and mobility or, separately, analyze the extranatural, yet few seem to study the correlation that exists between the two. The spatial orphan trope necessitates the combination of

[2] I highlight prose writers specifically, because I focus on prose writers throughout this project. Cooke Weeber hints to the different perspective of poets in discussing the Dark Room Collective, explaining that their purpose was to "address… the invisibility of black writers in the contemporary art and publishing worlds and forge… connections to earlier generations of black artists, offering a counternarrative or counterinstitution of contemporary poetry" (7).

these two aspects within Black American literature. By employing and understanding this trope within the 21st century, I suggest we can understand both how the characters are being orphaned and also a reflection of the current societal struggles in which these authors are writing. The 21st century has thus far followed the election of a Black president with a white supremacist, exposing the dangers of falsely declaring a "post-race" society. Identifying and analyzing the spatial orphans can help explain why these characters feel lost and explore the spaces that are being imagined for belonging across the U.S. and the Global South.

Defining the Spatial Orphan

Much like the recent proliferation of "post" terminology, scholars continue to note revival trends in Black literature such as the revival of the extranatural through the New Black Gothic or the Black Speculative Arts Movement and the revival of diasporic stories of enslavement through the neo-slave narrative.[3] And while overlap exists currently and historically between these trends, little work has been done to coalesce them into one encompassing term. In coining the spatial orphan as a trope, I identify key primary markers that can help determine if a text contains a spatial orphan and how to then discuss the multifaceted nature of mixing spatial representations with the extranatural. Firstly, the character – often, but not always, female – must be "orphaned." While this orphaning may sometimes refer to a literal loss of parental figures, it requires a figurative sense of orphaning from their current cultural space. This feeling of displacement results in the character undergoing a variety of movements into different locations during which

[3] In a talk for the University of California Riverside, John Jennings described Afrofuturism and the Black Speculative Arts Movement as "this generation's Black Arts Movement."

they engage with and are guided by some form of extranatural that they choose to reject or accept. Finally, the character most often confronts the traumas that led to their orphaning on their path to finding spatial belonging. While this confrontation does not guarantee the character finds a space of belonging, the refusal to confront these traumas prevents the spatial orphan from any hope of resolving their orphaned status.

If, as I've stated, the character trope centers on spatial identifiers - a *space* of belonging, a *spatial* orphan – the question may arise: what purpose does the extranatural, a non-spatial concept, serve? Because the character is already orphaned, spatially or otherwise, their status prevents them from having the tools to confront their traumas and find their own space of belonging. The extranatural elements – whatever form they may come in – serve, to continue the metaphor of orphaning, as an ancestral guide, leading the spatial orphan through different spaces of learning and confrontation. Just as the spatial orphan does not necessitate a lack of parents, the extranatural guidance does not necessitate literal ancestors. However, the extranatural does imply cultural lineage, as I will discuss, and because of this, the extranatural plays an essential role to differentiating between orphans and spatial orphans.[4] Ultimately, the spatial orphan's engagement with the extranatural provides necessary assistance as these forces guide the character towards confronting the generational source of their traumas and, potentially, to a space of belonging.

[4] This, combined with gender constraints of the spatial orphan in the other waves, serves as a reason why I do not consider characters such as Bigger Thomas or Ellison's invisible man as spatial orphans, although there is the potential to consider them both as ancestors to the spatial orphan figure, ones that did not have access to the extranatural and were therefore unable to find spaces of belonging.

Orphaning

The historical significance of orphaning for Black communities has influenced its inclusion as a common theme in Black American literature. Families were originally disrupted in Africa and removed from their motherland; then owners intentionally continued to disrupt any attempt at family groups. Frederick Douglass, for example, begins his 1845 *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* by reflecting on his parentage, explaining that separating children from their mothers "before the child has reached its twelfth month" was a common practice "to hinder development of the child's affection… and to blunt and destroy the natural affection of the mother" (20). Spillers further speaks to the trauma of separation of parent from child in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." She attempts to define the important role that parents, and the lack thereof, have had for Black people historically and how this orphaning impacts the present. In discussing the Middle Passage, Spillers suggests that she cannot use the term "orphans," because these first diasporic movements created not only a lack of kinship but a lack of identity altogether: "In the context of the United States, we could not say that the enslaved offspring was 'orphaned,' but the child does become, under the press of a patronymic, patrifocal, patrilineal, and patriarchal order, the man/woman on the boundary, whose human and familial status, by the very nature of the case, had yet to be defined" (Spillers 74). Also avoiding the term "orphan," Colson Whitehead consistently refers to his protagonist in *The Underground Railroad* as a stray, a term that reflects the dehumanization Spillers identifies.

In using the term orphan, however, we can reinstate the very early disruption of kinship by considering not only the connection to parents but to ancestors. In his piece

"The World and The Jug," Ralph Ellison provides a literary take on relatives compared to ancestors, saying "while one can do nothing about choosing one's relatives, one can, as an artist, choose one's 'ancestors'" (140). While he speaks specifically to literary ancestry, I believe we can apply this concept to the concept of orphaning and, more specifically, the spatial orphan trope. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the etymology of orphan is "post-classical Latin *orphanus* a person, especially a child, both of whose parents have died, also orphaned, bereaved, deprived of protection, advantages" ("orphan"). Using the word orphan as a part of the spatial orphan trope addresses the loss of protection provided not only by the land from which blood connections come but also those spaces in which ancestral connections could have flourished. Considering the redemption of the orphan through the idea of land and ancestors – and not necessarily relatives – humanizes the lost child and provides the potential for a restorative child-ancestor relationship that could not always materialize, especially as this disruption did not end with slavery. Saidiya Hartman chronicles this continued sense of loss in her 2006 manuscript *Lose Your Mother* in which she states, "the history of the transatlantic slave trade [distilled] to this: I was an orphan" (85). Indeed, the trauma of generations of orphaning continues to impact not only African Americans, but Black Caribbean Americans and even recent immigrants who, by virtue of their skin color, face the associations of Blackness with orphaning and are subject to the same racist practices. Upon the creation of the modern prison system, for example, Black men especially have developed a stereotype of being the absent father, resulting in the orphaning of their children. This cyclical practice continues as racist police practices and the prison industrial complex combine to imprison Black men (Alexander 33).

These disruptions have necessitated a greater reliance on not only biological family when possible but also community as family, making the process of orphaning refer not only to parents but to communities and the spaces those communities inhabit. Returning to the earlier definition from the *OED,* this form of spatial orphaning relates to the second portion: "orphaned, bereaved, deprived of protection, advantages" ("orphan"). Scholars have previous described these protections and advantages through spatial associations. In Farah Jasmine Griffin's text, *"Who Set You Flowin'?": The African-American Migration Narrative* (1995), she extends Robert Stepto's work in *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Literature* (1979) in order to better understand how African Americans have attempted to "come to terms" with the movement from the south or Midwest (home of the ancestor) to a cosmopolitan space through an interdisciplinary study of migration narratives in art, literature, and song (3). As part of this movement from south/Midwest to cosmopolitan (usually North) within the migration narrative, Griffin sets up a "dialectical relationship" between the ancestor/stranger (6). Adopting Morrison's definition of the ancestor,[5] Griffin emphasizes the ancestor's presence in "ritual, religion, music, food, and performance… the ancestor's presence in Southern cultural forms such as song, good, and language sometimes provides the new migrant a cushion with which to soften the impact of urbanization" (5). Of the stranger, Griffin writes that "all migrants are strangers," specifying that "within the African American community, the stranger is that figure who possesses no connections to the community. Migrants who seek to be strangers can never occupy that space fully" (7). Kameelah

[5] Morrison defines the ancestor in "Rootedness: The Ancestor in Afro-American Fiction" as a "sort of timeless people whose relationships to the characters are benevolent, instructive, and protective, and they provide a certain kind of wisdom" (343).

Martin plays off this definition in her 2013 book, *Conjuring Moments in African American Literature: Women, Spirit Work, and Other Such Hoodoo* in which she proposes that the stranger is not only one who is not connected but one who does not believe in conjuring. Extending Griffin's concept of the stranger and taking Martin's definition into consideration, the trope of the spatial orphan allows us to more succinctly identify the shifts in treatment of the extranatural and cultural mobility in Black American literature. Indeed, the spatial orphan represents not only a familial trope but a cultural condition within Black American literature. As such, the term spatial orphan suggests that spaces can deprive people of protection or advantages. In being guided through various spaces by the extranatural, these characters can work to heal their traumas, both personal and cultural, leading them to a new space where they can potentially discover these protections and advantages through either self-healing or a supportive community.

As I have touched on throughout my reckoning with the broader concept of the orphan, gender serves as an inherent piece of the conversation. In the few examples I have provided already, Douglass, Hartman, and Spillers all focus on the significance of the maternal aspect of orphaning. Hartman places the mother in the title and reflects, "to lose your mother was to be denied your kin, country, and identity. To lose your mother was to forget your past" (85). Additionally, Spillers highlights the connection between motherhood, enslavement, and gender, explaining, "motherhood as female blood- rite is outraged, is denied, at the very same time that it becomes the founding term of a human and social enactment" (80). She goes on to say the "female stands in the flesh, both mother and mother-dispossessed" (80). Black feminism, in other words, historically

relates to the role of mothering by reproducing but doing so knowing that they produce other bodies to be enslaved – making them simultaneously mothers and not-mothers. Developing female-authored narratives allows Black women writers to "engage in a powerful rewriting" by telling the story of Black motherhood and the effects of the lack thereof (Nehl 27). Considering the concept of displacement and gender spatially, the construct of homelands being "motherlands" suggests that the diaspora served as a doubled disruption of the child from the mother in particular. As a result, spatial orphans are primarily female characters authored by Black women as they work to envision Black feminist futures. As I illustrate in Chapter Five, however, we do need to examine and nuance the gender of both the characters and the authors by considering the socio-cultural and political shifts that accompany both female, and potentially male, spatial orphans of the 21st century.

Movement and Mobility

In Paul Gilroy's foundational monograph on the diaspora, *The Black Atlantic,* he writes that "modern black political culture has always been more interested in the relationship of identity to roots and rootedness than in seeing identity as a process of movement and mediation that is more appropriately approached via the homonym routes" (19). For the spatial orphan, it is both a matter of where they start their journey and the cultural mobility and movements they undergo that serve as essential elements to tracing not only how they became orphaned in the first place but how they work to find a cultural space of belonging. Black people have fought to find ways to belong in the United States as equals, often undergoing extensive travel such as moving to new cities where they could have better economic, physical, and other freedoms. While I have already

discussed one grander scale of movement through Griffin's conceptualization of migration, Dib too writes, "journeys can be forced, space can become unlocatable, and kinship can be thwarted by capitalist maneuvers. The roots of African and African American mobility in the United States must be understood in terms that reveal how travel has been contested for black individuals and communities from the start" (139). Thaddious Davis theorizes on migration as a journey, noting "migration itself is a form of movement, of travel, of following a course, and as such, in a speculative leap, can be linked to a chain with its predetermined courses of movement" (28). Migration serves as one form of cultural mobility that allows people to become spatially orphaned from a homeland, but, as some have suggested, the concept of a "reverse migration," or a return to the South, offers the potential to find a space of belonging.[6]

Yet to identify and analyze the spatial orphan of the 21st century, the concept of movement and mobility needs to become far more globalized. We are seeing an uptick in Black American writers who originate from across the world and immigrate to America or whose parents are recent immigrants. Their work frequently reflects their culture. In the current global context of the post-Black period, Black American authors frequently engage with cross-country and transnational movements while also considering how cultural mobility can shift even within a small space, such as how a plantation can serve as an entire world. Katherine McKittrick emphasizes the need to recognize all potential spaces for movement in *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of*

[6] These calls for a reverse migration have expanded since the 2020 election and the impact of the Black vote in Georgia. For example, Charles M. Blow's recent controversial opinion article for *The New York Times* entitled "We Need a Second Great Migration" attends to this idea.

Struggle, writing "space and place gives [Black] lives meaning in a world that has, for the most part, incorrectly deemed [B]lack populations and their attendant geographies as 'ungeographic' and/or philosophically undeveloped" (xiii). In identifying and analyzing the spatial orphan, then, it is important to consider more than these larger movements by thinking of the smaller scale movements between spaces that may otherwise be considered invisible, both figuratively and literally. Rather, a spatial orphan could work to find their space of belonging by only moving across the plantation or a city while being guided through this significant journey by extranatural forces.

Extranatural

The spatial orphan needs engagement with extranatural guidance in order to find their space of belonging, or they risk wandering aimlessly and never confronting the traumas of their orphaning. While some refer to this as supernatural, magical realism, or conjuring, each of these terms have their own specific histories and associations. The supernatural, for example, often connotes something unreal while magical realism has its own complicated history.[7] In an interview with Christina Davis, Toni Morrison explains her initial dislike and eventual indifference to the term "magical realism" stemmed from the belief that "if you could apply the word 'magical' then that *dilutes* the realism" (143). Rather, her writing embraces the "enchantment" that stems from a combination of "the very shrewd, down-to-earth, efficient way in which [Black people] did things and

[7] See Louis Parkinson Zamora and Wendy Faris's *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, an edited collection featuring numerous essential works to the history of magical realism including Alejo Carpentier's "The Baroque and the Marvelous Real," Faris's "Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction," and P. Gabrielle Foreman's "Past-On Stories: History and the Magically Real, Morrison and Allende on Call." *Magical Realism and Cosmopolitanism: Strategizing Belonging* by Kim Anderson Sasser contains a timeline of the historical development.

survived things" and "a knowledge or perception… a form of cosmology" that "informed their sensibilities and clarified their activities" (144). To encompass Morrison's sense of enchantment, I adopt the term extranatural, which has a fluidity to its definition that allows for numerous interpretations, making the spatial orphan a more inclusive trope amidst various waves, diasporic movements, and identities. I draw this term from Trudier Harris' *The Power of the Porch: The Storyteller's Craft in Zora Neale. Hurston, Gloria Naylor, and Randall Kenan* in which she describes Mama Day, the protagonist of Gloria Naylor's 1988 novel of the same name, as having "special, extranatural abilities… [and] extranatural resources" (55). Naylor crafted Mama Day as a combination of her mother and father; while Naylor's father believed in the rational, her mother believed in "other ways of knowing," and it is Naylor's mother's "willingness to accept phenomena beyond the empirical… to share in the realistic and imaginative realms" that Mama Day exudes (*The Power of the Porch* 56). Additionally, Harris notes that outside of her extranatural abilities, Mama Day is a relatively conventional woman with a strong moral compass and a dedication to her remaining family (*The Power of the Porch* 72), which makes her conjuring skills – including the ability to create life and kill Ruby – 'extranatural' as opposed to 'supernatural.' In other words, the extranatural normalizes practices that may otherwise be viewed as superstitious, magical, or unreal. Harris' term also draws an important connection between lineage and the extranatural. As discussed, the concept of the mother is essential to the spatial orphan, and these relationships inherently appertain to the extranatural, as Andrea O'Reilly states in *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart*: "The motherline" – and the motherland – "represents the ancestral memory, traditional values of African American culture… if black children are to

survive, they must know the stories, legends, and myths of the ancestors" (12). While not as common in regard to the spatial orphan, a point I discuss in greater depth in analyzing *The Intuitionist* in Chapter Two, I would suggest that in the 21st century the father figure and the "fatherline" also takes on this role of significance in passing down different elements of the extranatural. In doing so, these extranatural elements create a connection between the ancestral culture (although not necessarily parental) and the spatial orphan; this allows the spatial orphan to be guided through different spaces of traumatic confrontation if the character accepts the guidance.

For the purposes of recognizing the spatial orphan trope, I do not believe it is essential to delineate which specific religions connote the extranatural. I follow Mellis' line of thought that suggests the "practice and semantics" of different magic-religions "act as symbols for many writers to define themselves culturally and politically as they forge and claim their identity in an often hostile world" (*Voodoo* 8). This is not to say that we should not acknowledge the different foundational practices, especially as I recognize that diasporic movement is central to the appearance of extranatural within the United States, creating a clear connection between movement and the extranatural. To understand the journey of the spatial orphan's cultural mobility, it may in fact be essential to understand their connection to a specific form of the extranatural. For example, in the African American tradition specifically, Yvonne Chireau details a combination of the realism and imaginative relating to the conjuring tradition. She provides a history of the connection, giving a variety of terms to help define elements of conjure in *Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition* (2003) as she discusses the empowerment that stems from this cultural element. In particular, Chireau works to break

down the "magic-religion binary" when she argues "African American 'religion' is not always distinct from what others call "magic." Instead, these are complementary categories, and they have historically exhibited complementary forms in African American culture" (Chireau 7). Jeffrey Anderson defines conjure similarly as "fall[ing] between two extremes of religion proper and low-level supernaturalism" (x). While Chireau and Anderson work primarily with real world examples, James Coleman's take considers this relation within to African American literature; he contextualizes postmodern literature (post 1979) through a combination of Christianity and Voodoo/Hoodoo, creating a precedent for the complex combination of religious histories present in African American literature.

Especially significant to my understanding of the extranatural in Black American literature in the post-Black period is the experiences of the Diaspora. Leila Kamali explains that the religious practices often associated with the extranatural come from a variety of sources of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora (12). These Diaspora Religions – a term coined by Joseph Murphy in *Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora* (1994) - include Vodou, Obeah, Candomblé, and Santería among others (*Sacred Possessions* 2). Karen McCarthy Brown identifies Vodou in particular as being "close[r] to its African roots than most other forms of New World African religion" (5). Speaking on Caribbean Diaspora Religions at large, Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert write, "If all these religions can be said to coincide perfectly in one area, it is in their promotion of a ritualized union of the people with the spirit world, in the reciprocity of the link between the spirits and community" (*Sacred Possessions* 3). In addition to the religions present in the Caribbean, Murphy includes the Black Church as one of his Diaspora

Religions, suggesting that these religious elements are also present within the United States. Hence, there are spatial connections implied within the historical development of the extranatural in African American culture that often comes from what Kamali explores as "African cultural memory" (6). As with the Diaspora Religions and their dynamic ability to cross boundaries, Kamali proposes that African cultural memory can be located in African diaspora fiction, especially through "knowledge that is depicted as 'everyday,' knowledge of memories of the past, and the knowledge of other worlds accessed through spirit-possession" (12). As such, the extranatural helps the orphan connect with a lineage – through people and spaces – that may have previously been inaccessible, allowing the spatial orphan to be guided closer to a space of belonging.

Trauma

Orphaning, the result of a loss, inherently involves trauma whether it refers to a person, a community, or a location. For a spatial orphan to reach a space of belonging, then, they must undergo the process of healing from their traumas, which occurs as they move through different spaces with the guide of the extranatural. Black people in the United States face numerous forms of trauma, and the spatial orphans' journeys reflect this need for multifaceted healing. On the one hand, these characters face individual traumas that come from incidents of orphaning. These are unique to the characters, yet they also stem from generational and historical traumas. Many Black communities face generational and community traumas stemming from the diaspora that has repeated through slavery, Jim Crow, the War on Drugs, and others. This, Nancy Miller notes, causes continuous effects on those who experiences the trauma and on those who do not "share bloodlines with its victims" (Miller and Tougaw 9). This stands true for Black

people who later immigrated into the United States as they are treated in the same way because of their skin color regardless of origin. Both face "individual and community effects… which can endure for generations, shattering survivors both psychically and culturally" (Wales Freedman 5). For those impacted by the forced diaspora of slavery, the conflict between collective trauma and individual memories frequently derives from this generational trauma (Schreiber 5). Kathleen Brogan expands on this further, stating "When an individual's distress derives from the larger trauma of a group, pathologies of memory take on a cultural and political significance, reflecting a society's inability to integrate with both the present traumatic experience and a pre-catastrophic lost past" (6-7).

To recover from these traumas necessitates confronting them, which, according to Wales Freedman and others, could be even more painful than the trauma itself. [8] In order to heal from trauma, someone must both acknowledge that the trauma has occurred and someone else must listen to the trauma. Schreiber, in analyzing Morrison's response to trauma, explains, "physical location does not erase trauma; people must verbalize and acknowledge personal and cultural trauma in order to mature and function in daily life" (107). In other words, moving to a new location alone does not erase the haunting traumatic presence of the previous place. Instead, finding community, which we can associate although not correlate with a space of belonging, "enable[s] characters to begin the healing process and to develop a sense of self" (Schreiber 107). By following the guide of the extranatural, then, moving through various spaces can lead to purposeful healing instead of aimless moving. And the spatial orphan does need to heal – or at least

[8] See Caruth, Felman, Laub, and Phelan among others.

begin the process of healing – their dual traumas of individual orphaning and generational, cultural, and community-based pain if they have any chance at finding a space of belonging.

Spaces of Belonging: The 21st Century

A spatial orphan attempts to, at the very least, cope and, at the very most, resolve the trauma that comes from both the diaspora and its effects. The ultimate goal of the spatial orphan is to become un-orphaned, to find their home. In order to resolve the trauma, even if the characters cannot always reach the space of belonging, Wales Freedman suggests "One can feel at home with oneself and in the world when one has witnessed" - or come to terms with – "the traumas that prevent one from getting there" (179). This is also why the concept of community stands as so important, because "support for subjectivity [serves] as the communal act of mothering… the community offers similar support through cultural memory and rememory" (Schreiber 27). Authors, I propose, leave us the keys to tell us where these spaces of community support and individual belonging should be imagined by completing a form of "wake work," a concept Christina Shape coins in *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. "Wake work," writes Sharpe, involves "imagin[ing] new ways to live in the wake of slavery, in slavery's afterlives, to survive (and more) the afterlife of property." These actions serve as "a mode of inhabiting *and* rupturing this episteme with out known lived and un/imaginable lives" (18).

In the 21st century post-Black period, identifying that spaces need to exist where the individual can feel supported in attending to the collective traumas that come from different Black diasporas can be viewed as a form of Sharpe's wake work. Considering

these authors' works reflect the time period during which Black people face an "increasingly ambiguous position with regard to concrete political, legal, and economic structures" (Leader-Picone 18), it is perhaps unsurprising that the authors I address throughout my project infrequently identify a space of belonging. Irresolution of spatial belonging leaves their characters orphaned, but these authors can tell us where safe spaces need to be imagined and will hopefully be created.

Three Waves of Spatial Orphans

While my project focuses specifically on the 21st century spatial orphan, I posit that this trope appears in waves within Black American literature, each time in response to racialized and racist restrictions and violence as an attempt to create equality and/or advancement through art.[9] These three waves include the late 1800s to the 1930s; the 1960s to the 1980s; and 2008 through the present. Notably, these are also the three waves where the extranatural reappears in frequency as both Jeffrey Anderson and James Mellis note. Mellis specifically writes, in response to protest literature, that there is a "tradition of authors invoking African-based spiritual traditions variously: as a literary trope, a tie to originary African identity, and… as a means of empowerment for characters to control or punish, or as protection from and resistance to a racially oppressive society" (403). In his

[9] The use of wave to describe the different groupings of spatial orphans serves to create an intentional mental image corresponding with the subject matter of the spatial orphan. On the one hand, the term accurately describes the rising and falling action that each wave goes through; no generation of authors abruptly stops writing with the spatial orphan but rather there is a gradual rising and eventually falling as evidenced by my analysis of Whitehead's *The Intuitionist* from 1999. Secondly, I use the term wave to connect the idea of the spatial orphan with the forced diasporic movements of the transatlantic slave trade and the import of people from Africa and the Caribbean into the U.S. This reminds readers not only of the cyclical nature of the term but connects the spatial and temporal.

book *Conjure in African American Society*, Jeffrey Anderson further notes that America's historical and academic interest in conjure has come in waves with each wave correlating to a different significant period in the fight for Black equality. Although I do not extensively discuss the other two waves in this current work, recognizing that this trope appears in waves allows us to understand why this trope has appeared in response to the current socio-cultural and political climate and how the reappearance of a past trope represents a form of the work the characters within the novels are doing: revising the past in search of a new future. In the 21st century in particular, I suggest that the concerns of the individual and collective stem from the indebtedness to the spaces of belonging the second wave created while simultaneously rejecting the tidiness of their solutions that led to the time of realism and false sense of racial equality between the second and third waves. Defining these waves, then, allows for a literary lineage that has led to the post-Black era.

The first period of this extranatural trope begins in the late 1800s and ends in the 1930s.[10] Anderson contributes the beginning of conjuring's appearance in media in the 1890s as a way to literarily bridge "the romanticism of the early nineteenth century and the realism that came to characterize the twentieth" (5). The extranatural treatment of religion as a trope emerged in early African American literature with authors including Pauline Hopkins and Zora Neale Hurston who combined Christianity with the spiritual practices from Africa. Anderson, historicizing the time period, explains that white media

[10] Anderson technically splits the reappearance of conjure into four waves. Looking from a historical point of view, he distinguishes between the "hard" first wave from the last 1800s to the start of WWI and the "soft" wave from the end of WWI to the end of the 1930s.

used conjure at the start of Jim Crow to "bolster white superiority and regional distinctiveness" while Black folklore societies published conjure stories to "preserve knowledge" and keep their unique Black history (Anderson 4, 6). Elizabeth West further analyzes the literature of Black women specifically in this period in *African Spirituality in Black Women's Fiction: Threaded Visions of Memory, Community, Nature and Being*, in which she connects "memory [with] community" in order to suggest that spirituality helped "maintain community rituals and practices… [to] preserve significant African-rooted ontological beliefs" (23). These practices included the "human relationship with the supernatural" (West 26). This became especially important during the Great Migration, which, as Griffin theorizes, risked isolating Black communities from their ancestral roots. Hence, the first wave spatial orphan appears in response to both Jim Crow, the Great Migration, and the risk of losing their freedom and identity.

The second period saw a reemergence and redevelopment of the spatial orphan in the 1970s and 1980s after the Black Arts Movement with authors including Toni Morrison, Ntozke Shange, and Gloria Naylor utilizing this character trope.[11] While Anderson claims this revival occurs in popular culture due to the migration of Latinx people into the United States, Joseph Sorett posits in *Spirit in the Dark* that authors in this period tended to look toward the past in order to help comprehend, survive, and even excel in the future as a community (Anderson 18). Kamali also observes this: "individuality disconnected from African American and African tradition and community leads to alienation – yet part of the process of reconnecting to these traditions lies in

[11] See Leila Kamali's 2016 book *The Cultural Memory of Africa in African American and Black British Fiction, 1970-2000: Specters of the Shore* and Josef Sorett's 2016 book *Spirit in the Dark* among others.

understanding the aesthetics of fluidity, flexibility, and openness to change which is an inherent part of the African American tradition" (6). The South as a space is central to the process of alienation and reconnection in the second period, especially for Black women writers. Harris postulates in *The Scary Mason-Dixon Line: African American Writers and the South* (2009) that engaging with the South provides "validation and authentication… kinship and unity," particularly following the Civil Rights era that worked to create a unifying identity of Blackness (16). While there are novels that have involved the extranatural since then – for example, Morrison continued to engage with the trope and Randall Kenan published *A Visitation of Spirits* – most authors once more returned to a form of realism that excluded the possibility of a spatial orphan. Yet the election of Barack Obama in 2008 sparked the start of the third wave of the spatial orphan, which I focus on throughout the remainder of this project.

Chapter Breakdown

The spatial orphan, a trope I have identified in American novels, does not uniquely apply to the African American diaspora through the Atlantic slave trade. As such, I have selected novels that represent various Black identities, migrations, and experiences in the 21st century, including those represented by Caribbean and African authors.[12] The length of this project also necessitates limitations to the number of texts I can analyze to showcase both the existence of and practicality of the spatial orphan trope. For example, while I identify Toni Morrison as a primarily second-wave author, her 2012

[12] Although I include numerous transnational and diasporic movements, I have excluded Afro-Canadian authors for the purposes of focusing this project on the U.S. and the diasporic relationships that U.S. authors fictionalize. Future research could explore the potential for a spatial orphan trope in works by authors such as Nalo Hopkinson and Lawrence Hill as well as the corresponding questions of cultural and spatial belonging.

novel, *Home*, could easily fit within the scope of this project. Furthermore, I have previously identified the start of the third wave as 2008, yet I begin with Colson Whitehead's 1999 novel, *The Intuitionist*, to serve as the introduction to the third wave. Whitehead's text acts as a prophetic insight into the shifts that would not occur in full until Barack Obama's presidency, but by organizing chapters in chronological order, from *The Intuitionist* to Jesmyn Ward's 2018 novel, *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, I address the development of the spatial orphan throughout Obama's presidency and the beginning of Donald Trump's presidency. More significantly, I have organized my chapters by location and movement. This allows the reader to recognize how the spatial orphan exists within the United States and transnationally and how the trope can help readers to understand different responses to the socio-political post-Black struggle between "charting a transition that acknowledges the persistence of structural racism while imagining its transcendence" (Leader-Picone 20).

As such, Chapter Two addresses the spatial orphan and the Great Migration in the works of Colson Whitehead. Focusing primarily on *The Intuitionist*, I suggest his 1999 novel serves as a transitionary look into the role of the spatial orphan. While a desire to escape Southern racial policies drives Lila Mae Watson to the North, I argue that mechanical magic helps guide her to a potential space of belonging. I turn to *The Underground Railroad*, Whitehead's 2016 novel, to elucidate the progression of the spatial orphan through his blatant reference to the stray while still relying on mechanical magic to assist in Cora's North-bound escape. In combination, the open-ended nature of both novels represents the lack of resolution, albeit a hopeful one, for the spatial orphan

who wishes to find a space of belonging that allows the characters to maintain their individuality amongst a community.

Chapter Three addresses the diasporic roots of Black orphaning in the United States by addressing two takes on the idea of returning to Africa as a method of spatial belonging. There has been an uptick in "return to Africa" novels as a result of both political influences and the popularization of DNA and roots tracing in recent years, and in this chapter, I analyze the significance in contrasting spaces of belonging both within the U.S. and as these characters return to Africa. *Homegoing* (2016) by Yaa Gyasi fictionalizes a genealogical tracing from a pair of sisters in Ghana during the height of the slave trade to their descendants meeting in America in the 21st century. I problematize her solution of returning to Ghana as an overly simplistic method of resolution to the spatial orphan's struggles. I contrast this oversimplification with Nnedi Okorafor's Africanjujuist novel *Akata Witch* (2011) in which the protagonist immigrates to Nigeria from America. She struggles with finding her space of belonging in a hyper-globalized world, and I argue that she physically embodies the role of the border, troubling the idea of belonging within one space when one identifies as both American and African.

The next chapter addresses the diasporic nature of the Black Atlantic, this time stemming from the Caribbean slave trade in Marlon James' controversial novel, *The Book of Night Women* (2009), and a novella from John Keene's *Counternarratives* (2015). I propose each text attends to cultural mobility through dual movements of distance and ascent. Distance from a space, as evoked through forced diasporic movement, creates the need for finding a space of belonging; ascent, which often correlates with white male Enlightenment, produces alternative forms of attempting to

obtain spatial belonging through knowledge. James' protagonist finds an unlikely space of survival by deciding against the guidance of the extranatural as she moves across the Jamaican landscape. Keene's novella, on the other hand, identifies the power that comes from renegotiating Enlightenment through extranatural and ancestral knowledge, allowing for the potential to continue moving in the hopes of finding, or creating, a future space of belonging. As novels reimagining history, both James and Keene emphasize the lack of representation of narratives that do not fit within the traditional ideology of the Black American diaspora.

To this point, the spatial orphans I identified have been female and the South has been treated as a space of transience. My final chapter challenges these commonalities by considering Jesmyn Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing* in a case study. I suggest that Ward subverts the reader's gendered expectations of the spatial orphan to show the influences of generational orphaning. Ward exposes both what happens when the trauma of being orphaned remains unresolved and how we need to reconsider our understandings of cultural mobility through traditionally gendered spaces when analyzing the male spatial orphan. By ending her novel without a space of belonging, Ward reminds readers that race cannot be forgotten in the 21st century or the individual risks remaining orphaned without the Black community.

Overall, the novels I have selected represent the breadth of the trope applicable within the scope of this project. Yet this project only serves as an introduction to the trope. I hope to encourage future research in two directions: 1) other novels that utilize the spatial orphan trope in the 21st century and 2) analyzing how the spatial orphan reflects the social, cultural, and political environments in the other waves I have

identified. Given the tumultuous socio-cultural and political shifts in the United States in combination with Coronavirus, it is difficult to know if we have seen the crest of the third wave of the spatial orphan. If authors continue to use this trope for years to come, as I suspect, the analysis I have begun here can continue to inform researchers as the third wave continues.

CHAPTER 2

"AN ELEVATOR IS A TRAIN": MECHANICAL MAGIC AND THE GREAT MIGRATION IN COLSON WHITEHEAD'S *THE INTUITIONIST* AND *THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD*

In a 2009 Op-Ed for *The New York Times* on the anniversary of Barack Obama's inauguration, Colson Whitehead acerbically wrote, "One year ago today, we officially became a postracial society."[13] Perhaps it is unsurprising, then, that Whitehead has grown to a place of prominence as a post-race American writer, having earned innumerable awards including the National Book Award, the Pulitzer (twice), and a MacArthur Fellowship. One of the themes throughout his work is cultural mobility even as he does not stress race in his novels. In fact, Whitehead stresses the opposite. In a 2001 interview with *BOMB Magazine*, Whitehead explains that "Coming out of the post-Black Arts movement, and having blackness being reaffirmed in literature and drama, I think the young black writers of my generation have the freedom to do what we want. I can write a book that uses elevators to talk about race" (Sheman). And yet, his novels still provide important insight into racial responses to the 21st century's shift to a "postracial" society. Whitehead has explained that "I feel like I'm trying to face black literature, I'm trying to extend the canon of black literature and I'm a black writer doing this" ("Eavesdropping").

[13] Colson Whitehead is a noted satirist, particularly when writing his opinion pieces, making this statement blatantly sarcastic. You can almost sense the eyeroll that accompanies his writing.

What seems like a conflict in how Whitehead envisions his own role extends beyond his interviews and into his novels. Scholars, such as Jesse S. Cohn, have identified that "Whitehead's writings betray a sense of anxiety over the source of cultural value, of guilty indebtedness to the past" (21). Although Cohn's article refers to *Apex Hides the Hurt*, we can see this conflict between past and present in numerous other Whitehead works through his use of the spatial orphan trope, including his first novel, *The Intuitionist,* and his 2016 novel, *The Underground Railroad*.

Considering his first novel was published in 1999, Whitehead may seem to pre-date the third wave of the reemerging spatial orphan trope. His early work is almost prescient in anticipating some of the concerns regarding individuality within a larger community of belonging that now prevails in Black American literature and society. Yet, *The Intuitionist* serves as a transitionary novel between the literary realism more present in the 1990s and the 21st century as Whitehead anticipates and engages with the speculative nature of upcoming 21st century literature and, correspondingly, the reappearance of the spatial orphan. *The Intuitionist* has been described as a play on numerous different genres, including but not limited to a passing novel, detective fiction, film noir, allegory, and Black speculative fiction. Lila Mae Watson, a Black woman, leaves her family in the South and moves North to attend Elevator Inspector school, becoming the first Black woman and only the second Black person to become an elevator inspector in the unnamed metropolis. She is also an Intuitionist, a person who fixes elevators by sensing their problems, and when a newly built elevator at the Fanny Briggs building enters freefall, the Elevator Workers' Guild blames Lila Mae, turning her into a figurehead for crucifixion in the media. Upon going into hiding, Lila Mae is told of the

existence of the Black Box, a (previously) theoretical elevator created by the great Intuitionist James Fulton that is said to change civilization as the world knows it. Lila Mae spends the remainder of the novel both searching for the Black Box and trying to clear her name. Ultimately, she discovers that Fulton was a Black man passing for white and that she has been used by Guild and the elevator companies to find the Black Box for financial gain. Lila Mae is eventually given access to Fulton's *Theoretical Elevators Vol. III* and the plans for the Black Box, which will destroy society as everyone knows it in order to rebuild the world for equality – a "second elevation" (61).

While different in both genre and setting, this 1999 work contains parallels to Whitehead's neo-slave narrative. In his 2016 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Underground Railroad*, Whitehead reintroduces the spatial orphan trope through the character of Cora. The novel follows the journey of Cora as she escapes from a plantation in Georgia where both her grandmother and mother were enslaved. Her mother appears to have successfully escaped when Cora was only a child, and the novel traces Cora's journey on the literalized underground railroad as she attempts to find her way North and potentially recreate her mother's journey all while being chased by the same slave catcher that went after her mother. As she goes through different states, sometimes getting caught but always escaping and learning more in each place, Cora ends the novel on the run but with the slave catcher presumed dead and travelling on foot and above ground.

Cultural mobility and its associated movements readily appear in summaries of each novel, yet for the spatial orphan trope, the character needs to be engaged with the extranatural. Based on the examples I have provided in the introduction, the extranatural seems notably absent. Perhaps the closest to the extranatural that Whitehead admits to is

the literalization of a system of trains running underground as a form of magical realism (Mellis 404). How, then, might we see the extranatural as functioning in both *The Intuitionist* and *The Underground Railroad* if his novels lack the more traditional hauntings, premonitions, and rootwork? I suggest that Whitehead's novels employ what I am terming "mechanical magic" to guide his characters through their various movements. [14] Fittingly for Whitehead, who admits to having a "fascination with machines" (Sheman), mechanical magic liaises the past and future by conjoining elements of the more traditional extranatural with technological advances. Nadine Knight examines part of this connection, writing "Prophecy reintroduces a reliance on human voice and interpretation to counteract the technologically driven view of urban improvement that prizes rationality, impersonality, and mechanization" (29). In this way, Whitehead's adaptation of the extranatural as a human-mechanical connection further relates with the concerns of post-Blackness in the 21st century: how to balance the traditions of the past with the newness of the future.

As a transitionary text into the third wave, *The Intuitionist* engages the spatial orphan trope through unconventional elements of extranatural and different conceptualizations of mobility. Lila Mae negotiates both a South-North migration and an allegorical elevator ascension through mechanical magic and spiritual technology. Initially, Lila Mae attempts to erase her culture through migrating North and becoming a white man's disciple. Upon discovering that he was in fact a Black man passing as white,

[14] In *The Underground Railroad*, both Whitehead and the media tend to the train as a form of magical realism. However, I agree with Mellis that the term does not adequately describe Whitehead's work (404). Li also takes issue with this designation, explaining this "discount[s] the reality of that labor and to take for granted, yet again, the black bodies that fueled the engine of America" (4).

Lila Mae re-learns to navigate her spaces using ghost-like invisibility and alchemic "spell" reading. She eventually becomes closer to her space of belonging by accepting her ghostly role and the role her present discomfort could have on the future. In *The Underground Railroad*, however, Cora's South-North migration and her engagement with mechanical magic through the literalized underground railroad eventually provides her the tools to confront her own identity as a "stray."

Viewing the shifts in mobility through the lens of mechanical magic allows readers to recognize that spaces of belonging can appear, or at least become more apparent, through confrontation and transformation, especially as mechanical magic – combining technology with spirituality – brings together the future and the past. Reading Whitehead's evolving use of the spatial orphan reveals that political and socio-cultural shifts have yet to allow for clear spaces of belonging to be created or at least accessible, but there is still hope to find them. Trying to disconnect completely from the past results in isolation but by engaging with ancestry, even if it is only accessible through the extranatural, can create a potential path for an individual to find a space of belonging by confronting trauma and reimagining community.

The Intuitionist

Just as Whitehead's first novel can be viewed as a transition between generic shifts, Lila Mae represents the transitional prototype of the 21st century spatial orphan. She retains some of the characteristics of the trope that appeared in the second wave while starting to address the concerns of racial uplift and protest that would be emphasized later in the 2000s. The setting of the novel follows suit as an in-between time by Whitehead's refusal to clearly identify a temporality through cultural or societal

markers. For example, the novel makes reference to "last summer's riots" and explains that "The Mayor is shrewd and understands that this city is not a Southern city, it is not an old money city or a new money city but the most famous city in the world, and the rules are different here. The new municipal building has been named the Fanny Briggs Memorial Building, and there has been few complaints" (*Intuitionist* 23, 12). While these riots could refer to the 1964 Harlem Riots as Grausam has suggested, they could also refer to any number of racial protests to which the response was placation instead of change. Grausam further describes instances of the 1960s' emphasis on emotion, 1990s' technology, 1890s guild politics, and 1920s' gangster culture as other potential temporal markers, and the simultaneity of being all times yet timeless reinforces that similar racial issues are occurring in the 21st century and had only appeared placated in the 1950s and 1960s (121-22).

This is the environment Lila Mae enters into when she moves to the unnamed Northern city to become an elevator inspector. Only a select few become members of the Department of Elevator Inspectors and the Elevator Guild, and being an elevator inspector has similar prestige to being a lawyer or a doctor (Maus and Wagner-Martin 21).[15] Even as Lila Mae attempts to be invisible, she stands out because she is "three times cursed"; she is the first Black woman elevator inspector and she's an Intuitionist (*Intuitionist* 20). It is the politics of her choice to be an Intuitionist that foregrounds much of the plot, which centers on the conflict between two schools of thought in the Guild: Empiricism and Intuitionism. Empiricism, considered the old school approach, involves a

[15] Bérubé makes a similar comparison between the elevator inspectors and doctors/lawyers, describing their career paths as "staying in the field, working with elevators, or seeking a tenure-track position at the Institutes" (170).

hands-on, mechanical approach to elevator inspection, and it is the philosophical approach of Frank Chancre, the head of the Department and chair of the Guild. Intuitionism, on the other hand, is a form of mechanical magic. The inspector can sense what is wrong with the elevator through mentally communicating with the machine and sensing what problems the machine tells her. Saldívar describes Intuitionism as "meditation and instinct, the mystical sensorial communion of mind with matter" (9). Knight further associates Intuitionism with the mystical, calling Lila Mae a "prophet" and "a medium for the elevator's own declaration of its mechanical health." (31.) Isiah Lavender III considers Lila Mae to be a "worker of professional magic inasmuch as she relies on her perceptions to cure the elevator of its sickness in the primitive yet sophisticated urban society" (167) and Bérubé further describes her Intuitionism as "a rarefied, intellectual version of the discipline of elevator inspection, working at the theoretical forefront of the field while her plodding white colleagues check for tell-tale striations on the lift winch" (173). Lavender III's categorization of the society as "primitive" is especially interesting, given that the Empiricist associate the Intuitionists with Black culture. Nicknames for the Intuitionists include "swamis, voodoo men, juju heads, witch doctors, Harry Houdinis. All terms belonging to the nomenclature of dark exotic, the sinister foreign. Except for Houdini, who nonetheless had something swarthy about him" (57-58). By denigrating Intuitionism using racialized and "primitive" figures, not only for Black people but also in regard to Houdini being Jewish, Whitehead codes the contention between Empiricists and Intuitionists as a Civil Rights dispute between white people and the Other.

Rather than helping Lila Mae to blend in with the rest of the department, her philosophy of fixing calls attention to her race. Still, her role as an Intuitionist causes the majority of her problems. Lila Mae can make "quick judgments independent of any conscious reasoning process while fixing elevators [which] makes her dangerous, however, because it is outside the application of science" (Lavender III 170). In an attempt to hide from her identity markers, she embraces her role as an elevator inspector and otherwise tries to maintain a status of invisibility, hiding behind her badge as a way to navigate around the city. Her invisibility comes with an intended, yet ultimately negative, consequence though: Lila Mae cements herself as a spatial orphan and prevents herself from finding a space of belonging. When the elevator in the new Fanny Briggs building freefalls, Lila Mae recognizes that she has no safe space when Chancre unsheathes her from invisibility. Chancre reveals to the public that "Miss Lila Mae Watson is an Intuitionist," and when asked if he believes if the "'heretical and downright voodoo'" played a role in the elevator freefall, Chancre reinforces that "the old ways are the best ways… Just like it was in our fathers' day, and our fathers' fathers' day" (26-7). Chancre, who is running for re-election of the Guild against an Intuitionist, manages to identify her race, gender, and philosophy in one brief blow to present Lila Mae as "an object of suspicion," forcing her to either confront the crowds or go into hiding because "she threatens existing power structures and cannot be controlled" (Lavender III 171). Chancer's statement further recalls the Jim Crow era as he highlights the purity and betterment of not only his ancestry as a lineage of white, male Empiricists but the Guild's ancestry as well. Lila Mae, though, has privileged her career above everything, and she is left with no career, no ancestry, and no safe space of belonging. Lila Mae's decision

represents a prevalent cultural and economic conflict of the third wave. As the number of Black middle class and upper-class families increased, so too did the idea of the post-race society (Leader-Picone 12). And yet, I argue that in deciding to become her career and erase all other aspects of her identity, including her ancestry, race, and Southern roots, Lila Mae makes the intentional choice to be a spatial orphan. Like the elevator, losing her sense of mechanic purpose – one predicated on following ideals of racial uplift through what Wehelyie refers to as "the genre of man" – leads to a total freefall, suggesting the necessity to balance the desire of becoming a post-soul, post-Black generation with respecting the history and culture of Blackness. In order to recover and develop a space of belonging, Lila Mae must acknowledge the intersectionality of her identity by connecting her use of mechanical magic with her race, space, and roots.

Choosing her Orphanhood: Space

In reading Lila Mae as spatial orphan, her history of both movement and engagement with mechanical magic shows her development of invisibility from intentional to ghostly. As I have noted in my introduction, African American literature frequently reenacts the Great Migration from South to North as a desire to embrace more opportunities, yet the separation often results in isolation. According to Whitehead's allegory of the elevator, Lila Mae attempts to vertically ascend to the North as a form of racial, and I would suggest cultural, uplift. Lila Mae's reenactment manipulates the cultural mobility of Black Americans who moved as a necessity, which, according to Selzer, highlights "the troubling contradictions that lie at the heart of uplift ideology, especially those that pit a seemingly laudatory self-reliance against more collective forms of community life" (687). So, while Lila Mae moves North for better opportunities, she

also views the move as an escape in which she can intentionally isolate, and thereby reinvent, herself. Instead, however, her movements cause a migration into orphanhood. Her time at the Institute of Vertical Transport encourages this separation. She finds her living space is a "converted janitor's closet above the newly renovated gymnasium" with a single dim lightbulb because the Institute "did not have living space for colored students" (43). This closet is reserved for the one Black student the Institute allows at a time to prevent them from gathering and pushing for equality. Although living space most obviously refers to a place for students to live, such as a dormitory, the term also suggests that the school views domestic spaces as dead spaces and therefore the only suitable space for the single Black student. The closet resembles a coffin more than a bedroom and forces Lila Mae into service as the university ghost. Hence, Lila Mae's attempt to escape the South and reinvent herself by migrating to the North fails with the school's plantation-like structure. She has no community in a new space with familiar racial prejudice, and she seemingly invites the lesson the school ingrains in her: it is better to be a ghost than to be an individual.

She parallels her university experience when finding her own apartment by seeking neighborhood opposite of her hometown and absent of a sense of community, especially a Black community, as if following the lessons of invisibility taught at school – not only those in the classroom but on campus life – will help her blend in within the Northern metropole. The narrator describes the history of Lila Mae's neighborhood as follows: "the coloreds surged and dreamed of the north, too. They had been told something and believed it" (30). This suggests that Lila Mae has not been part of the original Great Migration, but rather, she belongs to the second group of Caribbean

immigrants who fill in where the Black communities have fled. Without a clear context, this narration could easily refer to Lila Mae's journey to the Institute, leaving her house and her family with the chance to have a better life, being told the same lies that all the immigrants – both the new Caribbean immigrants here and the Black immigrants who moved in the neighborhood before them – were told. Her desperate desire to escape to settle and find a space of belonging – namely, an apartment that she can afford and that is hers alone – Lila Mae neglects to shop, accepting what is given to her because it is close to the subway, showing that location, or space we might say, ranks higher on her priorities than community. She also chooses a place where "she is anonymous; the Caribbean immigrants share a code, a broad and secret choreography she is excluded from" (190). This anonymity, or invisibility, causes her to blend in from an outsider perspective but only Lila Mae recognizes that she is not part of the community. Her apartment is "her home, her one safe place" (39). At her home, she can finally take her mask off; she can be a black woman who thinks about theoretical elevators, her job, her few creature comforts. As the novel goes on and Lila Mae considers her living situation further, however, Lila Mae's narration describes as her apartment as "Where she feels as much peace as she ever feels in this city" (121). This suggests that her home is not actually a safe space and thereby not a space of belonging. Selzer raises further question to this point, noting "Her home life is in fact structured more by her relationship to things than by an intimacy with people" (683).

In this way, Lila Mae chooses to be a spatial orphan, because her understanding of racial constraints are inherently wrapped up in her specifically Southern origins and the associations of community and restriction that she associates with the locale. Lila Mae

must be, she believes, separated from all that reminds her of the South, resulting in her invisibility as a mandated price to pay to navigate her career and the Northern city. Her apartment may not be home, but it is better than the coffin-closet at the school and serves as a place of refuge. Yet when Lila Mae follows her Black co-worker to his home near hers, we discover that he lives in a community much like the one she grew up in: "she associates it with her childhood, Southern skies above the myriad taffy pleasures of colored town… As the afternoon unfurls outside her car window, each neighbor greets a neighbor, hats are doffed extravagantly, smiles are currency, no strangers" (190). By being forced out of her routines and her literal comfort zone, Lila Mae discovers that migrating to the North has not caused her to escape from the South at all. She associates community with childhood and a place that held her back. The "myriad taffy pleasures" suggests the town is overly, almost sickly, sweet but ultimately useless. It keeps a child's mouth chewing and occupied for a long period of time but without any gain or true substance. Lila Mae treats her life and these pleasures as unable to co-exist, a holdover from her time at school. The emphasis on her own achievements and self-importance requires her to be a spatial orphan, separating her physically from a community that she can only view as antiquated. Lila Mae may be a Black woman, but by dissociating from "a dirty town" (78) in the South, she can attempt to be one step closer to blending in, although not belonging, to the city. While sickly sweet, the nostalgia of home still evokes the pleasures of community that she could have had access to it not for choosing invisibility over community and her decision to become a spatial orphan.

Choosing her Orphanhood: Ancestry

As I have discussed in the introduction to this project, the spatial orphan trope in previous waves most frequently referred to a female character looking to both abandon and reconnect to her ancestry through maternal lineage. Whitehead's novel, in presenting a developing iteration of the spatial orphan, plays off of readers' expectation from the second wave by highlighting the slightly more active connection between Lila Mae and her mother in order to obfuscate the father-daughter connection. This interest in cultural fathers is a concern throughout Whitehead's work, according to Cohn, who explains: "questions of African-American literary and cultural ancestry… continue nonetheless to be fraught with Oedipal anxieties, haunted by debts to shadowy cultural fathers and to the names they have bequeathed" (21). Hence, as Lila Mae's mother appears through her presence in photographs and clothing, it is the ghostly presence of Lila Mae's biological father and the father-daughter relationship that I suggest Lila Mae most attempts to abandon upon her move North and simultaneously yearns for when she does decide to connect to the Black community.

The traditional aspects of womanhood that a young Lila Mae learns from her mother – being a wife, parent, and seamstress– directly conflict with Lila Mae's desires for achievement as an Elevator Inspector. And yet, Lila Mae's mother plays a comparatively more active role in her adult life, seemingly being the only parent Lila Mae acknowledges through two appearances in the present: a photograph in the apartment and a dress Lila Mae wears. The two men who search Lila Mae's apartment while investigating the elevator freefall observe this as the only photograph she displays: "…when the father shot the picture ten years before, she stood on the porch of her

childhood home with her mother, skinny and quiet… Hers is essentially a sad face, inward-tending and declivitous, a face that draws the unwary into the slope of its melancholy. Something in the bones, and inherited" (31). Maintaining this reminder in her house could be viewed as a positive reminder of family. Lila Mae, however, received her mother's traits of sadness, which implies the photograph reminds Lila Mae the benefits of being a spatial orphan by showing the inheritance she believes she would otherwise receive: being a Black woman in the South, isolated except for her husband and children.[16] The other mention of her mother occurs in Lila Mae's internal narration. While planning a date with Natchez, who claims to be Fulton's nephew and is helping her to find the Black Box, Lila Mae sheds her boxy, masculine Elevator Inspector uniform that others describe as "wearing a man's suit like [she's] a man" (*Intuitionist* 94).[17] She changes into an old dress that her mother made her, and "if she presses her nose to the dress, Lila Mae imagines she can smell her mother's sweat, deep in the cotton" (192). This sensory recollection implies the generational labor Lila Mae has left behind and provides insight into how mechanical magic keeps her separated from her biological family. Her decision to attend school and work as an Intuitionist keeps her hands clean unlike either her mother, her ancestors, or the Empiricists she works with. Not only does she recall the sweat from the time her mother spent making the dress, but the cotton of

[16] That her father is absent from the photo reflects on the background role he has played in Lila Mae's life but also his absence from the family. Her desire to be more like her father in all aspects could be further reflected in Lila Mae's attempt to embrace the drag of a man within her work uniform. She avoids physical connections, especially copulating with a man to have a child, to the extent that Lila Mae describes children as "loins' issue" (*Intuitionist* 191).

[17] We can see parallels here between Lila Mae and Whitehead who has stated that he works in forms of generic drag from one novel to the next (Shukla).

her dress connects to the generations of Black women who were likely enslaved to pick cotton. Only temporarily distracted, Lila Mae remains focused on redeeming the reputation that she has earned in her career as an expert in Intuitionism, especially given, as I claim, that this relationship remains the surface reasons why Lila Mae decided to become a spatial orphan.

Through her migration away from the South and into orphanhood, Lila Mae disassociates from her gender while seeking both to redeem her father's memory and rejecting his influence. According to Bérubé, "just as elevator inspection signifies upward mobility… and offers colored people a route North and a piece of modernity, Intuitionism offers the promise of working in the civil service without getting your hands dirty" (172). Like Lila Mae's mother, her father has been "getting his hands dirty" every night as an elevator worker. An omniscient flashback reveals his true career goal: Elevator Inspector. His application is denied because he is Black and working an elevator is the only way he can stay close. Instead, he would sit in the dark and look at the Arbo elevator catalogue reading through all of the different machines and blueprints, drinking because he could never access them (119-120).[18] While most scholars suggest that Lila Mae becomes an elevator inspector to redeem her father by becoming what he could not, I believe this assessment requires additional nuance.[19] Lila Mae struggles with the conflict typical of

[18] Although much is made of the importance of reading in the novel, with Fanny Briggs being a reference to Frederick Douglass amongst other slaves, Marvin Watson shows that the ability to read is no longer enough to escape the horrors of racism. It may be confronting her father's failure in this way – to not find the next step – that encourages Lila Mae to become an inspector, to succeed in a way that her father couldn't but in a way that requires her to abandon him.

[19] See Bérubé and LaForge.

the third wave spatial orphan; she wants to redeem her father as part of the previous generation by doing what he could not and simultaneously faces a desire to distance herself from his inability to overcome the struggles that she now must face. Lila Mae learns from her father that reading plans and wanting to do something is not enough; she must know not only what to read but how to read, interpret, and act. Russell makes a similar point: "Her father, a fallen man by his own standards, represents that which is coming to Lila Mae if she does not move up and out" (54). Yet as soon as she has an opportunity to succeed where he has failed, their relationship seems irreparable. Marvin is the one to drop Lila Mae off at school, and while he is proud, he is also "limned with shame." His shame during this point reflects his own personal shame in never achieving his life goals and a greater familial shame in being unable to difference in changing racist hiring practices so she could become an Elevator Inspector in the South (43). For her part, Lila Mae barely looks back at him, their shame at his failure apparently mutual, as she eagerly escapes the history of racism in the South that her father represents.

Much like the Elevator Inspector who cannot figure out how Marvin's elevator works at the department store, Lila Mae overlooks her father's experience and time doing his job because she sees him as a failure, a reflection of his own perception. As a result, she believes his advice also results in failure, even when her father makes one last attempt to inform her of the importance of family and the lack of distinction between locations. His own experiences trying to be an elevator inspector - "Studied engineering at the colored college downstate, saw North" (161) – taught him that achieving her goals will require a total abandonment of culture. It is not only moving North that matters but the fact that she must attend an almost entirely white school to benefit from its

accompanying reputation. Hence, when he finds out she has been accepted into the Institute, Marvin gives her this warning: "'You don't worry about us. You worry about yourself. It's not so different up there, Lila Mae. They have the same white people up there they got down here. It might look different. But it's the same'" (234). Marvin appears to give his daughter a form of permission to orphan herself and abandon her family, and she believes she can achieve racial elevation by migration. If she had listened to her father, however, she would have realized that he was telling her what she would discover. Upward mobility, be it through education, race, gender, or migration will not elevate her beyond the familial trauma that haunts her background and the confines that the North will place upon her solely by her physical appearance and not by her abilities.

The Search for Belonging

Lila Mae serves as a transitional iteration of the spatial orphan trope; she moves from South to North to create her own orphanhood, but she must then navigate a Northern urban to search for Fulton's Black Box plans, a search which forces to recognize and develop forms of ancestral connection in combination with her mechanical magic abilities before she can find a space of belonging. Whitehead uses Intuitionism as a form of mechanical magic to create a faux parental bond between Fulton and Lila Mae that replaces the relationship she abandoned with her father. In substituting the importance of an ideology (Intuitionism) for the basis of a relationship over places, people, and culture, Lila Mae brings someone else's message to life instead of finding her own space of belonging. This aspect of Whitehead's novel reflects the early shifts into the post-Black period during which he was writing; unable to predict the future but anticipating change, Whitehead constructs Lila Mae's placeholder relationship with

Fulton-as-father/ancestor to make Lila Mae a medium and a ghost. Fulton's works - *Theoretical Elevators* and his journals – act as the method of communication, and Fulton, through his works, charges Lila Mae with bringing these ideas to the public as his ghostwriter. This further highlights the struggle to balance the fears of being subsumed by the work of ancestors past while desiring to be an individual member who belongs to a community of equality in the present. Whitehead, then, encourages us to ask: Can Lila Mae find a space of belonging by sacrificing her individuality to become a ghostly medium for the past?

Fulton is the (presumed northern, white) father of Intuitionism, and the connection Lila Mae feels with him and his works parallel those absent from her biological father, especially regarding what Lila Mae sees as acceptable ways of passing down knowledge. Lila Mae sees her biological father as a failure, in part, because he relies on reading blueprints but never fixes elevators. Fulton, on the other hand, writes the scholarly texts for how to understand elevators, and Lila Mae idolizes the man who provides her the path to success in the Department of Elevator Inspectors and away from her past. She acts on her idolization by copying everything Fulton does, much like a young child might copy their parent. Lila Mae "studied [Fulton's handwriting] under the gaze of the Institute librarian, in locked rooms – she even, in the early, giddy days of her conversion, practiced Fulton's handwriting for hours. Knows the ink. For one entire semester Lila Mae wrote her class notes in that hand, believing it would bring her closer to him… She mastered his hand, its reticent parabolas and botched vowels" (*Intuitionist* 205). This resembles a spell, a form of literary alchemy, as though Fulton is guiding Lila Mae to her career through his teachings of mechanical magic. This skill, Knight reminds

us, will eventually allow Lila Mae to not only pass *as* Fulton but expresses a desire to pass as a white man from the north (35). Creating her new identity, Lila refuses to acknowledge that her father taught her how to feel elevators and instead relies on Fulton's editions of *Theoretical Elevators* as her source of knowledge.

We can further identify Lila Mae's choice of Fulton-as-father through viewing Lila Mae's prized possessions. The only picture in her apartment is of her mother, and within her safe, she hides a soccer trophy that she earned from her mother's encouragement, a love letter, her high school ring, her degree, and "her prizewinning paper on theoretical elevators. Not much, really" (42). Her mother and Fulton are both present amongst her most prized possessions, but her father remains absent. Even more telling, Lila Mae chooses to take none of this with her when she abandons her apartment. Instead, as she leaves, "she thought she had forgotten something. Hadn't. She did not possess any lucky rabbit's feet or childhood dolls to ward off the monsters of the adult world. Just clothes. Then it hit her – she retrieved her copies of *Theoretical Elevators*" (166). Lila Mae does not believe in creature comforts, because for so long, her clothes provided the drag she needed to pass by monsters in the world as she hid under her uniform. She regards the one connection she has with Fulton, representative of her time up north discovering her skills with mechanical magic through is teachings, as her only desired memory of the past. Pigeonholing her memories has the potential to affect Lila Mae's magic, because as Selzer notes, "Lila Mae's method of elevator inspection originally draws upon a combination of factors— moments of intimacy with her father, her years at the Institute, Fulton's teachings, and her own feelings, experience, and imagination" (695). Ignoring all but Fulton's text as part of her fatherly worship is

problematic for numerous reasons, with the most obvious being that she has chosen a white man as her idol. Russell troubles the relationship between Lila Mae and Fulton because Lila "worshipped the words of her white father" while ignoring the lessons of her biological father (52). Rather than becoming her father who falls to white racism in the South, rejecting him could mean Lila Mae is joining the racist institution of the Inspector's Guild. Or, more colloquially, she takes the "if you can't beat them, join them" approach. Choosing her own ancestor, however, showcases the power of agency that being under her biological father's influence would not have allowed; she sets her own path and chooses her own community of Fulton's disciples to belong to. This decision to respect Fulton's teachings and ignore both who and where she came from makes Lila Mae a representative of the conflict Whitehead senses in an almost prophetic way as a turn of the century author. He acknowledges the complications that arise in the 21st century by balancing Lila Mae's decision to leave the ancestral South while moving her to a metropole that mimics New York City and Chicago, some of the hubs of the Black Arts Movement, maintaining her cultural debt. Simultaneously, he evokes the power that being a spatial orphan provides, namely the ability to be a successful individual where race is acknowledged but not determinate.

Because her relationship with Fulton-as-father/ancestor relies on reading with their communication only coming through books and journals, their relationship experiences similar blunders as Lila Mae's relationship with her biological father. Fulton cannot teach her the lessons he learned outside of Intuitionism, particularly important lessons regarding family and the community that Lila Mae has avoided, because he believes that "communication is wordless and intuitive, pure and absolute, untainted by

misinterpretation" (Russell 53). In essence, words will fail, because communicating for Fulton is not about reading but intuiting. Yet Lila Mae has hung on to every one of Fulton's words, embracing them and making them her own. Fulton, then, has prevented her from learning how to read written communication just as much as her father could not read the elevator blueprints. While Lila Mae is almost always correct in elevator communication, people are not machines. Lila Mae has never been communicating *with* Fulton but serving as his medium; he uses her ability for Intuitionism and mechanical magic as a tool to interpret and, as we discover, publish his writings. Communicating with technology and being Fulton's medium cannot replace the community she loses by staying separate from her family. Instead, she must learn *how* to read before she can successfully use the intuitive guidance of her ancestors to find a potential space of belonging.

Once she learns how to read, however, Lila Mae suddenly understands the purpose of Intuitionism as "communication. That simple. Communication with what is not-you" (241). This is why Lila Mae is an Intuitionist; she can communicate with the genies that help tell her something about the elevator and she has always had a bat-like sense of what is around her. The use of mechanical magic serves as a connection between Fulton and Lila Mae, like "a parallel spatial entity that reaches both backward and forward, that is, like air and the space inside a chain's link, invisible yet absolutely essential to continuity" (Davis 29). However, she also understands its faults, because limiting Intuitionism to understanding elevators prevents people from engaging in community traditions, are Lila Mae's way of working toward a space of belonging. It is knowing how to read, how to listen, and how to feel that results in "a kind of pure

communication, suggestive of cultural or racial memory and thus a return to origins" (Russell 55).

Indeed, "Lila Mae [eventually learns] words are open to misinterpretation," just like the genies that failed to tell her of the elevator's freefall, in part because she has wrongly interpreted Fulton's writings (Russell 53). She discovers Fulton was a Black man who had been passing for White after undergoing a Great Migration of his own. Suddenly, Lila Mae's white idol is both her intellectual and racial ancestor, which forces her to come to terms her own Blackness and question her attraction to Intuitionism. This sends Lila Mae into her second freefall, one that forces Lila Mae to reinterpret Intuitionism and *Theoretical Elevators,* the texts through which she came to know Fulton, through the lens of passing as opposed to her previous reliance on white Enlightenment ideals. The personal uplift she believed to have experienced as a result of her intense dedication to Fulton's Intuitionism has only resulted in the recognition that her uplift has been pointless all along. Lila Mae has always already been in a freefall. I quote her reaction to Fulton's reveal at length:

> Fulton's nigresence whispered from the binding of the House's signed first editions, tinting the disciples' words, reconnoting them. Only she could see it, this shadow. She had learned to read and there was no one she could tell. She understood that the library would be empty if these scholars knew Fulton was colored. No one would have worshipped him, his books probably would never have been published at all, or would exist under a different name, the name of the plagiarizing white man Fulton had been fool enough to share his theories with. She read the words in her lap, *horizontal thinking in a vertical world is the race's*

> *curse,* and hated him. She had been misled. What she had taken for pure truth had been revealed as merely filial agreement and thus no longer pure. Blood agrees, it cannot help but agree, and how can you get any perspective on that? Blood is destiny in this land, and she did not choose Intuitionism, as she formerly believed. It chose her. (151)

Part of the betrayal Lila Mae expresses here comes from, I believe, the realization that her Northern education did not teach her any more than her father's education; she never learned how to read. The books she took at face value, mimicking Fulton's handwriting and language, ultimately betrayed her. Marvin Watson was always correct that the North looks different but still provides the same lessons. Lila Mae's main anger comes from the realization that her isolation and invisibility, from her family, her culture, and her gender, all in the name of becoming an Elevator Inspector, has only led her back to all the things from which she tried to escape. Intuitionism, which she has seen as truth, was only a matter of inheritance. Mechanical magic ultimately leads her closer to space of belonging no matter how hard she fought against it. This also raises questions of Lila Mae's individual agency. To this point, I have suggested that she chose to become a spatial orphan by abandoning the ancestral south and her biological father. Yet, this moment forces Lila Mae to come to terms with her surrounding material conditions; as much as she has worked to evade her race, she cannot escape those materials with which she has been presented be it her father's blueprints or Fulton's textbooks. She has done the best she can to separate herself from her identity as a Black woman, but her agency as a spatial orphan can only work within the confines of the system, particularly one that she has, thus far, choses to exist within as opposed to change.

Lila Mae's discovery of her freefall through family falsities parallels with Fulton's own recognition of family. Mrs. Rogers describe a story of Fulton's sister's visit. She saw Fulton's picture in the newspaper and came from down South to visit him on the Institute's campus. After this first interaction with his family since childhood, "'he got strange'" (240). In a way, this reflects Lila Mae's own fears of what would have happened if she had not migrated; she would be like Fulton's sister. It simultaneously parallels her own future had the Fanny Briggs elevator not fallen: would her parents have come up North, sneaking into her house at risk of embarrassing her or exposing her humble roots? Not only was he strange in attitude but in his work. Fulton switched from the "Intuitionist methodology of *Volume Two*" to notes for *Volume Three* that would create the "perfect elevator that will lift him away from here" (241). Lila Mae wonders "What did his sister say to him. What did he wish after their meeting. Family? That there could be, in a world he invented to parody his enslavers, a field where he could be whole? A joke has no purpose if you cannot share with anyone" (241). The strangeness of Fulton's attitude showcases the shift from his own recognition of spatial orphaning into acknowledging the importance of recognizing the Black community as essential in the hopes of creating uplift. Even though he invented Intuitionism to make fun of white people, he begins desiring a world where there is the chance for himself and his family to have a single space of belonging and where he didn't have to pass and maintain a false identity in order to have intellectual success. The appearance of his sister makes him believe that community uplift will somehow be possible, and hearing this story of their relationship also leads Lila Mae to believe that she needs to find her own space of belonging not only for herself but so that the break between Fulton and his sister need

never happen again. Lila Mae must finally learn these lessons and not run from them in order to avoid becoming the very ideology that represents her own freefall: the Fanny Briggs building. Lila Mae, who has worked to become a ghost except for her one skill – intuiting elevators – must work to avoid being a rememory of the past while adapting to the present conditions she has created for herself through her migration.

A Space of Belonging?

Whitehead ends the novel with Lila Mae in a similar position to the beginning: a ghostly presence hiding in an apartment in the city. Mrs. Rogers has given Lila Mae Fulton's notes, and she takes on the project of turning them into *Theoretical Elevators Vol. III* in which the main purpose is to reveal the Black Box. What is the Black Box? Whitehead does not tell us. All we discover from Lila Mae's internal narration is that the Black Box, believed to be an elevator, will not cause transcendence because his passing proved society to be irredeemable. The ominous tone of her inner thoughts reveals the fate of the cities: "there are other cities, none as magnificent as this, but there are other cities. They're all doomed anyway, she figures. Doomed by what she's working on. What she will deliver to the world when the time is right" (254). Her power in taking on Fulton's Black Box could potentially limit her ability to develop a space of belonging. While she settles into one rented apartment at first, she knows she cannot stay for a long because the Black Box is a desirable commodity. The open-ended nature of Lila Mae's fate has understandably prompted conflicting opinions between scholars. LaForge suggests that Lila Mae views this space as a reward: "alone, yet representing the aspirations of her community, race, and faith; and in her room, whose borders, she knows, are at best temporary" (149). Davis appears to agree, explaining that Lila Mae's

self-confinement is her "ultimate conceptual freedom… Self-liberated from the social and professional pressures of the Empiricists and her fellow Intuitionists, Lila Mae is free to take on the past and become a newly imagined free self" (31). On the other hand, Selzer suggests the reader's own desires for Lila Mae's success as a "self-reliant, bootstrapping" woman discourage and prevent negative interpretations of the ending, such as "those that cast her not as black woman in charge, but as a black woman given over to a new form of social and technological radicalization that leaves her increasingly isolated from black community, progressively alienated from her own body, and ever more in thrall to the seductive attractions of uplift" (682). By reading Lila Mae as a spatial orphan, I do not believe we can determine whether this ending is positive or negative. Rather, like Lila Mae, Whitehead leaves us in a liminal space. This is not to say, however, that a liminal space cannot be a space of belonging albeit an unconventional one that I would not say prompts resolution. Lila Mae's preparation to jump from space to space, no longer attached to an idea of the North but keeping the lessons of her community in mind, shows a reliance on an internal space of belonging that still gives her the potential to be an individual amidst a community.

Similarly, Lila Mae displays agency by intentionally mimicking her old ghostly ways, but for the good of a greater community instead her individual success. To create this balance, she must continue to be Fulton's medium, but she does not blindly follow his words: "Sometimes she almost gets his voice down and then it flutters away and it takes her some time to catch it again… The optimism of this new book is taking some getting used to. She has to recalibrate. Luckily, she's just filling in the interstitial parts that Fulton didn't have time to finish up. She knows his handwriting. The most important

parts are there. They just need a little something to make them hang together" (254). It is no longer easy for Lila Mae to directly copy her once perfect father figure, suggesting that she has learned from her ancestors. She can not only read what Fulton has written but intuit his meaning. When she struggles with wanting to put too much of her old self and Fulton's old self into the book, she recalibrates, a mechanical description. As a result, I suggest that Whitehead reveals Fulton's Black Box. Not a machine at all, the Black Box is Lila Mae's edition of *Theoretical Elevators*, one that has been inspired by generations yet finished by the individual.

The Underground Railroad

Whitehead's 2016 novel, *The Underground Railroad*, has numerous similarities to *The Intuitionist*, which makes sense given that he first developed the idea for a railroad novel in 1999 (Brockes). While he may have had the idea early on, Cora's role as a spatial orphan directly reflects many of the 21st century cultural and political concerns through the lens of a historical novel. In once again engaging with this trope, *The Underground Railroad* questions the role that the absence of a parent plays in a child's development, using mechanical magic to reimagine a different form of a Great Migration in the underground railroad. Whitehead presents the railroad as a set of tracks and trains that run through tunnels under America, and travelling through these tunnels shows Cora much about the construct of not only her own identity but of America itself; she is told by a station guard that "'If you want to see what this nation is all about, I always say, you have to ride the rails. Look outside as you speed through, and you'll find the true face of America'" (71). Already, some similarities between Whitehead's two novels should be apparent: both novels discuss the complexities of parent-child from the adult child's

perspective, and both rely on different modes of transportation to showcase a South-North migration. Even more significant is the ending to both novels: Lila Mae and Cora both end without a clear future. Unlike in *The Intuitionist*, however, Whitehead's engagement with the spatial orphan trope complies with expectations both of his work and of other authors in the time period, with his liminal ending reflecting as much uncertainty in the future with the Obama/Trump transition as with the transition out of the Clinton presidency.[20]

I do contend that Cora more fittingly embodies the third wave spatial orphan both in her orphaning from her maternal line as a result of circumstance and in her movements guided by mechanical magic to find a space of belonging. Cora searches for a place where she can feel safe to heal from the trauma of being abandoned by her mother and start her own family. Whitehead never provides a space of belonging amongst the many underground railroad stops, and Cora must move constantly both to avoid the slave catcher and because she never finds the place where her dreams can come true. While almost each place has potential, the settings disallow the stability to garner trustworthy connections and prevent trauma recovery. Cora eventually learns what she needs to find a space of belonging, but she cannot fully find a safe, stable space to find love, start a family, and not only recognize but embrace and learn from her past.

Before understanding Cora's journey as a spatial orphan, it is important to discuss how Whitehead treats normative forms of the extranatural in *The Underground Railroad.* Little has been made of the extranatural in this novel, because scholars and interviewers

[20] Li notes that this compliance with expectations, describing the novel as a *Beloved*-esque neo-slave narrative without the troubling psychological implications, which makes Whitehead's novel "generic" and "predictable" (5).

are quick to characterize his use of an actualized underground railroad by shoehorning the novel into the genres of magical realism or science fiction, designations that Whitehead has not challenged. The novel does contain traditional aspects of the extranatural, but Whitehead writes them as foolish and unbelievable, as though not only the traditions are outdated but that the application of the extranatural in Black American literature has been overplayed as well, as the following passage illuminates:

> Randall [the master] retained the services of a witch to goofer his property so that no one with African blood could escape without being stricken with hideous palsy. The witch woman buried fetishes in secret places, took her payment, and departed in her mule care. There was a hearty debate in the village over the spirit of the goofer. Did the conjure apply only to those who had an intention to run or to all colored persons who stepped over the line? A week passed before the slaves hunted and scavenged in the swamp again. That's where the food was. (41)

The use of the term "goofer" links Whitehead's take to another story, "The Goophered Grapevine" by Charles Chesnutt, in which Uncle Julius tells the story of a cursed grapevine to prevent a white couple from purchasing the vineyard only for the couple to discover that Uncle Julius was living at the vineyard and trying to protect his property. The passage from Whitehead shows a reversal; when the white power structure attempts to use conjure for its own success, the goofer only works until survival becomes more important, suggesting this form of the extranatural is more of a psychological tool than a part of slave history. James Mellis further explicates this: "when spirituality… is used against an oppressed black population, the drive for survival and self-sufficiency are more powerful, and rejecting the appropriation of spirituality when used as a means of

repression by a white power structure can be a driving impulse towards physical and psychological liberation" (408). Since the more traditional extranatural elements can be forecast as tools of power instead of real curses and haunting, I contend that the association between elevators and mechanical magic in *The Intuitionist* allows us to read the trains of the underground railroad as another form of mechanical magic. Much like Intuitionism, the trains rely on Black thought and the work of Black bodies to help take slaves to the north, but this magic would not function by following a white – or Empiricist – way of thinking. The tunnels and trains rely on the Black men who made it run. As such, we can see the trains in this novel as a form of the extranatural, and it is a type of magic that helps bring Cora closer to a space of belonging.

Self-identification as an orphan proves an effective tool to prevent emotional bonds. From early in Cora's life, "When Mabel [her mother] vanished Cora became a stray," and Cora latches on to this identifier (14). That she sees herself as a stray is perhaps expected, since, as Schreiber explains, "mothers in particular provide support for identity, but the separation of slave mothers and children disrupts this connection" (27). The definition of "stray" shows just how damaging the internalization of this label will be for Cora. Two of the sub-definitions of "stray" in the *OED* are as follows: "A domestic animal found wandering away from the custody of its owner, and liable to be impounded and (if not redeemed) forfeited" and "A homeless, friendless person; an ownerless dog or cat" ("stray," n.). The fact that Cora views herself through the animalistic terms reflects the novel's setting; Cora is property owned to perform labor for the slave master. Indeed, he treats his property very similarly to an animal; the slave catcher works to impound her and yet she is forfeited upon his death. I want to draw more attention to the second

portion of the definition; Cora not only believes herself to be friendless and isolated from the rest of the salves, but she is also homeless. While she technically has the Hub to live in and people with whom she speaks, Cora does not see the plantation as a home but a space where she must reside because of her life's circumstance.

The plantation further serves as a setting of trauma because she believes her mother abandoned her to a life of slavery in exchange for her own freedom. Yet, self-identifying as a stray associates Cora, albeit unknowingly, with her mother. Cora eventually decides she wants more than the plantation can offer as she plans to escape with Caesar, a male slave, much like her own mother who wanted Cora to know "there was something beyond the plantation, past all that she knew" (300). Her mother never expected to abandon Cora, but she wanted to pass down the knowledge of the space outside of the plantation. Cora's only hesitancy with regards to leaving is giving up her inheritance, which is the last thing she has left of her mother and the only good thing Cora can remember of her. Cora believes "Her mother had left that in her inheritance, at least, a tidy plot to watch over. You're supposed to pass on something useful to your children… there was a plot three yards square and the hearty stuff that sprouted from it. Her mother had protected it with all her heart. The most valuable land in all of Georgia" (300). Like Cora inherits a small plot of land while her mother (she believes) lives free, which seems like a small penance for being a stray. As we learn at the end of the novel, however, Mabel died during her escape attempt, but Cora's orphanhood actually allows her to search for a place of belonging, because she is unwilling to settle for what she has been given in life. Her mother had a child that caused Mabel to turn back and die; Cora's

lack of connection and bitterness – a trait unintentionally provided by her mother – allows her to live.

Just because she does not belong, however, does not mean that Cora doesn't still defend the few things she believes in and that belong to her. We see Cora be uncontrollably overcome as a form of possession when the master begins to beat a "stray" child over spilling a single drop of wine: "One drop. A feeling settled over Cora. She had not been under its spell in years … This night the feeling settled on her heart again. It grabbed hold of her and before the slave part of her caught up with the human part of her, she was bent over the boy's body as a shield" (34). In this way, much as the trains will later, the extranatural compels Cora to claim her autonomy, but it takes an extranatural intervention to do so. This feeling, almost a possession of sorts – under a spell – comes when the things she has made claim to come under attack: the garden, which she cared for, and the boy, which she also cared for and looked after. This maternal feeling, the one almost ingrained in her even though she does not believe it was passed on, seems to come through when she is unable to control it. This suggests a potential for possession that her mother has given in her death; the desire for Cora not to be a stray keeps her able to protect and care while also giving her the desire to escape.

Cora intertwines the associations of movement with her own traumatic abandonment. We first see this on the journey to South Carolina – the first stop on the railroad from Georgia – and in how she envisions the city itself. The first train a dilapidated boxcar that runs through a "deathless tunnel," implying that the tunnel extends eternally to the North and providing the hope of life for not only Cora but her mother (100). The train leads her to South Carolina city, which, much like the unnamed

Northern city in *The Intuitionist*, has transhistorical features: experimental government programs for eugenics and syphilis, living history museums, and skyscrapers. Considering this a form of "speculative satire," Dischinger describes this combining of past and present throughout the texts as "speculative literary strategies in order to enact political satire of real histories that, of course, stretch into the present" (84). We might consider mechanical magic to be one of these strategies, which appears once again from Cora's perspective when she encounters the elevator within the Griffin Building skyscraper. The elevator "both delighted and frightened [Cora] by its magic, bracing herself with the brass rail in case of disaster" (88-9). At this moment, Cora could be Lila Mae's ancestor in recognizing that machines embody a form of mechanical magic in that they work autonomously. The magic, for Cora, represents a futuristic freedom, and the vertical movement once again shows the potential for racial uplift that will always fail when engaging when white ideals of progress and Enlightenment.

To this point, so much of Cora's character can be clearly related to her reaction to her mother, and as such, her inability to recover from her past familial trauma has prevented her from being able to envision a future. The elevator suddenly brings her visions of the future into reality, allowing Cora to attempt a similarly introspective confrontation of her feelings about her mother. She realizes "she had banished her mother not from sadness but from rage. She hated her. Having tasted freedom's bounty, it was incomprehensible to Cora that Mabel had abandoned her to that hell. A child. Her company would have made the escape more difficult, but Cora hadn't been a baby. If she could pick cotton, she could run" (100). Although moving away from the plantation setting allows for introspection, Cora still cannot forgive her mother in part due to her

location. According to Evelyn Schreiber, "retelling and remembering the trauma *within a supportive community* enables trauma victims to move forward" (16; emphasis mine). Thinking of Cora, then, even as she moved away and had space to reflect internally, she still does not have a supportive community in which to heal. Moreover, the lack of healing prevents a maturity necessary for Cora to become a parent, which she admits to wanting. She assumes that because she could walk as a child, her mother should have taken her, ignoring that children have more material needs. By staying absorbed within her past and being unable to heal ancestral traumas, Cora also cannot access the necessary extranatural abilities that can help lead her to a space of belonging. Cora spent so much time being bitter against her mother that she never learned the ways she could access her mother in the afterlife. Instead, she spends her time despising traditional, ancestral elements of the extranatural such as goofering. That extranatural involves denial whereas mechanical magic offers the chance for uplift and freedom. As such, Cora needs to continue moving, learning, and engaging with the extranatural in order to heal from her traumas and find a space of belonging.

Part of the reason South Carolina cannot exist as a space of belonging is because the attitudes of people there parallel the system of slavery that Cora has tried so hard to escape. Cora's doctor pushes her to be sterilized and expresses disappointment when she denies him. Although unable to heal from her own familial trauma, Cora begins to understand the larger project of U.S. society, envisioning the capitalistic system of slavey as "an engine that did not stop, its hungry boiler fed with blood… Cora thought the whites had begun stealing futures in earnest. Cut you open and rip them out, dripping. Because that's what you do when you take away someone's babies – steal their future"

(120). Juxtaposing eugenics with slavery clarifies to Cora and readers that just as "histories of these horrific experiments, in the novel's vision, cannot be divorced from a racist history of enslavement and oppression" (Dischinger 91), questionable medical practices, police shootings, and unequal hiring in the 21st century are a continuation of the historical racial inequality. The South Carolina city that provided Cora with the hope for racial uplift through the magic of the elevator, yet this process makes her realizes that technological advancement, much like goofering, can be used by white people for their protection as well. Her only hope for a good future, not only for herself but for all Black people, relies on children, but her comparison of society with the elevator calls into question the use of mechanical magic as the tool to make her future accessible. Rather, she needs a combination of healing from her past by drawing on her ancestry *and* the ability to move in order to have the potential for a space of belonging. Once she knows that South Carolina is not safe for her as a stray and would not be safe for her children, she can no longer "conjure the names of the children" (122). She cannot connect her past to a future if a future is something she cannot envision.

Cora ultimately flees from South Carolina because Ridgeway, the same slave catcher who searched for her mother, discovers her and Caesar's location, but in a way, he prompts her to do what she could not: leave the temporary comforts of South Carolina in search of a better place where she could truly belong. While lying in the dark and awaiting the train, unsure if Caesar will appear to escape with her, she considers what their future would have been like together, a passage I quote at length:

> In the end she would have disappointed him. She was a stray after all. A stray not only in its plantations meaning – orphaned, with no one to look after her – but in

> every other sphere as well. Somewhere, years ago, she has stepped off the path of life and could no longer find her way back to the family of people. The earth trembled faintly. In days to come, when she remembered the late train's approach, she would not associate the vibration with the locomotive but with the furious arrival of a truth she had always known: She was a stray in every sense. The last of her tribe. (147)

Perhaps one of the most devastating parts of Cora's internal narration is that, to this point, her sadness and anger at her mother had been fueling her. Without Caesar, however, her mindset shifts into believing that she is the problem and will not fit in or find her own group of people to be her family. Her mother left, everyone on the plantation disliked her, and Caesar had started to pull away from her as well; thereby Cora sees herself as less than human and unable to negotiate movement in such a way that brings her to a space of belonging. The train no longer seems magical because, in retrospect, she can only focus on her own pain.

Whitehead parallels the diasporic language of Cora's journey from South to North Carolina with her grandmother's life from Africa to American, transhistoricizing the treatment of Black people to suggest the difficulties of finding a space of belonging after a traumatic history while stressing the importance of communities for survival. Cora's grandmother was described as the last of her tribe on the Randall plantation, yet she managed to embrace this status to survive, implying that the train, on which remembers she is the "last of her tribe" will bring her to a community. The other slaves on the plantation also considered Cora's grandmother cursed, because each new owner died or lost his plantation shortly after she arrived (5). Similarly, Cora phrases her time in North

Carolina, where she is confined to an attic, as being a combination between her own journey taking the railroad – "between departure and arrival, in transit like the passenger she'd been ever since she came" – and her grandmother's time on the slave ship – "for now there was only the blank and endless sea" (183). She comes from a line of women who have been able to cope with slavery, giving the readers hope that she will be able to survive even as Cora does not know her own fate while stressing the importance of an ancestral community in inspiring individual success. Indeed, she still needs to overcome the trauma of her abandonment in order to find a space of belonging. Her "northern fantasy" while in the isolation of North Carolina is seeing her mother "a broken old woman bent into the sum of her mistakes… [who] did not recognize her daughter" (175). Cora responds in this fantasy by kicking the beggar's cup out of her mother's hand and continuing with her errands. While her grandmother was able to come to terms and adapt, Cora has yet to forgive and heal from her trauma; this prevents her from being open to the extranatural, so regardless of whether she moves north or stays south, Cora will never be able to find a space of belonging. In other words, movement without the extranatural cannot save a spatial orphan just as moving through different spaces in the U.S. today without recognizing ancestry and community cannot lead to a better individual future.

When Cora's movements do not occur through mechanical magic, losing any connection to her ancestry to guide her through movements, she cannot settle into one space. Ridgeway catches Cora in North Carolina and moves her above ground into Tennessee where she must escape again. Members of the railroad assist her and bring her to the Valentine farm in Indiana, which, of note, is still not a Northern state. The farm acts as a commune filled with escaped and freed slaves who have access to food,

comfortable living spaces, a school, and books. In a scene paralleling Lila Mae's schooling in *The Intuitionist*, two escaped slaves "ran their fingers over the books as if the things were goofered, hopping with magic" (244). Rather than understanding their concerned excitement and connecting with the men, Cora views them to be just as foolish as the slaves on the plantation who believed in the owner's goofer. They do not trust the privileged power source, but they also seem to recognize that once they break through the goofer and learn how to read, they will always have access to the secret. She believes her journey, and I would suggest her engagement with mechanical magic, has taught her all she needs to know about the present position of power, but she is not impervious from the magic of books. Almanacs entrance Cora with their magic because an alamanac is "an object conjured from the future," reassuring her that there is always the possibility for a tomorrow. When her love interest, Royal, presents her with a new almanac, "she broke down… seeing the year on the over – an object conjured from the future – spurred Cora to her own magic" (285). Finally having solid proof that the future can exist in combination with the sense of community that comes from receiving a gift creates the magic of trauma healing. Cora tells Royal about her past, including her mother, which serves as therapeutic and cathartic. Just as she unknowingly paralleled her grandmother's journey, Cora performs a level of acceptance and hope that her mother had also achieved. Magic comes through the manipulation of time and the ability to merge past and present. If trains, as I have proposed, showcase mechanical magic by combining the ancestral magic with future technology, Cora serves as a train herself for the development of her family line.

As the train that allows her family line to continue, Cora must work on the development of her own parental skills; she achieves the first step to healing by confiding in Royal and she continues to heal by being exposed to a good mother/daughter relationship, or, as she calls it, a "maternal performance" (248). Sybil and Molly become the lost future Cora could never envision, but the magic of the almanac convinces her that the future may still be possible. This positive mother/daughter relationship in combination with Cora's access to romance shows her that "freedom was a community laboring for something lovely and rare" (278). In one of his less subtle moments, Whitehead suggests this community where "so many colored settlers had put down roots [is] the advance guard of a great migration" (251). As we know, however, the Great Migration caused the separation of numerous families, and the sacrifice they made for their new roots involved losing their own. Griffin, like previously stated, reminds us that the Great Migration often caused engagement with the Stranger who can only be redeemed by reuniting with the Ancestor. Whitehead allows Cora to begin healing by experiencing community and freedom, but she still has not been able to fully resolve the trauma of abandonment through engagement with the extranatural. Her extensive trauma impacts her abilities to acknowledge that her mother may have left her with the best intentions to ultimately save her life and create a community of their own.

In what is perhaps the most distinguishing feature of the spatial orphan trope in this period, Whitehead's use of the Great Migration warns the reader that Cora's ending will not necessarily be happy. The north (which they have technically not reached) still contains violence but in hidden ways. Violence invades Valentine farm when Ridgeway and others decide to harm and kill as many people as possible during a town meeting.

Being forced to flee for her safety and abandoning her community helps Cora to continue her healing journey, because she acknowledges that her mother has helped her. After all, "it was Mabel who first laid [Ridgeway] low. It flowed from her mother, his mania over their family. If not for her, the slave catcher wouldn't have obsessed so over Cora's capture. The one who escaped. After all it cost her, Cora didn't know if it made her proud or more spiteful toward the woman" (307). Cora inherits Mabel's strength and her enemies, but for the first time, Cora acknowledges that her mother helped. Cora can then parallel her own life with not only Mabel's own imagined journey north but with the railroad as Whitehead uses Cora's internal narration as a self-awareness of her spatial orphan journey:

> Who are you after you finish something this magnificent – in constructing it you have also journeyed through it, to the other side. On one end there was who you were before you went underground, and on the other end a new person steps out into the light. The up-top world must be so ordinary compared to the miracle beneath, the miracle you make with your sweat and blood. The secret triumph you keep in your heart. (310)

I would suggest she is talking about both spatial movement and motherhood/pregnancy here, as the language she uses refers not only to building a tunnel but also creating a human. Just as those who built the tunnel came up as new people, so too has Cora come up through her mother's sacrifice. It took the sweat and blood of both of them to not only bring Cora into this world but to keep her alive. And this accomplishment is a triumph achieved through hard work as well as guidance from those who may no longer be around. She uses this guidance to aim her through the final tunnel: "She could not see it

but she felt it, moved through its heart. She feared she'd gotten turned abound in her sleep. Was she going deeper in or back from where she came? She trusted the slave's choice to guide her – anywhere, anywhere but where you are escaping from. It had gotten her this far. She'd find the terminus or die on the tracks" (310-11). While Cora works on slave instinct, the lack of having a child and knowing that her community likely died gives her the ability to relate back to her stray self. Mabel's failure resulted from being human and returning to care for her daughter. Although Cora does not have access to this information, her time on the underground railroad and all of the people she has met along the way have taught her that she needs to create her own new path. The novel ends with Cora arising from the tunnel and walking above ground as she looks to find a new community without the reader knowing, but still hoping, that the combination of the movement and her extranatural engagement will lead to a space of belonging.

Conclusion

Whitehead leaves his endings up to the readers to determine what the fate of his characters will be. While he has admitted to seeing the open-endedness of *The Intuitionist* as optimistic, because Lila Mae is facing the same journey he himself faces as a writer, he also has observed that "the more pessimistic you are, the more optimistic you find the endings of both books, and the more optimistic you are, the more pessimistic you find the endings" (Sheman). Yet in picking a side of the happy/sad ending debate, I believe we miss the point of the endings. In discussing the concept of chaining in African American literature, Davis writes "futurity requires the work of unchaining oneself yet that work may or may not be achieved, especially because the past can so haunt the memory of successive generations of blacks that it can, in fact, inhibit the necessary transition

forward" (29). Indeed, Whitehead leaves open the possibility that there is hope for the future. In making each character embody their respective form of a mechanically magical object, however, he also leaves the potential for an uncertainty that reflects the carryover of the past. Lila Mae, as I have suggested, is Fulton's Black Box. Caesar identifies Cora as not "a rabbit's foot to carry with you on the voyage but the locomotive itself," and she ends the novel being the train running down the track (234). Neither women are the same person as they are before they encounter mechanical magic and undergo a rebirth of sorts that gives them the potential to find a space of belonging. Hence, when taken optimistically, each novel implies there will always a community to assist during a struggle and that internal motivation can help maintain individual identity while promoting the betterment of the group. Yet, an elevator, as Whitehead tells us, is a train, and "*horizontal thinking in a vertical world is the race's curse*" (*Intuitionist* 151; emphasis in original). The repetition of the similar endings almost twenty years apart suggests the need for a new form of movement in order to prompt change. If, as Dischinger suggests, "destabilizing the temporal dichotomy of past versus present… though a speculative premise that puts the novel in conversation with contemporary US politics and literature" (87), reading Whitehead's continued use of mechanical magic through the spatial orphan trope could also suggest that there needs to be a new approach to solving the problems of racism in the 21st century. Moving vertically and horizontally, forms of movement that white society accepts and thereby constrains, are not helping spatial orphans to find their homes, but maybe diagonal movement in combination with the extranatural, whatever that may look like, can work create equality in a society that seems to be increasingly racialized.

CHAPTER 3

"WELCOME HOME": THE RETURN TO AFRICA IN YAA GYASI'S *HOMEGOING* AND NNEDI OKORAFOR'S *AKATA WITCH*

Termed "the fourth Great Migration" by Ira Berlin, there has been a drastic increase in the number of African immigrants and Caribbean immigrants to the United States since the closing of the 20th century (qtd. in Leader-Picone 147). Ava Landry notes a similar migration pattern in in "Black is Black is Black? African Immigrant Acculturation in Adichie's *Americanah* and Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*," namely that there has been a surge since the 1980s in the number of Africans who are immigrating to America from Africa, a voluntary immigration that comes with far different associations from those African Americans whose ancestors were forced to America through the transatlantic slave trade (Landry 127). As such, this has created a "struggle between pre-migration ethnic identity and post-migration racial identity, in which African immigrants work both in concert with and in opposition to existing notions of Blackness" (Landry 128). These concerns directly parallel with the post-Black period; while many of these immigrants want to maintain their individual identities from their home countries and be separate from those in America descended from enslaved people, they must also contend with the collective idea of Blackness that society will group them into based on skin color. As one of the founding concerns of the post-Black era, the conflict between individuality and community surfaces with the use of Blackness as an identifying concept. While this term creates a collective that allows for community organizing, such

as the Black Lives Matter movement, the term also creates an all-encompassing idea of Blackness that is oftentimes presented as synonymous with descendants from bondspeople. Yet as the post-Black era parallels with this increase in immigration, we must consider both if and how these authors utilize the spatial orphan trope to reflect their own concerns of the individual versus collective.

In some ways, then, racial solidarity becomes essential but only to some extent while these groups work to battle against the historical traumas that are placed upon them. Recent African immigrants have not historically faced the same concerns as those descendants in the United States and may have a different outlook on slavery and its impacts on American history, yet they often face the same racist attitudes that being Black in the United States evokes. Leader-Picone observes this in his analysis of another popular novel contending with African American identity, Adichie's *Americanah*, explaining "the fluidity of [racial] experience does not mirror a similar loosening of the current racial order… the experiences of Black immigrants signal the ongoing breakdown of conceptualizing Blackness as a new monolithic community, even while highlighting the continuing oppressiveness of American racial dichotomies" (153). As a result, the third wave spatial orphan character in Black American literature potentially faces numerous different concerns of identity and spaces of belonging. Authors are not only contending with the conflict between individuality and community in a post-Black era within the U.S., but they are also navigating spaces of belonging throughout the Global South. Hence, I explore the trope of the spatial orphan in two novels set partially in Africa that cope with different understandings of what it means to be both African and America. *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi (a Ghanaian-American author) and *Akata Witch* by

Nnedi Okorafor (a Nigerian-American author) address the complications that arise from being an African spatial orphan and the role that Africa can play in envisioning transitional spatial belonging.

These novels, as well as others from the post-Black period, tend to treat Africa as a realized space, which represents a shift from previous waves of the spatial orphan. By this, I mean that Africa and individual countries within Africa serve as real settings where characters travel, interact, and live. This stands in stark contrast with prominent representations of Africa and the spatial orphan in Black American literature during the second wave (1960s-1980s), which treated Africa as a wholly imagined space. Leila Kamali explores this sentiment in discussing African American authors from 1970 to 2000. Africa, she promulgates, serves as "an ambivalently represented space" that "espouses the values and aesthetics of community life, and communal storytelling, as part of the fundamental fabric of African American tradition" (3, 5). In other words, Africa served as a representative spatial concept more so than a physical space. This resulted in its epistemological vagueness" but helped to bridge the historical pre-diaspora past with the present cultural memory (Kamali 6,8). Yet this space also depends greatly on who is writing and for what purpose. Kamali's manuscript, addressing specifically Black American and British fictional novels from the 1970s to 2000, does not consider novels written by African immigrants to America. In taking these authors into account for the third wave spatial orphan, I speak to three different types of African/American identity constructs that fall under the umbrella term Black American: non-American Black, African American, and American African, all of which play off of and complicate potential spaces of belonging. In analyzing *Homegoing*, I borrow the term non-American

Black from Adichie to describe African immigrants into the U.S., while the term African American refers to descendants of bondspeople forced to the U.S. For *Akata Witch*, I employ the term American African to refers to first generation African immigrants, those who still closely associate with their African identity and culture but were born in America.

In some ways, the spatial shift that Kamali does not account for – from "ambivalently represented" to realized – parallels not only with a change in immigration but with the shift in genre of the novels featuring African spaces from contemporary to historical or Afrofuturist. As I will discuss in more depth in Chapter Four, historical novels present the opportunity to explore the creation of generational traumas, such as orphaning, to see how those traumas have reappeared in the present. Afrofuturist novels, on the other hand, use elements of science fiction and the extranatural to explore current struggles through different lenses. Yet, the realism of African spaces also reflects the political shifts of the 21st century. Barack Obama, a Kenyan descendent from his father's side, troubles his own familial connections in *Dreams of My Father*, making Obama a figure of "optimism in the ongoing racial rearticulation while revealing its limitations" (Leader-Picone 149). In particular, his race and his father's birthplace sparked conversations that would extend into conspiracy theories regarding Obama's own birthplace. Considering Donald Trump, the figurehead of the birther conspiracy theories, subsequented Obama as president, the idea of "African-born as illegitimate" expounded and forced the discussion of Africa as a real space, not just a historical concept, into prominence. The murder of George Floyd, which drew worldwide recognition for not only the brutality of the action but for Trump's militaristic support for the police who

killed Floyd, prompted Ghana to hold a memorial for Floyd, during which the minister of tourism provided this message to Black Americans: "We continue to open our arms and invite all our brothers and sisters home. Ghana is your home. Africa is your home… Come home" (Asiedu).[21] Considering how literature reflects these shifts, then, Kamali's description of Africa as a source of cultural memory has not disappeared – *Homegoing*, in particular, contends with this conflict between Africa as imagined and Africa as real – nor does the shift away an imagined Africa remove the extranatural from influencing the spatial orphan's journey. The influx of African immigrants has, however, led to African becoming a real space, which complicates the possibilities and consequences for the spatial orphan.

Socio-cultural shifts have played an additional role in encouraging the notion of a "real" Africa, bridging the pre-conceived notions of the imagined Africa as a "motherland" with the realities of scientific technologies and genealogical tracing. The increase of at-home DNA kits has allowed Black people to trace their ancestry back to a specific region, or sometimes country, within Africa. This parallels with Henry Louis Gates's PBS (and then network) show *Roots*, in which he traces lineage through historical documents and DNA. This proliferation of materials now allows Black people to access a physical place of ancestry to pair with the desire for an emotional space of belonging, There are some obvious concerns with this, however. Firstly, there remains a noticeable Caucasian bias within these kits that often affects the ability to narrow down Black lineage. The second concern, as noted by Patricia Williams, raises the issue of spaces of

[21] Asiedu's article attends to some of the complications of this message, particularly that the statement works to increase the Ghanaian economy through tourism and the country's complications with non-state sanctioned vigils for Floyd.

belonging. Namely, knowing the physical place of roots cannot replace the centuries of mistreatment and forced diasporic movements that African Americans have undergone, nor do they help to create a space of belonging within the U.S. (Williams).

Saidiya Hartman's work, *Lose Your Mother*, attends to this specific desire as she moves to Ghana in an attempt to discover more about her own diasporic identity. Placing Hartman in conversation with Gyasi's 2016 novel *Homegoing* provides a useful basis for understanding the various identities and desire for a unified space of belonging, as well as a method of critique for what I believe to be Gyasi's oversimplistic solution for belonging. Gyasi traces the lineage of a family from Maame, an Asante woman in Africa during British colonization, through her two daughters whose descendants experience very different journeys. As Gyasi covers the span of major historical events in both Africa and America, each new generation for the characters is broken down into two vignettes with the two members of different lines being the protagonist for those vignettes. The first two vignettes tell the story of Maame's children: Effia and Esi. Effia, separated from Maame at birth, is married off to a British officer and her family line primarily stays in Africa; Esi, who lives with Maame until her their village is invaded, is enslaved and her descendants live in America. While Effia's African descendents often have dreams that connect them to their past, Esi's American lineage tends to have premonitions the provide hints about their futures. While there are numerous spatial orphans throughout Gyasi's novel, I focus on the final generation: Marjorie (of Effia) and Marcus (of Esi). Marjorie must cope with the movement from Ghana to America as a young child, much like Gyasi herself, while Marcus's lack of knowledge about his ancestors drives his journey to Stanford. In an extranaturally-influenced reunion with his

distantly related ancestor, Marcus and Marjorie both return to Ghana, allowing for both to realize their space of belonging as Marjorie tells Marcus, "'Welcome home'" (Gyasi 300). Placed in conversation with Hartman's work, this idea of a welcome home becomes problematic as I consider Gyasi's audience and purpose of her novel in pushing a return to Africa narrative more common to the second wave.

Akata Witch, on the other hand, is a 2011 speculative young adult novel written by Nnedi Okorafor about being an American African. Sunny is an eleven-year-old Albino girl who was born in New York City to Nigerian parents. After moving back to Nigeria when she was nine, Sunny describes herself as "'I'm Nigerian by blood, American by birth, and Nigerian again because I live here. I have West African features, like my mother, but while the rest of my family is dark brown, I've got light yellow hair, skin the color of "sour milk" (or so stupid people like to tell me), and hazel eyes that look like God ran out of the right color. I'm albino" (3). She eventually discovers that she is a free-agent Leopard person – someone who has magical abilities but with non-magic parents. Sunny and her three friends work to develop their abilities together in order to defeat a Leopard person gone bad all whilst Sunny discovers more about her complicated family lineage. Eventually, Sunny realizes that it is not her parents that matter most to her lineage, but her connection with her grandmother and her spiritual line that give her a sense of a belonging.

These two novels provide the three different approaches to and insight into the sense of lost identity that comes with being a Black African American, particularly as each spatial orphan works through the complicated binaries that are inherently inferred by the term African American. And, the journeys they undergo to discover their spaces of

belonging are necessarily isolating, excepting the guidance from their extranatural connections. While *Homegoing* provides a seemingly ideal "return to Africa" narrative, Gyasi's ending seems liminal and leaves much open for interpretation if the characters leave Africa. *Akata Witch*, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of accepting a border-like both/and identity in order to exist within the increasingly globalized world, what we might think of as the identity within a "diaspora space." I find Avtar Brah's "diaspora space" concept helpful here to consider these different configurations of identity as they relate to home and movement. Diaspora space, Brah states, "is the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence… [where] boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of 'us' and 'them,' are contested" (208-09). The border as an identifying space is uncomfortable, and Sunny cannot access this space within the U.S. This implies that spaces of belonging may not exist in America but returning to Africa is not simple either. My argument represents a both/and as a way to belong, implying that Okorafor suggests a space of belonging does not have a true source of resolution like Gyasi does. Rather, it is managing how to live on the border, becoming the border, and using that to one's advantage that could lead to a potential space of belonging for the spatial orphan. Instead of attempting to subsume the individual as just a sampling of the collective, which Gyasi's novel threatens to do, recognizing the border as a space of belonging allows readers to see the role the individual can play as both a part of and a barrier between the collective, negotiating the difficult identity concerns of the post-Black era.

Homegoing

Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* covers an impressive span of orphaning and cultural traumas in both Africa and America beginning with the transatlantic slave trade and ending with the identity conflicts resulting from these traumas in the 21st century. In order to tell such an extensive story, Gyasi provides two chapters for each generation. As an example, Esi and Effia are of the same generation, so each sister is the focus of her individual chapter. While this creates what Wright describes as a "linear, male-dominated, traditional diasporic genealogy that so many scholars in the humanities and social sciences seek to (re)construct and/or (re)discover" (225), the form of the novel reflects the disruption between not only the two original sisters but between individual generations of the same line. The fractured reading experience parallels the description of family lines due to the numerous historical traumas through the Diaspora and colonization. In other words, the form of the novel itself embodies the struggles of the spatial orphan in the post-Black period, making individual vignettes difficult to discuss without an understanding of the collective history of each chapter while each vignette could also stand alone. Because of the vast expanse of historical events Gyasi's novel covers, moreover, we can generally understand each vignette as a representative, or stand-in, for what a person may have gone through during the time. In this way, "Gyasi's novel feeds us with a concrete origin, a sense of belonging and place" (Wright 225-26), which allows the reader a space of belonging to read and come to terms with the traumas of the novel.[22] While the novel may have numerous spatial orphans, then, Gyasi's form

[22] This is particularly true given the intended audience that many reviews have noted, which seems to be primarily white Americans. The book was not published in Ghana, and Gyasi has noted it is not intended for Ghanaian audiences. There are further problematics

grants the reader some reprieve and reassurance that they can find a temporary space of belonging in the ending of her work.

Yet when analyzing the content of the novel, it becomes difficult to choose just one spatial orphan when Gyasi provides 400 years of orphans with intertwined histories to choose from. After all, each of Gyasi's vignettes, as I will refer to them, presents one feature of historical trauma that not only showcases an example of a spatial orphan but also how that unresolved space of belonging leads to the next generation's spatial orphaning. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I am choosing to focus on the final generation, Marjorie and Marcus, because their stories ultimately intersect; both characters have been impacted by diasporic movements before meeting in the United States, making their desire for spaces of belonging coincide as they struggle with orphaning in the 21st century in America. While Marjorie represents the experience of the "fourth great migration" African immigrant as a non-American Black, Marcus represents the descendant of bondspeople in the U.S. Both experience the same recovery from trauma when they come together to return to Ghana, as Gyasi suggests that revisiting and recalling historical trauma through a return to Africa can remove the feeling of being orphaned and provide a space of belonging. Yet I propose that Gyasi's formulaic ending problematically reduces the generational traumas of forced diaspora and colonization (among innumerable others) in suggesting that the feeling of home can be easily achieved

in her representations of Black Americans and the oversimplification/clichéd writing of their struggles in the U.S. X review goes more into depth in this subject. The linear narrative form "gives us hierarchies that prize certain bodies over others, draws firm, biological boundaries around racial collectives that do not really exist—and also follows white supremacist logic in defining whiteness as the active agent, Blackness as the reactive object of our own Black diasporic history" (Wright 226).

by revisiting Africa. In other words, she solves the orphaned feeling in the same manner for both recent non-American Black people and African Americans. The characters may seem to find their space of belonging, but, I argue, that space is liminal and prevents the ability to heal from their different current and generational traumas. This reflects the purpose of her novel: to assuage the complicated history of Black spatial belonging by developing the chance for community regardless of origin and writing for a space of belonging for non-Black Americans instead of attending to the two very different histories of trauma.

Marjorie

As an African immigrant, Marjorie does not begin her life as a spatial orphan but instead becomes one upon her parents' decision to move from Ghana to Hunstville, Alabama when she is a child. Serving as a somewhat auto-biographical representation of Gyasi's own childhood, Marjorie desires to maintain her African culture and identity, which she associates with her grandmother who refused to leave Ghana (Goyal 477). But she faces challenges to maintain this individuality against a school system, and society at large, that forces assimilation not only to American culture and language but to American Blackness specifically. One of the first ways the school and her parents push her to assimilate is through her language; the school implies that because Marjorie does not speak up in school, she either needs to be taking ESL classes or Special Education. Angered at the implication that their daughter is unintelligent, her parents "quizzed Marjorie on her English every night… until now it was the first language that popped into her head" (Gyasi 266). In removing her linguistic connection with her original home, the teachers alienate her further from African culture, but they do not provide her with the

skills to assimilate with her Black peers in return. They replace her Twi with proper American English; different from the AAVE the other students, she is doubly disconnected. As a result, the other students bully her, calling her "white girl," making Marjorie "aware, yet again, that here 'white' could be the way a person talked; 'black,' the music a person listened to" (269). We can recognize the truth of the first part of her statement; white and black do not refer to colors of skin but to entire cultures, associations, and histories in the U.S. As her favorite teacher informs her, "it doesn't matter where you came from first to the white people running things. You're here now, and here black is black is black" (Gyasi 273). And these are very different, both in the novel and in real life, than Marjorie presents. This suggests Marjorie's deep desire to find a space of belonging where she can avoid these difficult truths and traumas that come with being a Black immigrant into the U.S. She dreams of blending in with the collective, a specifically African collective, avoiding the individuality that makes her a subject for bullying in school because the schoolmates view her as "the wrong kind" of Black (Gyasi 268). What Americans call Black, she calls *akata* – the same *akata* that we see see in *Akata Witch*. Marjorie describes *akata* as follows: "*akata* people were different from Ghanaians, too long gone from the mother continent to continue calling it the mother continent" (Gyasi 273). This fear of becoming *akata* separates Marjorie even further from her classmates; she is morphing into the *akata* identity that she does not want to possess because it implies a lost connection with her ancestral space of belonging.

On the other hand, Marjorie overly idealizes Ghana in an understandable way to a child who undergoes the trauma of being forced to leave her home, potentially reflecting Gyasi's own experience. She believes that "in Ghana you could only be what you were,

what your skin announced to the world" (269). In this statement, Gyasi erases centuries of complex diasporic histories, suggesting that all Black people are welcome back to Africa as African. Marjorie's own fears of becoming *akata* dispute this simplistic statement. Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother* provides further insight into how all types of Black are not created equal in Ghana. She recognizes "a black face didn't make me kin… I was a stranger in the village" (Hartman 4). This is because she reminds the Ghanaians of "what most chose to avoid… and what was forbidden to discuss: that matter of someone's origins" (Hartman 4). Marjorie avoids this introspection as she returns to Ghana because while she lives in America, she was born in Ghana and still identifies Africa as home. When a young boy attempts to charge her to take her to the Castle, she responds, "'I'm from Ghana, stupid. Can't you see?'" (Gyasi 264). His confusion is apparent: "'But you come from America?'" (Gyasi 264). While she wants Ghana to be her space of belonging, then, and she identifies it as home, the longer she is away from Ghana, the more of a spatial orphan she becomes – neither fully African nor American.

As Marjorie grows older and spends more time in America, her assimilation deepens and she recognizes that being African does not prevent her from being treated as Black, necessitating the development of skills to cope with her deepened orphaning. Marjorie describes her feelings as "'Loneliness, maybe. Or aloneness. The way I don't fit here or there" (278). Her time spent in Ghana with her grandmother on summer vacations and as a child, however, helps provide her with the extranatural tools to feel grounded as her identity becomes increasingly unmoored. One of these tools comes in the form of a stone. The black stone, which had been passed down from Maame all the way to Marjorie, serves as a physical representation of their family history and a reminder from

her grandmother on "how to come home" (268). This stone pairs with the ability of her line to have predictive dreams that serve as visions of the past. Marjorie's grandmother, who once burned her own children to death because of a dream of a past great fire, reveals her past to Marjorie:

> 'In my dreams I kept seeing this castle, but I did not know why. One day, I came to these waters and I could feel the spirits of our ancestors calling to me. Some were free, and they spoke to me from the sand, but some others were trapped deep, deep, deep in the water so that I had to wade out to hear their voices. I waded out so far, the water almost took me down to meet those spirits that were trapped so deep in the sea that they would never be free. When they were living they had not known where they came from, and so dead, they did not know how to get to dry land. I put you in here so that if your spirit ever wandered, you would know where home was.' (268)

Marjorie's grandmother recognizes that, historically, the world has destroyed Black bodies, particularly those who cross the water. Hence, she not only sees her ancestors, but the spirits of all the ancestors, the ones who lived on land and the ones who are trapped under the sea. While the grandmother seems able to predict Marjorie's spatial orphaning, Marjorie refuses to confront these traumas while staying Ghana, Instead, that home for her spirit is where her ancestors are, preventing Marjorie's spirit from being lost but not preventing Marjorie from being a spatial orphan while alive.

Her grandmother's ability to see the past through dreaming further implies a passing down of extranatural abilities that manifest in Marjorie's ability to have premonitions, which, when she listens to them, helps to guide her to her space of

belonging. Reluctant at first of these extranatural abilities, Marjorie fears that she would be "chosen by the ancestors to hear their family's stories" through similar dreams to those her grandmother experienced (274). While these dreams never come, she instead experiences premonitions, which her grandmother describes as "the body registering something that the world has yet to acknowledge" (Gyasi 281). The premonitions are uncontrollable and appear in the form of nausea and stomach pain, all physical signals of something bad occurring in the near future. She experiences this feeling preceding her poetry reading in front of the school to celebrate the "black cultural event" with a poem entitled "The Waters We Wade In" (273). This moment forces Marjorie to confront her feelings of displacement as she reads her poem, in which she highlights that "the waters seem different but are same. Out same. Sister skin. Who knew? Not me. Not you" (282). Marjorie's poem directly reflects the concerns of the post-Black period. She calls out their similar ancestry and the way that Black people treat each other differently based on being their individual ancestry, yet they all underwent struggles that led to them being treated as the same, and as lesser, in America. While Marjorie's premonition does not guide her to a space of belonging at this point, it does prepare her for the pain of confronting difficult questions of identity and suggests that she can find a space of belonging in America if she can come to terms with both her Africanness and Americanness.

Marcus

Unlike Marjorie, whose father writes a book on African history informed in part by his familial knowledge, Marcus descends from Esi, who was stolen from her tribe and sold into slavery, yet he can only trace his family line to his great-grandfather. Gyasi

presents Marjorie as having a richly developed, specific experience, albeit one that many immigrants can relate to; Marcus, on the other hand, is depicted as having a less common experience for an African American male while serving as a generalization for African Americans in the 21st century. In undergoing unique experiences, such as a father-led home and attending Stanford, Marcus's ideas concerning space, identity, individuality, and belonging align more with Gyasi's own immigrant experiences, or even the experiences of Hartman, both of whom received research fellowships to visit Ghana. Yet, Marcus' vignette concludes the novel, raising the potential that his character, and by extension and problematically, a tool to help Marjorie reach her home and assuage centuries of past wrong. If he does stand in for a representational African American, Gyasi's novel encourages us to discuss: can spatial belonging exist for the general African American population? Or is it only for the privileged individuals? If this is the case, what happens to the community left behind?

Of all the characters in Gyasi's novel, Marcus seems least likely to be a spatial orphan; while Marjorie is essentially forced from her home in Ghana to move to the U.S., Marcus clearly identifies his home as an individual space of belonging.[23] This privilege originally showcases through his seeming lack of concern regarding the historical trauma

[23] As a male, Marcus breaks with the pattern of female spatial orphans. While I will address the potential for male spatial orphans in depth in Chapter Five, I do not believe his gender to be a deterrent in analyzing Marcus as a spatial orphan because of the role in which Gyasi places him. Marcus serves as a representation of a privileged collective, however, and she removes concerns that may make gender more significant. If anything, Marcus's gender is more important in his role as Marjorie's push home. In an earlier vignette, one of Marjorie's ancestors explains that in the Fante tradition, "Your sister's son is more important to you than even your own son" (68). Marcus serves as Marjorie's male ancestor, making his gender important to help her find her space of belonging but without impacting his role as representation for the privileged African American collective.

of his family and culture. Gyasi reminds us of his clear sense of home numerous times, providing small anecdotes about the moments Marcus left his home – specifically any place outside of his grandmother's small apartment in Harlem – and the paralyzing fear that he felt each time. These fears away from his home often showcase the terrifying nature of the unsafe or unhomely, terrors that his parents and grandparents experienced and wanted to keep from him. For example, upon going to a museum in Manhattan on a school field trip as a child, a place of New York City that "wasn't his," Marcus is separated from his classmates who he describes as "a line of little black ducklings in the big white museum" (Gyasi 288). He is then found by a white couple, who refer to him as "a cute one" and "boy" (288). Although Marcus has never experienced this situation before, he senses that the white man will beat him with his cane. Yet he "couldn't guess why he felt this way," suggesting that he is unaware of his own familial past, not only in the present world around him but from his own lineage and history (Gyasi 289). This sheltering is inherently spatial; the museum is a dedicated space of whiteness for its location in the city, its décor (described as having "one white-walled room to another to another), and its people (Gyasi 289). He relies on his extranatural perceptions of the situation, the sensation of being beaten before it occurs, to attempt an escape from the museum, even as he is chased by the white security guards and confined by the infinite white walls. The only way he can feel safe is when the whole class is taken "back home to Harlem" (289).

Having a space of belonging in the beginning allows Marcus to ignore any traumas that he experienced as a child, highlighting how extremely important this feeling of spatial belonging is. Reflecting on his first experience of the Harlem he "knew only

through stories" when his mother "had stolen him" from his family for the day, his memories of the childhood experience are overall positive (292). Unlike Marcus, his mother navigates the streets of Harlem filled with drug dealers, the type of life both his father and Ma Willie, his grandmother, work to keep him away from. Rather than being concerned that he had been taken by "the woman who was no more than a stranger to him," he actively recalls "the fullness of love and protection he'd felt later, when his family had finally found him. Not the being lost, but the being found" (Gyasi 293). Marcus has the privilege, or perhaps the shelter, to avoid many of the problems that stem from being Black in America, but this also prevents growth and discovery; he cannot belong anywhere else if he chooses to leave his neighborhood because he is constantly confronted with the terrors of the outside world. Hence, Marcus may not seem to be a spatial orphan because he does have a "space of belonging," but that space is so carefully constructed in a way that increases isolation from the rest of America and is impossible to sustain. As such, Gyasi's construction suggests that America as a whole lacks a space of belonging for Black people. Rather, only artificial spaces of home allow for refuge from the outside horrors of racism and its effects in America.

Before Marcus can find a national space of belonging, he must first experience life without this false space of safety and recognize that he is a spatial orphan, or, to phrase this in terms of the post-Black movement, he must balance his desire to be a protected individual that leans toward the future with the community that points toward his past. The extranatural allows Marcus to recognize the limitations of his space, making him a spatial orphan on not only a national level but a personal level. This is because Marcus recognizes that the forced diaspora of his ancestors prevents him from having a

complete family line, what Hartman refers to as the "afterlife of slavery" (6). While sitting at dinner listening to his grandmother sing, he "would sometimes imagine a different room, a fuller family. He would imagine so hard that at times he thought he could see them" (Gyasi 290). The pronoun "them" is ambiguous here; it could apply to either the family members he envisions or the specific spaces, implying that the spaces in which his ancestors lived are equally as important to his identity as the people. The spaces he describes include an African hut, a "cramped apartment," and "a small failing farm, around a burning tree or in a classroom," all direct references to other characters in the book from both his family line and from Marjorie's line (Gyasi 290). Ma Willie explains that Marcus has "the gift of vision," just as she had before moving to Harlem from Alabama: "'Harlem.' The word hit her like a memory. Though she had never been there, she could sense its presence in her life. A premonition. A forward memory" (205). While a premonition is generally thought of as an idea of what is yet to come, the suggestion of it being a forward memory implies that this action has already occurred and will reoccur again. Like her feeling of a forward memory, the gift of the extranatural is a family trait. Marcus's experience, then, signifies a greater familial connection to the extranatural.[24] This prompts his recognition of his spatial orphaning. Not only has he been isolated from the rest of his city to keep him safe, but the resulting diaspora and American history has kept him from knowing other spaces that were inherent to his belonging.

[24] There appears to be a crossover between the family lines in terms of the forms of extranatural they can access. Marjorie's line tends to dream of the past, while Marcus's tends to see the future, yet their generation experiences the opposite.

While it is the extranatural that inspires him to look deeper into his family line, his rejection of the extranatural begins his journey as a spatial orphan as he then leaves his individual space of belonging to understand better where his collective space of belonging exists. Gyasi presents a contrast between scholastic knowledge and ancestral knowledge at multiple points, seemingly suggesting that the extranatural (or ancestral) knowledge ultimately overrides academic learning in hopes of finding a space of belonging, particularly as he objects to the extranatural (perhaps signaling a rejection of Christianity, which the Africa line shows us to be a Western concept) in favor of scholarly knowledge about his family by moving across the country to California. In other words, he has to abandon everything – be separated from his family and his individual space of belonging – in order to gain a collective space of belonging. School, however, reinforces his family's stories of the counternarratives of American history that he was reluctant to believe while highlighting whose histories are privileged both in the academy and in the world. He attempts to find his space of belonging through research, yet he realizes that the academic world contains little knowledge of the family history that he accessed through his own family's oral history and his extranatural visions. For example, he cannot trace his family line back any further than his great-grandfather, H, at the Pratt City mines, which he intended as the focus of his dissertation. It is not the lack of accessible research that halts his academic attempts to find a space of belonging, thought. Instead, Marcus recognizes that he cannot talk about the impacts of Pratt City without considering all the generations up until his. This forces him to confront that his lack of spatial belonging is significantly different than others he grew up with; like many of his friends growing up, Marcus should be in jail and not getting his PhD in Stanford

(Gyasi 289).[25] In a way, then, Gyasi presents Marcus as a character should be an individual spatial orphan but who learns he is part of the collective spatial orphans who suffers from the generational trauma of slavery. It is the desire for a collective belonging – to belong to his history of ancestors, not the other Black men his age – as well as his lack of accessible knowledge through (white) knowledge spaces that leads to him becoming a spatial orphan and searching for resolution.

Reunion

The extranatural within Gyasi's novel, while understated in the final generation, remains a powerful force. Marcus's desire to reject his grandmother's imaginary idea of visions in favor of academia leads him to California.nYet this ultimately ends up being a prophetic fate, as if he was guided there by an extranatural force. Marcus meets Marjorie at a party, and he immediately senses a deep connection that he describes as "Not the being lost, but the being found… Like she had, somehow, found him" (293). This description parallels the feeling Marcus has when his father and grandmother recovered him from his mother and makes Marcus read a sense of intentionality into their meeting. While other friends believe this to be a romantic connection, particularly as they start spending all their time together, Marcus rejects the idea of romance, but he "didn't know what it *was* about" (293). Instead, the parallel between different "being found" experiences suggests that Marjorie is somehow a form of home and family, a form of

[25] This is a bit of a conflict within Gyasi's story. She mentions that many of his friends have been subject to police brutality, but Gyasi also claims his resistance to believing that the police used to pick up people for no reason. For this reason, it becomes difficult to truly identify Marcus's background, which I believe comes from the attempt to make him a representation of his generation and a potential tool for Marjorie's own space of belonging instead of an individual character.

safety. Marcus attempts to avoid attributing their meeting to the extranatural, yet he cannot escape the fact that he has been drawn to Marjorie without reason; she, I suggest, becomes his ancestral guide by serving as his gateway into finding and understanding the rest of his lineage. Indeed, he acknowledges to her that "'Just because somebody sees or hears or feels something other folks can't doesn't mean they're crazy'" (Gyasi 294). While he is not willing to acknowledge how the extranatural impacts him, then, Marcus still recognizes that extranatural abilities exist and Marjorie becomes his guide.

Marjorie further encourages him to find his space of belonging through an academic approach, guiding him through his insisted learning method first before convincing him to follow her. Doing so under the guise of academia, Marjorie helps Marcus travel throughout different spaces and envisioned times as she allows him to learn messages about himself while he recognizes that his family's history has undergone almost total erasure. Marcus does not reveal much about himself, including his reasonings for learning more about his family history for his doctoral degree, because he believes Marjorie's status as an immigrant prevents her from understanding his desire for family. On a trip to Platt City to find out more about his great-grandfather, Marcus cannot find the words to tell her "It was one thing to research something, another thing entirely to have lived it. To have felt it… he wanted to capture with his project… the feeling of time, of having been a part of something that stretched so far back, was so impossibly large… that she, and he, and everyone else, existed in it – not apart from it, but inside of it" (295-96). Marcus cannot tell her that he "was an accumulation of these times" (Gyasi 296). He instead reveals his fear of the ocean, just as Marjorie shared her fear of fire. He explains his fears stems from "all that space… I have no idea where it begins" (Gyasi

296). His personal fears parallel his academic and familial ones: Marcus wants to find a space of belonging through understanding where his roots began. But, when Marjorie casually suggests he go to Ghana with her, he willingly goes to the place where Marjorie has not been since her grandmother died, bringing them both closer to a space of belonging.

Initially, Ghana creates challenges that potentially prevent the country from feeling like a space of belonging. The two initially appear out of place in Ghana as they rely on Marjorie's "rusty" Twi to help them navigate through the country, while Marcus insists on tour the Castle turned museum, an activity, Marjorie notes, reserved for Black American tourists (Gyasi 298). The Castle served as the original slave holding spot where Esi was held before being put on a ship to America and where Effia lived above with her husband, never knowing they were sisters and living in the same space. The Castle becomes so overwhelming for Marcus that he runs out of the museum through the Door of No Return, the same door that slaves were led through to be loaded onto boats. On the one hand, this implies that returning to the space allows Marcus to confront the trauma of his missing past; the fact that he exits the Door of No Return, physically paralleling the journey of his ancestor suggests that Marcus has found his beginning. Writing on the Door of No Return, Dionne Brand writes, the door is "that place where our ancestors departed one world for another; the Old World for the New. The place where all names were forgotten and all beginnings recast. In some desolate sense it was the creation place of Blacks in the New World Diaspora at the same time that it signified the end of traceable beginnings" (Brand 5). In other words, Marcus finds the beginning he has desperately searched for, allowing him a grounded sensibility and to realize upon fleeing

the castle that "the fear that Marcus had felt inside the Castle was still there, but he knew it was like the fire, a wild thing that could still be controlled, contained" (Gyasi 300). He can control the feelings and fears of historical traumas now that he confronted the source and understands where history comes from.

Engaging with the Castle and finding what he sees as the beginning of his family's diasporic roots suddenly allows Marcus to easily overcome his lifelong fear of the water, what I consider to be a liminal space of belonging. This fear that has represented the historical traumas of slavery disappears as he runs into the ocean with Marjorie. As they both go into the water, Marjorie, whose "father had told her that the necklace was a part of their family history and she was to never take it off, never give it away" takes off her stone necklace and gives it Marcus, saying "'Welcome home'" (267, 300). Considering the idea of home from a diasporic perspective, Brah describes home as "not only 'a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination,'" but also "the physical and psychological experience of a particular place at a particular moment, a place in the diaspora where identities are negotiated and transformed" (as cited in Nehl 52-3). In this sense, both Marcus and Marjorie have found this diasporic sense of home that serves as a temporary their space of belonging – the place where the land and water of Ghana come together, where collective historical traumas can be overcome. Wright presents a similar view, suggesting the novel "sharply delineates subject and objects, allowing Marcus and Marjorie to clearly engage with the 'homeland,' to wade in its symbolic waters, where Marjorie passes on the steadfast racial birthright that remains even after generations of trial and suffering" (Wright 228). It is through this return to Africa and the bringing together of their line in a fated way that allows them to understand their identities and

their space of belonging – together in the ocean where their ancestors once split. Marjorie, in particular, was consumed by fears of losing her African identity while being a spatial orphan in the U.S. Yet, in being a guide to Marcus, she can relinquish her desire for physical security. Landry further analyzes this exchange as "illustrat[ing] Marjorie's security and acknowledgement" in her own identity as a Ghanaian-American who "could still feel connected to her home without being physically rooted there" (144). Instead, she recognizes that while her space of belonging is in Ghana, the security of her identity does not depend on being there but rather recognizing the spiritual connection that will always occur between herself and her ancestors.[26]

The transfer of the stone from Marjorie to Marcus implies that both characters have the same space of belonging – one can be satisfied with the spiritual connection while the other needs a physical sense of grounding in history. I want to problematize this idea that both Marcus and Marjorie can have the same simple solution to discovering the space of belonging. Representing a physical embodiment of the land, the stone keeps Marcus grounded and safe amidst the engagement with the physical representation of traumas. Landry furthers this, suggesting "Marcus's willingness to receive the necklace represents a joining in and acceptance of the multiplicity of black identity" (145). Yet Gyasi has presented Marcus thus far as a character concerned with the concepts of individuality and representative collectivity; his isolation within his small family unit serves as a privilege that allows him to explore larger role in the collective that created and influenced him as well as the society within which he lives and engages. This

[26] This potentially reflects Gyasi's own experiences who explains in the interview with Goyal that while she is a Ghanaian-American, she now identifies as a Southerner (Goyal 475).

experience does not, however, help him learn about, connect to, or process the historical traumas that happened between the door and the water. Moving physical spaces alone, as I discuss in the introduction, does not erase the past or resolves traumas, and returning to Africa alone seems to serve the exact opposite purpose of multiple Black identities that Landry notes, because it creates the idea that reducing the generational traumas of Blackness in the U.S. can be solved by finding the one common identity that began it all. Wright further problematizes this, noting that "closure for the traumatized Middle Passage Black subject requires a rather brutal shearing off of the rich entanglement that is in fact the history of Black collectives in the African diaspora including those who understand themselves as interpellated through the catastrophe of Atlantic slavery" (230). Gyasi "pretend[s] that they are actually coming full circle for Middle Passage Blackness" (Wright 230), and by attempting to cure the trauma rather than confront and process it, Gyasi's novel creates a false collective and suggests unity can only be achieved by ignoring complex histories.

Instead, I propose that the ocean serves as a liminal space of belonging for Marcus, which leaves us with the question: What will happen if and when they decide to return to America? While Gyasi seems to be simplifying this point in making her novel linear, Saidiya Hartman shows the lack of simplicity and linearity in searching for ancestral connections. In *Lose Your Mother*, Hartman writes "I knew there wasn't a remedy for my homelessness. I was an orphan and the breach between me and my origins was irreparable. Being a stranger was an inveterate condition that a journey across the Atlantic could not cure" (199). Considering this within Gyasi's novel, Marcus's finding of a liminal space of belonging does not solve any of the issues he will face upon

returning to America. Once he leaves this space, he have the potential to lose the feeling of belonging, resulting in a return of the feeling of being spatially orphaned. In problematizing Gyasi's simplified solution of the liminality of belonging, we can recognize that there is no one universal space of belonging for a monolithic Black community nor one universal Black history; community does not come from implying that everyone comes from Africa. Indeed, it becomes even more important to recognizing the individual identities, histories, and traumas that the post-Black period calls attentions to in order to create a strong community that acknowledges differences in search of a more common goal for those whose histories and identities are entirely based in the U.S.

Akata Witch

Gyasi's novel offers two different African American identities, and Nnedi Okorafor offers yet another version of the African American identity in her 2011 coming of age novel, *Akata Witch*. Sunny, the eleven-year-old protagonist, navigates her identity on multiple fronts: spatial, racial, and ancestral.[27] Sunny describes herself as follows: "'I'm Nigerian by blood, American by birth, and Nigerian again because I live here. I have West African features, like my mother, but while the rest of my family is dark brown, I've got light yellow hair, skin the color of "sour milk" (or so stupid people like to tell me), and hazel eyes that look like God ran out of the right color. I'm albino" (3). Her external appearance immediately marks her as 'othered' even though she lives in Africa, the birthplace of her parents. Yet, she was born in New York City and raised there until

[27] Although this is considered a children's novel, Egbunike calls for its cultural relevance, citing Nana Wilson-Tagoe who "states that 'for fantasy to be culturally relevant it must by contrast or comparison, provide useful insights into a child's real life and culture'" (as qtd. in Egbunike 147).

she was nine; her first language is English. In other words, Sunny's physical appearance marks her as an in-between, or, if we analyze her through the trope of the spatial orphan, I suggest that Sunny becomes the embodiment of a border through her existence as between places while being both hyper-visible and invisible. Specifically, it is the extranatural and her experiences transitioning between the magical world of Leopard Knocks and the Lamb world of Nigeria that allow her to negotiate her spatial identity by coming to terms with her embodiment of a diaspora space. Sunny's journey in discovering her place of belonging further allows us to question the ability for and remaining difficulties of Africa as a space of belonging in a hyper-globalized world.

Sunny's home emphasizes her status as a spatial orphan by reflecting the lack of safety and belonging she feels not only within the country of Nigeria but within her own family and school. Within her household, consisting of her father, mother, and two brothers, Sunny is the only American. She describes, "My family moved to America, where I was born in the city of New York. When I was nine, we returned to Nigeria, near the town of Aba… We're Igbo – that's an ethnic group from Nigeria – so I'm American and Igbo, I guess" (*Akata Witch* 3). Her Americanness, albinism, and her gender create a divide between herself and her family, especially her father who often speaks to her with anger if he acknowledges her existence at all. Instead, he praises her brothers and lets them get away with everything while he yells at or physically punishes Sunny for being out past curfew. As such, Sunny develops a skill for invisibility or, perhaps more accurately, camouflage, allowing her to blend into different spaces even if she does not feel safe in them. She utilizes this ability at school as well where her transnational identity gives her a firm grasp on spoken and written English while allowing her to

emphasize her Nigerian, more specifically Igbo, accent when she blends in. Still, her classmates identify her as *akata*. While Marjorie felt distaste at the thought of being *akata*, Sunny's reaction to being called *akata* in Nigeria in much stronger: "She hated the word 'akata.' It meant 'bush animal' and was used to refer to black Americans or foreign-born blacks. A very, very rude word" (11). Equally as bad for Sunny, being albino marks her as white, further erasing forms of her Africanness from the outside perspective and making her both hyper-visible physically while making her Nigerian Blackness invisible.

Sunny must rely on a space outside of the confines of Abu and her home in order to better comprehend the complexities of her belonging while adding additional layers to her own already-complex identity. Okorafor facilitates Sunny's discoveries using "organic fantasy," Okorafor's specific term for her identification of the magic in her novels and what I identify as the extranatural. She describes organic fantasy, a spatial novel relating to the earth, as "the power to make something familiar strange" because it "blooms directly from the soil of the real" (278). Organic fantasy intertwines directly with Okorafor's own Nigerian-American identity. Even though she has never lived in Nigeria, she writes that she "experienced [her] life's greatest joys and terrors" there, and her "complex African experience" led to "a series of cultural mixes and clashes between being American and being Nigerian" ("Organic Fantasy" 276). In *Akata Witch*, Okorafor employs organic fantasy through the Leopard society. Sunny learns that she is a Free Agent Leopard person – a magical person without a biological magical connection – which starts her on her journey to developing her identity and finding a space of belonging, one that can only be achieved through connecting better with her ancestry. In *Fast Facts for Free Agents*, a book within Okorafor's novel, Sunny learns all about

Leopard People: ""The term 'Leopard Person' is a West African coinage, derived from the Efik term 'ekpe,' leopard. All people of mystical true ability are Leopard People. And as humankind has evolved, so have Leopard folk around the world organized" (6). Egbunike futher describes how Okorafor's Leopards are similar to Ekpe: "Ekpe provides a framework through which to engage with discourse on locations and origin, the past and present, cultural memory and the bridging of time" (150). Leopard people, while branching from Africa, have come together to create a world-wide organization in which all people can be united through their magical abilities. This is because, as her teacher Antanov explains, Leopard abilities are spiritual, which does not confine them to physical constraints of movement: "Leopard ability doesn't *travel* in the physical. Though blood is familiar with spirit'" (52, emphasis mine). Hence, finding a space of belonging is more associated with the spiritual world, which allows Sunny to negotiate her complex American-Nigerian identity even as she must contend with her newfound physical/spiritual split and her Free Agent status.

Increasing her knowledge of spirit creates access to extranatural guidance through physical spaces, including entrance into the city of Leopard Knocks. The city, Sunny's friend tells her, is "on an island conjured by the ancestors," creating the strongest foothold of combining both ancestry and spirituality but preventing access without crossing over a border (65). Her journey into Leopard Knocks also shows that the border – the in-between space – is a dangerous place to be. To enter Leopard Knocks, Sunny must cross a narrow, slippery-looking wooden bridge with no handrails. Underneath this bridge is "a river so angry that its churning water threw up a white mist" (45). The only way to cross is to be true to one's Leopard Self, which for Sunny, involves saying a spell

in her native tongue – American. At first, Sunny feels confident crossing, but as soon as she begins to doubt herself – seeing a "enormous dark, round face" and the river's strength – her confidence wavers and she begins to fall. Only after crossing is she told that there is a river beast "older than time" who will be "messing with shit long after we're gone," something common for Leopard borders. This monster preys on those who may not be sure of their identity, yet Sunny can flourish – at least temporarily – when she recognizes both her Africanness in entering Leopard Knocks and her Americanness in using the language to call her spell. Her friends do pull her to safety at the last minute, physically dragging her into Leopard Knocks – forcing her to choose a side and become one part of her identity, at least for the moment. Yet Leopard Knocks does not allow her to forget her American birthplace, and it is essential to her construct of her free agent identity. I would suggest that it isn't until Sunny is able to cross this border safely and with confidence that she successfully bridges the two aspects of her own identity and becomes able to float across the bridge with grace.

Leopard Knocks prompts her to bridge these aspects of identities by requiring a combination of American and Nigerian learnings, even as this often leaving her feeling displaced because she wants to fit in into one place or the other. In realizing that all things have multiple sides – it is only those societies which force you to be one or the other – Sunny can accept her role as part of the diaspora by embodying the diasporic border space where she can be both/and. Her description of Leopard Knocks helps readers to understand how she can bridge her two identities through her own experiences as a border crosser. Even though Sunny is young, her travelling experiences leaves her uniquely situated to identify different locations: "She'd traveled to Jos in Northern

Nigeria to visit relatives. She'd been to Abuja, the capital of Nigeria, too. She's been to Amsterdam, Rome, Brazzaville, Dubai," and of course, different places in America (*Akata Witch* 70). When she first sees the city of Leopard Knocks through the mystical border, then, her observations come from a place of experience. This is her introductory description of the city: "Leopard Knocks opened up before her like the New York skyline. It was nowhere near as big, but it *was* grand. Huts stacked upon huts like hats at a hat shop. Not a European style building in sight. All this was African" (70). This introduction to an "all African" hidden city begins with a comparison to the New York City Skyline. This serves two purposes. On the one hand, it gives readers – and Sunny - a globally recognized image to associate with this new, frightening experience. On the other hand, this comparison serves to de-center New York City just as quickly. This place is not big, but it still gives off the feeling of grandeur without needing the allure of New York City. To maintain the spaces Africanness, there are also no "European" buildings. Instead, there are huts stacked up in a way that is only possible in a fantastical place.

Once she crosses the bridge and is able to observe the city properly, she describes it as the following:

> So this was Leopard Knocks. The entrance was flanked by two tall iroko trees. They were slowly shedding a constant shower of leaves, although their tops remained healthy and bushy. At the foot of each tree were small piles of leaves. Beyond was the strangest place Sunny had ever seen. But this place was something else entirely. The buildings were made of thick gray clay and red mud with thatch roofs. They reminded her of Chichi's house, but more sophisticated. Almost all of them were quite large. Many had more than one store; several had

> three or four. How clay and mud could stand up to this kind of use was beyond her… The buildings were crowded tightly together. Still, tall palm trees and bushes managed to grow between them, and a dirt road packed with people wound among the buildings. (70-72)

This is clearly a fully developed city with tall buildings, decorations, and "sophistication." But it is also unique, and nature is privileged. The Leopard People are magical – they could choose to build their city however they want, with whatever materials, but in Leopard Knocks, they choose to maintain a city full of nature that Sunny recognizes as uniquely African – clay huts, thatch roofs, and dirt roads. More impressively, they manage to keep trees and bushes in between buildings where it seems, based on the description, that there should be no room. Yet, none of these elements lack aesthetic. They have drawings all over them, window of different shapes, and Sunny relates this to Africa as well. In centering this vision of African as the headquarters of all Leopards in West Africa, Okorafor prioritizes both Africanness and knowledge over the West and money. This is the base that it seems all other people and societies should return. Hence, when Sunny goes to another Leopard town later and she stays at the Hilton in Abuja, she is able to recognize just what happens when money, which the novel codes as both corrupt and American, is allowed to disrupt and take over the global landscape.

More importantly, Sunny recognizes that the space is "all African" but she does not need to be all African to enter. The Epke society that Okorafor bases Leopard Knocks on reinforces the importance of the transnational. Egbunike writes, "The Ekpe society is used to re-present African traditional institutions, characterizing Ekpe as a global transcultural network whilst locating its spiritual centre in Nigeria" (149). As such, Sunny

can enter because she is Leopard not because she is African or American. Okorafor presents us with another character with which to contrast Sunny, raised partially in Africa, and Black Americans raised in America. Sasha, one of Sunny's new friends, has magical abilities and can enter Leopard Knocks but he provides the perspective of other headquarters for Leopard people. Discussing the different Leopard cities across the world, the reader learns that Leopard Knocks is the main headquarters for West Africa whereas New York is the headquarters in the U.S. For Sasha, however, New York City isn't "'the head of anything. It doesn't represent black folks. We *are* a minority, I guess. As a matter of fact – everything's biased toward European juju. The *African American* headquarters is on the Gullah Islands in South Carolina. We call it Tar Nation'" (79). This is one of the first reminders that in Okorafor's world, having extranatural abilities is not solely confined to African ancestry. Sasha reveals, though, that European (or white) juju remains different from black juju, so while Leopard Knocks may remind Sunny of New York City, the combination between its metropolitan nature and its Africanness acts as a marker of difference in a way that makes Sunny proud.

Paralleling the physical pull into the city, Sunny's time in Leopard Knocks leaves her uncomfortable, reinforcing the experiences of dislocation that result from diasporic movements. The narrator describes her as feeling like an intruder with Sunny declaring, "'Maybe I should just go home'" (72). Her feeling of dislocation does not, and cannot, have an easy resolution; she cannot choose one identity because she is not one identity. Rather, Sunny must become like the river border – a both/and. The ability to hide in the water but to be seen as the only way in. This isn't easy, though, especially for an 11-year-old girl. On a grander scale, this represents the difficulty of disrupting borders now,

especially those borders that are put up by coming from another country. By centering the conversation on something that is "all African," Okorafor reframes the conversation to make Africa the focus and that disruption that borders, especially ones that privilege Americans over and above all else, can have.

This is furthered after her trip to Abuja for a large Leopard festival. After returning home from the weekend in Abuja, she was "trying to shake the *dislocated* feeling she was experiencing. It was like two realities fighting for dominance" (287; emphasis mine). Sunny's abilities as a free agent involve being able to move without being seen and to shift between worlds and times. Yet she feels most dislocated by going from being around other Leopards to returning back to her home. Like the conflict between her African and American identities, Sunny feels physically displaced by the conflict in her extranatural and lamb abilities. This particular conflict in especially interesting in that it relates very much to the combination of the motherline and the extranatural. As she returns to her home, Sunny is with Sasha and Orlu; she is disgusted but they clearly like her. Sasha hugs her and Orlu gives her a kiss on the cheek. Once she returns home, however, the first people she encounters are her father and his friend. They are drunk and it is the friend who notices her, not her father. Sunny does not feel dislocated until she comes in contact with her father. Dislocation here, while being somewhat associated with location, becomes more about the people she is with and being separated from those accepting of her extranatural abilities.

This is something that happens numerous times experiencing magic in contrast with the Lamb world; as a result, both spaces feel foreign, and she is left struggling to understand how to be a free agent – a between person – in a purely Lamb or purely

Leopard world. Paralleling her complications of struggling to be American and African, she remains subjected to rules and customs in both spaces that leave her as a spatial orphan. Her experience is not unique to Leopard Knocks in particular but any purely Leopard or purely Lamb space. The majority of Sunny's development of abilities depends on her movement between her home, her school, and the purely Leopard spaces. And, as Sunny develops her extranatural abilities, she can more easily access Leopard Knocks. Yet, she continues to feel out of place. As revealed in *Fast Facts*, "A free agent is one who isn't privileged with even one pure Leopard spiritline form the survivors of the Great Attempt. She or he is a random of nature, a result of mixed-up and confused spiritual genetics." (96). The author, who Antanov reveals to be supporter of European juju, believes that free agents should attempt to blend in with the lambs and forget that they even have extranatural abilities. Indeed, as her access to Leopard Knocks becomes easier, Sunny's home life becomes more difficult. While her mother is thrilled at Sunny's newfound happiness, her father avoids her (174). Developing her own identity as a free agent causes Sunny to become a literal orphan even as she works away from being a spatial orphan.

When she realizes that the world crosses over in other ways – magic is not contained within Leopard Knocks - and she has friends and family who help her to negotiate her American and African identities – the *oha* coven that brings together everyone, including someone who is a Black American, she has the opportunity to develop spaces of belonging in the future, even if she is currently between them. As her friend group of four realizes they will need to be the ones to defeat Black Hat Otokoto, the Leopard serial killer terrorizing Abu's Lamb children, the friends must meet with the

powerful committee of Leopard elders who teach Sunny important lessons that not only will help the group during their battle against the killer but are also significant to Sunny's own understanding of her identity as a spatial orphan. The first lesson they impart is that Sunny and her three friends are an *oha* coven. An *oha* coven represents perfect balance within a group of four people. For Sunny's group, they bring together Americans and Africans, outsiders and insiders, lovers and lusters. Even though their powers individually may not be that advanced and Sunny has only been learning for a few months before her match up with Black Hat, it is the *oha* that helps provide support for each of them, creating a new family structure full of acceptance. Even within this group, however, Sunny remain the most conflicted between them because of her identity as an albino. This leads to the second epiphany about her identity in particular. An elder tells the group, "'Whether Sunny knew it or not, she has always been a Leopard Person… And she is a child of the physical and spirit world, for before you were born you were a person of importance there'" (*Akata Witch* 307). Speaking to Sunny directly, the elder asks, "'What kind of person were you? Well, that is something you'll have to figure out'" (307). In other words, Sunny's identity from birth has always destined her to be a border not only between her American/Albino and African/Black identities but between the physical world and the spiritual world. Nothing could have changed Sunny's destiny to be half in one world and half in another world – a spatial orphan. But in discovering who is she now and who she was in the spirit world though her actions, she can develop her identity of belonging. Moving between worlds, then, will allow her to belong in both places instead of always feeling like she is split. Moreover, the *oha* coven proves that while she

has her individual struggles of belonging, they are in fact necessary to the collective identity of the group.

Even if Sunny logically understands that she represents two places within one, a split identity that serves as a border between worlds, she still must experience these identities after being told in order to complete her learning. As a young adult, Sunny is not fully developed in either her extranatural abilities. Yet when faced with the danger of going against the masquerade Otokoto calls forth, the situation necessitates Sunny's instinctual reaction to her identity. She has the choice to run and hide or to face the evil force, and "On instinct, Sunny let her spirit face move forward. In that moment, her fear of everything left her – her fear of Ekwensu's evil, of being flayed alive by the monster's fronds, of her family learning of her death, of the world's end. It all evaporated. Sunny smiled" (326). This ability to separate herself from her physical family and enter the spirit word – symbolized in her spirit face being the one to battle Ekwensu – shows the readers that Sunny has recognized the strength that comes from being able to choose and control when her identity appears. Being a young free agent does not prevent her from fully engaging with either the Leopard or Lamb world, and she is powerful enough to be able to save both of them. Spatially, she recognizes the power of being a border – while she cannot belong to either place, she also has the ability to divide and protect each place from the other. There is power to recognizing the ability to be both Leopard and Lamb, both American and African, both physical and spiritual.

In recognizing the power of her split identity, particularly the emphasis on her spiritual, magical side, Sunny must face the backlash of her physical, Lamb identity and biological family. She returns home after the battle to an outraged father who tries to beat

her for being home. As her mother steps in, her father shouts, "'This is why she runs wild… It's all you! You protect her and she thinks she can do whatever she wants. She's got your genes, your damn mother's genes! She'll come to no good like your mother'" (338). For her father, behavior runs in genetics, and as we have seen, he isn't entirely wrong. Yet as a Lamb, he cannot understand that ancestry and the spiritline is more important than blood in discovering who a person will be like. And still, all of this with her father and everything that has gone on leads Sunny to ask "'Who am I, Mama?'" (338-39). Figuring out her identity still leaves her a spatial orphan in the physical world and it is not until both identities are resolved that she can find her true identity and settle into a space of belonging. Her mother reveals: "Men always blame the woman when a child dissatisfies him. In this case, he is right – in more ways than one'" (341). They moved back to Nigeria solely because her mother was scared something would happen to her in New York City, and her father trusted the mother's intuition. So, it is because of Sunny and the matrilineal line that they are in Nigeria where Sunny can develop her abilities (341-42). Even though her mother is not a Leopard Person, she has the ability of intuition, which allows for Sunny to fulfill her destiny. Moreover, in choosing to move back to Nigeria, Okorafor "destabilises western understandings of human subjectivity by calling attention to the artificiality of the stable dichotomies between self and other, human and nonhuman on which successive instantiations of enlightenment humanism have been built" (Curry 43). Her Americanness makes her unique, yet her mother moved them all back to Africa to sense that Sunny had a bigger purpose in the world. Her individuality is essential within the larger collective, even if she does not realize it until the end of the novel.

As Sunny continues to develop her abilities, we can assume that she will also know how to better handle the conflict between being a Leopard Person surrounded by Lambs. And, being of both America and Africa is partially what gives her the ability to move between worlds just as being an albino makes moving between worlds much easier. The novel ends with the conclusion from her friend Orlu that "'Having two lives is better than none'" (349). Yet in realizing that all things have multiple sides – it is only those societies which force you to be one or the other – Sunny can accept her role as an intersectional border where she can be both/and. While this is not easy, it provides her with the tools to help accept that places where she can fit in and rely on those safe spaces – particularly those that involve her friends – when she cannot. In other words, she is recognized for her individual abilities within the collective. Yet, Okorafor does not present this as a fix-all solution. Even as Sunny goes "back to Africa" only one generation removed, she is still seen as an outsider, an *akata*, and is even viewed as an outsider within her own family. Instead, being in a diaspora space as a border allows her to learn and shows that those spaces need to be created, perhaps transnationally, instead of just mitigated.

Conclusion

Spatial orphans in both of these texts rely on a return to Africa in order to eventually discover more about themselves and their identities. Rather than treating Africa as a token place where the ancestors lived, Ghana and Nigeria are both spaces of living for these characters even as America acts as their birthplace. Ancestry and place intertwine in a way that the extranatural abilities eventually lead each character to discover who they are and where they belong. Even if the space of belonging is not

physical, they each access a space of knowing. For Marcus and Marjorie, the coast of Ghana but specifically in the water acts as a home because their lines have unknowingly come together once more in a place where their line last split. They can come to terms with their history and their identities. Sunny is also split between America and Africa, yet she eventually realizes that her identifiable space of belonging is Leopard Knocks where there are people who can know her full identity, who knew her grandmother, and where she can fit in. The return to Africa does not solve everything but it does allow insight in a space where identity is accessible. Egbunike writes, "In privileging the voice of people of African descent and locating her narratives in Africa, Okorafor centres Africa in the world of her writing, locating her projection of global futures within an African context" (153). *Homegoing* does not appear to be this positive; Africa is more so a necessary space to discover and come to terms with one's identity. As Winters writes in her review of the novel, "*Homegoing* is a realist novel whose even most fantastical coincidence feels plausible" (340). Thus, to continue as a realist novel, Africa needs to remain a physical space where identities can meld. While Sunny continues her journey, however, there is almost an assumption that Marjorie and Marcus will go back to America to continue living. Ghana may feel like home, but it their combined, multiplicitous identities that become their real albeit conflicted home.

The transnational concerns cannot be denied as people are now being treated as outsiders both in America and elsewhere either for their Americanness or their Blackness. Africa is not the imagined space it once was, challenging its status as a "space of belonging" because of ancestral connections. Because of this, going "back to Africa" is not the easy solution. Yet by recognizing the transnational movement between the U.S.

and the Global South, we can recognize the shifting identities of the diaspora and use these to create more encompassing ideas of Blackness. In other words, we can imagine that spaces of belonging need not be limited to the U.S. but that they can be imagined, and indeed may necessitate being imagined, in a hyper-globalized world as diasporic.

CHAPTER 4

"WE BECOME WHO WE BE": DISTANCE AND ASCENT IN MARLON JAMES' *THE BOOK OF NIGHT WOMEN* AND JOHN KEENE'S *COUNTERNARRATIVES*

In an interview with *Contemporary Literature*, John Keene, the author of *Counternarratives*, explains that "when we think of American history, we have to think in hemispheric and global terms" (Cooke Weeber 16). For Black history in the United States, we must think not only through slavery and the African diaspora but also the Caribbean as a diasporic space as well as the complicated sense of identity that stems from a undergoing a double displacement. This double displacement, Gage Averill notes, represents a common Afro-Caribbean self-identification within the United States as "a people twice displaced, a diaspora within a diaspora" (261). The first diasporic identity conflict stems from the forced movement from Africa to the Caribbean. Marcus Nehl, citing Stuart Hall's "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," explains for many people in the Caribbean, there is a "wish to return to, the common homeland" but this wish cannot be "associated with authenticity" (44). Hall parallels Kamali's concept of Africa as an imagined spaced, noting that "To *this* 'Africa', which is a necessary part of the Caribbean imaginary, we can't literally go home again" (232). Instead, the first diasporic identity is "characterized by a shared history of forced deportation and racial oppression" (Nehl 44-45).

The second diaspora occurs when moving from the Caribbean to the U.S., which transpired across numerous historical moments both during the slave trade and through voluntary migration. In this way, the Afro-Caribbean loss of spatial identity parallels the conflict Marjorie experiences in *Homegoing*: the post-Black concern of recognizing individual cultural identity while being identified by a racialized society that associates skin color with a specific idea of an ancestor enslaved in the U.S. Much like the increased migration from African countries to the U.S. in the 1990s, the "second half of the twentieth century" according to Jeffrey Anderson, featured "large numbers" of people from the Caribbean and Latin America who "immigrated to the United States, driven by a variety of economic and political forces" (163). Since many of these people have grown up as immigrants or first-generation citizens, the Afro-Caribbean literature reflects these post-Black concerns of individuality and collectivity backgrounded by the double diasporic displacement. Aligning with the numerous "post" terms subsumed under post-Black, Marlon James has described himself as a post-postcolonial writer, because "identity is not necessarily how to define ourselves in the relation of colonial power, colonial oppressor — so now it's a matter of defining who you are as opposed to who you're not" ("A Post-Post-Colonial"). He further elucidates that the identity of these post-postcolonial writers inherently intersects with the U.S. as opposed to England, because "we're not driven by our dialogue with the former mother country [the United Kingdom]. The hovering power for us when growing up in the '70s and '80s was not the U.K. It was the States, it was America. And it wasn't an imperialistic power, it was just a cultural influence" ("A Post-Post-Colonial"). Even still, the conditions stereotypically associated with the Caribbean – including intense poverty, homophobia, and violence – by virtue of

media coverage that claim to be "ostensibly committed to unearthing the source" ignore, according to Sam Vásquez, the "deep imbrication with Western colonial paradigms" (44). Marlon James' *The Book of Night Women* and John Keene's "Gloss on a History of Roman Catholics in the Early American Republic, 1790-1825; or the Strange History of our Lady of the Sorrows" both reflect these concerns of diaspora and identity through the spatial orphan trope.

The Book of Night Women, written by Marlon James and published in 2009, asks us to consider space in a more abstract sense. The novel is set entirely on the island of Jamaica in the 18th century. While there are three different locations James features on the island – the Montpelier Estate, the Coulibre estate, and Kingston – the majority of different spaces we must consider are within the Montpelier Estate, including the basement, the cave, and the overseer's cabins. Lilith, the protagonist, obsesses over her lineage. She is raised believing she has a mother and father, only to find out her mother died after giving birth to the overseer's child, and she must negotiate through each of the plantation spaces in order to survive through her attempts to understand her identity. As she moves through different spaces on the plantations, she views herself and her relationships with the bondspeople around her in different ways, specifically those bondspeople who are biologically related through clear physical markers.

Keene's novella shares a very similar story at its base. As one part of the first section of John Keene's larger collection, "Gloss on a History of Roman Catholics in the Early American Republic, 1790-1825; or the Strange History of our Lady of the Sorrows" is the longest piece. Keene frames the novella as a footnote to the larger story about a convent that disappeared, which immediately sets up the story as a counternarrative, a

backstory to what exists within the recognized narrative. Carmel's story begins with a footnote after "no other definitive records of this foundation remain" (86). Carmel might be the most obvious of the third period spatial orphans, albeit in a slightly different way. She is orphaned due to the Revolution and alone at the plantation where she does not fit in with the other slaves because her mother was a ginen. As she is forced to move to America, she develops her extranatural abilities. It is at this point we find out these abilities are inherently connected with her ability to communicate with her mother. This allows her to develop her own autonomy and connect with the other slaves. So, although the convent is not necessarily a space of belonging – because she does not choose nor want to be there – it is a necessary space in the creation of her identity of belonging. After this, Carmel can escape with the greater potential for freedom.

While these novels do, I argue, engage with Afro-Caribbean identity in the post-Black United States, they at first appear to do so indirectly because of their historical nature. This historical novel, particularly one that features the Caribbean, highlights the importance of individual within collective to show unique Caribbean identity and culture in the U.S. through showcasing how the influences of slavery outside the U.S. still have impact on current traumas that are both similar and different. Both novels suggest the need to recognize that historical traumas are present day issues, and, more specifically, the importance of reimagining the Black diaspora by realizing the individual struggles that historically and presently impact descendants from the Caribbean. This extends to their individual locations: Jamaica and Haiti. While to this point, I have generalized the Caribbean as an overarching space, I do so keeping in mind Hall's premise regarding Caribbean identity construction that there is "the vector of similarity and continuity; and

the vector of difference and rupture," namely "The common history — transportation, slavery, colonisation – has been profoundly formative. For all these societies, unifying us across our differences. But it does not constitute a common *origin*" (226, 228). As such, I attend to the unique forms of displacement for each country while recognizing that both authors "interact with the history of Caribbean writing, as well as how it should be situated in African diasporic writing's contemplations of black life in the present" (Harrison 4). It is important, then, to not only consider how these different identities impact the spatial orphan but also how they represent the concerns of the spatial orphan within the post-Black period specifically.

In one way, this has occurred through both James' and Keene's representations of the extranatural and cultural mobility, which, I suggest, appear in similar forms. These forms allow for analyzing their similarities as Afro-Caribbean novels whilst still acknowledging the difference in space-based cultural identity. As part of this third wave of spatial orphans, James and Keene both maintain cultural connections to the Caribbean through generic tropes that encourage extramural engagement. Harrison explains that both embody tropes of the New Gothic through "a preoccupation with the enduring legacies of various forms of historical racialized oppression" in addition to "a sense of the inescapability of racialized oppression as well as an eschewal of hope for the future" (7). These tropes further correspond with what Marcus Nehl identifies in *Transnational Black Dialogues* as the "second generation" of the neo-slave narrative, which creates "counter-stories," or, to use the title of John Keene's collection, counternarratives (15, 25). More importantly, these conflicts of individual identity and community present a historical turn into identity insight that further corresponds with the post-Black period; as James

highlights the important role of Obeah on the Jamaican plantation, for example, Keene engages with Haitian Vodou. Encouraging the individuality of each specific Caribbean place represents part of that conflict within the post-Black period on a greater scale. That is, recognizing individuality amidst the collective is important, but to what extent does there need to be a reckoning of collectivity to create change and the potential for all to have a space of belonging?

Spatially, I propose that both James and Keene engage with dual forms of movement that mimic Hall's representation of identity as being on horizontal and vertical axes. In two forms of mobility I identify as distance and ascent, forms that can happen individually or simultaneously, *The Book of Night Women* and "Gloss on a History" highlight that the search for belonging for the spatial orphan begins with the diasporic movements away from the original orphaned space. Distance from a space, as evoked through forced diasporic movement, creates the need for finding a space of belonging. Yogita Goyal confirms that "every displacement carries with it the embedded memory of a stable past," and this displacement creates a trauma from that fracture that embeds those memories (396). Healing traumas and accessing memories often necessitates distance from that original trauma, which occurs over both space and time, as each novel engages with historical traumas that still impact current conceptualizations of identity.

Ascent has a dual meaning as well. Much like the language of rising and freefalling elevators in Whitehead's *The Intuitionist*, I use ascent to describe a spatial ascent. Amongst his many projects in *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard explains the connection that people share with their houses beyond the ethnographic descriptors. He proposes that understanding *how* a person inhabits a space can tell us about their

identity. One of his specific interests is the contrast between the cellar and the attic as spaces of rationality: "Verticality is ensured by the polarity of cellar and attic, the marks of which are so deep that, in a way, they open up two very different perspectives... Indeed, it is possible, almost without commentary, to oppose the rationality of the roof to the irrationality of the cellar" (Bachelard 18). The language of Bachelard's distinct binary suggests the second form of ascent, that is the representation of Enlightenment ideals through verticality; one ascends from the cellar to the attic at the same time as one reaches a point of reason. These Enlightenment ideals are particularly relevant to Caribbean history. In *The Black Jacobins*, C.L.R James dramatizes the actions of Toussaint L'Ouverture, the revolutionary hero of Haitian independence. His story emphasizes L'Ouverture's education as one of the main reasons for his successes for ascending from a slave to a leader of the revolution. His education, according to James, gave L'Ouverture the power to predict the military strategies of other countries, write communications, and present strong military strategies of his own. In a close reading and critique of James, David Scott writes in *Conscripts of Modernity* that L'Ouverture "believes that his knowledge is the key to freedom, and he employs it in the achievement of his farsighted aims… he trusts fundamentally, absolutely, to his enlightenment" (173). Yet, theories of Enlightenment often exclude considerations of race and gender. In *Habeas Viscus*, Alexander Weheliye explains that "White European theorists," such as those who founded the ideals of Enlightenment, "appear unaffected by identarian locality" and therefore their ideals are considered "uncontaminated by and prior to reductive or essentialist political identities such as race or gender" (7). Weheliye understandably contests this, and Keene does as well, noting the connection between

slavery and the Enlightenment as what "makes possible the Enlightenment−the liberation of labor and, as Gilroy says, a counterculture of modernity is *slavery*, the black Atlantic" (Cooke Weeber 17). Although often correlating with white men, these stories reengage with Enlightenment through ascent. While James' protagonist struggles to blend the two ideal and ultimately chooses those of Enlightenment over the extranatural, Keene re-presents the extranatural as a specifically Afro-Caribbean form of enlightenment as both authors produce alternative forms of attempting to obtain spatial belonging through extranatural knowledge.

The Book of Night Women

Scholarship on Marlon James has increased drastically upon his 2015 Man Booker Prize win for *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, with numerous scholars attending to *The Book of Night Women*, particularly in response to James' profanity and graphic descriptions of violence. Marcus Nehl describes this violence, occurring primarily against women, as showcasing the "slave's experience of humiliation and sexual exploitation in an explicit, even pornographic, way" (162). This analytical lens often works in conjunction with attempts to categorize James's novel, suggesting it is, individually, a neo-slave, a Black Gothic, and a diasporic narrative amongst others. This is due, in part, to the subversions of genre that James undertakes. While Jerold Hogle notes that "The deep Feminine level, as the Gothic mode has developed, is but one major form of a primordial dissolution that can obscure the boundaries between all western oppositions," Harrison suggests that James subverts the "female abject as gothic" into "a possible way forward at a moment when the historical present is not seemingly graspable through paradigms such as nationalism" (Hogle 11, Harrison 5). While part of this project does attempt to place this novel in a new realm of 21st century extranatural narratives, one that

parallels the reemergence of Black Gothic and neo-slave novels, I propose a reading that focuses on Lilith as a spatial orphan in which the extranatural and her movements across the plantation and Jamaica are only backgrounded (as much as possible) by the violence. How does Lilith's status as a cultural, but – and importantly - not actual, orphan impact her identity formation? And, more significantly, what does Lilith's ultimate refusal to support her fellow slaves and defend her father suggest about the importance of cultural belonging as represented through space in the novel? Because James' novel ends in a way we do not expect, Lilith's choices are difficult to understand and even more difficult to support; Lilith arguably rejects the expected narrative for a slave rebellion by choosing to protect her white Father and killing one of her half-sisters in the process. By reading Lilith as a spatial orphan who chooses the plantation over potential freedom in a newly developed, slave woman run, Afro-Caribbean space, however, I suggest Lilith showcases a greater understanding of the imperialistic system, one that allows her to survive the rebellion and live with relative freedom. Lilith does not ever find a space of belonging, but she does find a space of survival during which her role as a spatial orphan allows her to become a mother who keeps her child.

With this rejection of the Black bondwomen's revolt, Marlon James' *The Book of Night Women* highlights the post-Black concerns with the identification of individuality versus community, especially as it relates to the challenged association between being Black and being African American, by removing American from the conversation and reframing the conversation as Black African and Black Caribbean identities. Much like, as Cruella Forbes identifies, James "redraw[s] the map of Caribbean literature" (1), he uses *The Book of Night Women* to redraw the plantation estate as a microcosmic

representation of a full Caribbean society. Lilith undergoes a complicated journey in *The Book of Night Women* as her understandings of the extranatural are innately intertwined with her own constructs of racial identity and with which group of people she identifies. Set in the turn of the 19th century Jamaica, the novel asks us to consider the representations of space within the minutia of the plantation, especially as the plantation space relates to Lilith's constructs of family and her own understandings of identity and belonging. Backgrounding these concerns of identity between the bondspeople is the overarching difference between those who came from Africa – the motherland – and those were born in Jamaica. Homer, the head slave who attempts to serve as a mother figure to Lilith, complains that "You niggers who didn't come over 'pon the slave ship don't know a damn thing," suggesting a divide between those born in Africa and those slaves born in the Caribbean (279). These bondspeople born in Jamaica are still expected by the other bondspeople to respect and idealize Africa as the place to which they belong. Lilith's understanding of faith, family, and loyalty stem from her understanding of the horrors of the plantation and further impacted by her lack of connection to Africa.

In addition to having no previous physical access to Africa, Lilith lacks maternal access to her African line. While she experiences many of the traumas of slavery, Lilith experiences the unique trauma of believing she was in the care of her biological mother until the age of 14. At this age, Circe, the woman who raised Lilith, tells her to "stop call her mama," because "she dead, girl like that born fi dead" (James 8,9). Shortly after, Lilith must go into hiding from not only the mother she knew all her life, but the cabin she called home. This leaves her doubly spatially orphaned; she has no way to access her African roots –no motherland – and no access to the home she associated with her (not

real) mother. Considering James's novel as part of the Black Gothic tradition, Harrison explains that *The Book of Night Women*, "explore[s] black life by focusing on the spaces between the real and unreal, which are often featured in opposition to each other, as spaces of indeterminacy" (7). If we are to reframe Harrison's comment through a spatial lens, the plantation acts as the real for Lilith while the Africa, a land she has never visited, serves as the unreal, pairing African innately with the "unreal" extranatural. Lilith, who refuses to acknowledge the reality of life on the plantation but has no connection to her African past, exists in this indeterminate middle. Over the course of the novel, Lilith refuses to ground herself, choosing, in Harrison's words, a space of indeterminacy.

I explore Lilith's journey through various spaces of indeterminacy, which she traverses through both distance and ascent in attempts to come to terms with her own complicated history and desire for identity while simultaneously battling against the plantation's attempts to force her to choose one space of belonging. The Montpelier plantation, like many, serve as relatively contained – albeit large – space, with the fields, main house, barns, cabins, and other buildings, and some bondspeople never have the chance to leave. I focus on three specific spaces, one of which involves Lilith's leaving Montpelier: the Main House basement, Coulibre (a different plantation), and the two overseer cabins. Lilith spends most of her time in the main house, particularly the basement. The basement, I suggest, represents a space of her initiation into the extranatural in addition to her first experience with a caring mother figure in the form of Homer. James provides an individual section for the second space: the Coulibre plantation. At Coulibre, Lilith confronts both whiteness and the extranatural; thus, I

propose this second space serves the most significant for Lilith in terms of her choice to reject her motherland/motherline, leaving her even more of an orphan. In returning to Montpellier after Coulibre, Lilith frequents and then occupies the overseers' cabins, one belonging to her biological father and the other to her (non-optional) lover. These represent spaces of literal and cultural fatherhood; within these spaces, Lilith experiences the privileges that come with access to a caring, masculine, and white figure on the plantation and, as such, fully battles against the extranatural. Outside of maternal spaces, Lilith can finally make the choice to embrace her identity as a Caribbean – not African – woman. Lilith learns the importance and power of her choice: the choice to disidentify with her role as a spatial orphan, to protect her white father, and to survive in her own way. As Lilith states herself in a conversation with Homer: "-You think you is woman? Homer say. – Me think me is Lilith, Lilith say" (*Book of Night Women* 350).[28] Separating herself from the connection implied between womanhood and African heritage, Lilith makes clear that she will do what is best for her own survival as a Caribbean person who, while not finding a space of belonging, has found a space of survival. By reading this through the lens of post-Blackness, James confronts readers who may have the desire to see all Black people as African Americans by reminding them that Blackness is not monolithically African.

[28] This conversation parallels one Jadine has with the spirits in Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby*, with which I begin the introduction of this project. This is one of numerous parallels between James' novel and Morrison's, representing the cyclical nature of the spatial orphan.

The Cellar

The cellar of the main house serves as one of the first spaces of indeterminacy for Lilith as Homer hides her these after accidentally killing another slave. As such, the cellar acts as both a space of protection but also a space of terror because of the constant waiting in darkness. When Homer first leaves Lilith in the cellar, Lilith notes that the space becomes "darker and darker" until it "turn into pitch," leaving Lilith with only the thoughts of her killing the night before and the fears of retribution (James 19). Upon waking the next day, Lilith describes the cellar as having a "darkness that grip her throat… This was not night darkness that show things once the eye get used to" (20). She responds by moving chaotically until she can determine a sense of location based solely on touch and discovers the basement is full of rats. The only thing she can do is "clutch herself 'cause she can't see nothing" (James 21). The darkness forces Lilith to reacknowledge her existence as a person and come to terms with the idea that she can depend on nothing except her physical sense of self. In this way, the cellar becomes a place of invisibility; from Lilith's perspective, she can only rely on the mental sense she has of her physical body, because she can only touch and think. She is more than an orphan. She is a spatial orphan in both surrounding spaces and her own body as it inhabits a space.

Simultaneously, the cellar serves as a womblike place that provides the opportunity for rebirth. Homer, who hides Lilith in the cellar, can keep Lilith under a protective eye and treat Lilith like her own child, giving Lilith the ability to introspect on her life as someone without a biological mother but with a mother figure. Homer, who was born in Africa, intertwines motherhood, motherland, and motherly spaces with the

extranatural, because she is closely associated with Myal – the "white magic" form of Obeah. Myal provides a new pathway for Lilith if she chooses to accept Homer's teachings and, by extension, Homer's role as representative mother and motherland. Citing Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, Ozuna describes Myal as spiritual religion that "emphasizes group practice," particularly one that uses "possession by 'ancestral spirits'" to create a lineage between ancestors and the living in addition to the practitioners and believers (139). In highlighting Myal and Obeah as practices common to the plantation, particularly plantation women, James emphasizes that this is a specifically Caribbean story. Obeah, according to Layne, occurs at the "intersections of binary oppositions that are crucial to European epistemology — between the secular and the religious, and the natural and supernatural" (51). In other terms, Obeah (and Myal) should relate to Lilith through their combined in-betweenness. Yet Lilith's first reaction to experiencing Obeah is not through Homer's healing Myal but through a Sasabonsam shuman. Indeed, upon finally having light in the cellar, or coming out of the womblike space without Homer's protection, Lilith first sees a "bundle of twig wrap tight and bind with straw" next to her (50). According to Homer, the Sasabonsam "come straight from the Africa, not in chains but by it own free will, and make him home wherever there be the most misery. Sasabonsom be the wickedest Obeah, worse than poison. Only one thing can fight it and nothing that the white man brew" (50). To defend herself from the negative extranatural within the cellar, the outside evil that comes from the other bondspeople – especially those still entrenched within their African birthplace and heritage – Lilith must rely on Homer to save her. Being in the cellar should teach Lilith to showcase the evils of Obeah and the benefits of Myal, but, more importantly, the cellar should serve as a space where

she can trust Homer to save her. Yet these experiences show Lilith that both forms of the extranatural relate heavily with Africa, creating an even deeper divide between everything she has known before and her relatively brief time in the basement.

In making the cellar a safe space that keeps Lilith alive, Homer also exerts control over when Lilith can leave and where she can move to under the guise of serving a spiritual guide, causing Lilith to associate the spaces that Homer approves of with the community that integrates motherhood, motherland, and the extranatural. One of these spaces that Homer allows Lilith to follow her to is a cave on the outskirts of the plantation where some of the enslaved women are planning a rebellion under Homer's orders.[29] Even though Homer does not physically guide Lilith to the cave, she justifies Lilith's appearance to the other women by claiming that "- The chile find the way with her own inside map. That settle the matter, Homer say… Olokun giver her new sight" (67-8). Homer automatically subscribes Lilith to her same extranatural knowledge, suggesting the extranatural can create a map that guides people to their place in life. She fails to consider Lilith's own traumas and how they may differ from her own and the other women in the cave, however, by assuming that Lilith will recognize the collective trauma of the other enslaved women and want to take up the same actions. While Lilith held a relatively privileged life compared to others on the plantation, her ability to find the cave in the dark parallels her own trauma of darkness from her time in the basement when she could not see and relied on her skills of sensation without vision. This is the

[29] While I do not currently include the cave as a space of indeterminacy, upon revision of this project into a book, I plan to include a discussion of the cave both as the more obvious reference to Plato's allegory and as a collective womb-like space that pairs with but differentiates itself from the basement.

trauma we can associate to Lilith's discovery amidst indeterminacy – one she discovered on her own, without community and without the extranatural. Homer's insistence upon including Lilith within this extranatural belief system teaches Lilith that she can only rely on herself and reject Homer's mothering. When Lilith does eventually return to the cave after undergoing the trauma of being whipped, raped, separated from Homer, and murdering multiple people, Lilith stands at the entrance, "waiting for the cave to show magic, but it stubborn and stiff" (247). The separation from Homer allows Lilith the time to fully reject the Obeah magic that Homer imbued upon the cave and its hidden location. As Homer represents Lilith's living connection to mother/Africa, Lilith's waiting shows her desire to still believe in the magic of motherhood while ultimately seeing the cave at face value. Layne usefully notes that "The Act to Remedy the Irregular Assembly of Slaves," passed in Jamaica in 1760, caused Obeah to "always carrying the germ of slave rebellion," (52). That the cave will not show magic symbolizes Lilith's grander rejection of rebellion; she cannot meet with the collective whilst unwilling to engage with their plan of action. Fully rejecting the collective in favor of individualism, even as she undergoes the same traumas, creates a divide that prevents access from potential spaces of belonging stemming from her time in the basement.

Within the confines of the basement, Homer refuses to reveal any information about Lilith's parentage, and Lilith refuses to accept Homer's role of supplemental mother. Hence, Homer's plan to maintain the control over Lilith's spaces and knowledge by allowing her to be introduced to the cave backfires; Lilith continues to emphasize her lack of belonging within the basement space, especially once she discovers the identity of her biological father from the other rebellious slaves (many of whom are her half-sisters)

whilst in the cave. “That mad nigger [Tantalus] was not her father. Not at all. Jack Wilkins be her daddy now,” Lilith reflects (77). Lilith’s inner desire to find her family, and her space of belonging, appears in the rhetorical shift from father to daddy. As a term of endearment, Lilith rejects her non-biological relative in favor of discovering her new daddy. Simultaneously, Lilith ignores the sisters in the cave as her family even though they are also her biological relatives. Lilith considers her biological connection to Jack Wilkins, the overseer, as a privilege because he is white, while her sisters are black slaves and, more importantly for Lilith, ugly women who could impact her reputation. Not only is she one of Jack Wilkins’ daughters as shown through her green eyes, but her eye color makes her partial whiteness visible to everyone. The realization that she is not entirely black but mulatto flourishes within her and makes the basement less inhabitable as the womblike space she despises reflects what Curdella Forbes describes as “the rhizoid womb-space in which her conscious subjectivity and otherness [are] intertwined” (8). While Homer has attempted to parent Lilith, the fact that Lilith’s biological father lives within a different house on the plantation prevents Lilith from feeling like she belongs with family elsewhere on the estate. Moreover, we learn that Jack Wilkins had provided Lilith the privilege of living with a mother and father figure, albeit not her biological family, and this creates a sense of entitlement that few, if any, of the other enslaved people ever had accessed. Lilith, then, wants to escape a space that she sees unbefitting of her racial status and her status on the plantation, particularly one that she deeply associated with Homer and mothering.

Outside of Homer’s desires to induce Lilith into Myal practices, another form of extranatural appears in the form of the night woman who haunts Lilith in the basement.

This woman reappears in the basement numerous times both in Lilith's dream and in the darkness, but I quote at length the first time Lilith sees the night woman:

> Two night in a row, Lilith wake up and see a woman watching her. The first night she go to scream but catch her mouth… this woman thin. Her hair wild and natty and her skirt spread wide like bat wing. Lilith can't make out the face. She don't see no eye, only the blackest black. When she leave something visit Lilith mind and don't leave for the rest of the day. Six tell six tell six. (144)

This woman's description mimics a bat: black with wings and no need for sight. Even as Lilith cannot distinguish her own body, she can see this apparition that frightens her into speechlessness. This night woman has immense power, influencing Lilith's thoughts by evoking the rebellious plan to tell six women each. This ghost could represent harm or help; on the one hand, she terrifies Lilith, seemingly representing all the things Lilith despises about herself, creating a negative reminder of who Lilith is. Then again, this ghost encourages Lilith's friendship with the other slaves as well as the rebellion. Based on Lilith's descriptions here and elsewhere, as I will attend to momentarily, I propose this night woman appears as the spiritual form of Lilith's mother *and* a projection of Lilith from a potential future. While the body appears dark and the energy angry, her lack of face allows Lilith to associate herself with the spirit, a faceless Black woman amidst a horrific history of innumerable faceless Black women, sparking both an interest and an abjection from Lilith.[30] Ultimately, she chooses to be fearful, likely resulting from her

[30] Although Forbes does not make this connection, she describes other moments in the text that combine Walcott's idea of "West Indian meeting herself" with Kristeva's concept of abjection, particularly in James' circuitous use of the phrase "Every Negro walks in a circle" (Forbes 4).

conditioned response against the extranatural in response to Homer. Instead, she places her faith in reading, which helps "the cellar seem not so dark" or, she considers, "mayhaps it was she who didn't seem so dark" (57). Keeping a space of light, both necessary for reading and a form of white Enlightenment, keeps the night woman away and prevents Lilith from turning into her by providing Lilith with a sense of self outside of revolutionary anger. Battling the extranatural with a white form of Enlightenment and rejecting rather than accepting the advances of the night woman, Lilith rejects her Black family, both ancestral and communal, as well as her family roots back to Africa in favor of her white biological relation.

Coulibre

Coulibre serves as the second main space of indeterminacy that Lilith inhabits as a spatial orphan that leads to her own understandings of individual and community identity. Her master's love interest requests Lilith at Coulibre, her plantation, so Lilith can be properly trained and disciplined, taking Lilith away from Homer for the first time. In and of itself, Coulibre does not contribute to Lilith's choice of biological family and cannot act as a space of belonging. Lilith, as a slave, does not have a choice in moving to Coulibre. Instead, living at another plantation serves other important roles – those of distance and ascent – that help understand her own ancestral identity and decide if she wants to be an individual or a community member. If we consider Layne's description of the "religious-magical/secular-rationalist continuum" of Obeah in spatial terms of Africa and anti-Africa/Caribbean (53), Coulibre provides a middle ground for Lilith to consider both ends of the continuum while being held in a space of indeterminacy.

Moving through distance to a new physical space allows Lilith to experience separation from the pressures she experiences on both sides of her conflicted identity as an orphan, because Coulibre exposes her to a new culture through the family's treatment of their slaves. Lilith describes the Coulibre as "far, very far" away from Montpelier, and the entire house is made up of only two floors (James 179, 182). Coulibre, in fact, is "not an estate at all" with only three male slaves to work what little grounds there are and "no sugar… nor tobacco, nor cotton neither" (James 187). This results in a very different form of work that the owners expect Lilith to undertake; as one of two slaves to work in the kitchen, Lilith must take on more household responsibilities but without the ability to roam the grounds. As such, the new estate alienates Lilith, both spatially and culturally, from the only form of enslavement she has known without the possibility of escape, allowing her – or perhaps forcing upon her –an uninfluenced opportunity to reflect on her identity and process the traumas she has undergone at Montpelier.

In a simultaneous form of movement, Lilith ascends from sleeping in the basement of Montpelier to the kitchen floor that parallels with her development in thinking of her identity as well as alignment with ancestry. The kitchen, being "half the size of the one at Montpelier" and emphasizing the lesser opulence of Coulibre, allows Lilith to "cook the meals fast, so she have plenty time to think about how she no got nobody" (James 185, 205). Notably, James leaves the location of this missing "nobody" unclear. Lilith could be reflecting upon the lack of community at Coulibre or missing Homer and the other woman at Montpelier. She could also regret her lack of biological family, leaving her to have no one to love her and no one to love in return. I would propose, based on Lilith's current space of indeterminacy, that she considers the lack of

both. She literally ascends out of darkness and into light and has more opportunity to engage with traditional forms of enlightenment, including access to books. However, she now has more access to other forms of enslaved education with her fellow kitchen worker, Dulce, who teaches her about sex and ways to rebel against the masters. Hence, her desire for biological family – and the corresponding individualistic desires – combines and conflicts with her time away from Homer, introducing Lilith for the first time to the importance of community. Both, however, draw her back to Montpelier, even as her enslaved status prevents her from making the decision to actively search for a space of belonging.

Importantly, ascending into a new space of indeterminacy, and I would argue increased trauma and conflict, prevents Lilith from creating mental distance from the issue at the root of the conflict, even as she increases her physical distance: namely, her connections to her (invisible) parents combined with her enslaved status. Lilith's own "ghastly" eyes, which makes Dulce feel as though she is being "watched by an owl," remind Lilith of her white father (James 199); they serve as a physical challenge to the powers of slavery symbolized in both estates, much like the bird who is always watching in any direction. In giving her his eyes, Jack Wilkins also imbues the power of sight upon Lilith in a way that allows her, when she chooses and is willing, to see deeper into the power structure of the plantation and slavery in Jamaica. Her mother's ancestry imbues Lilith with another form of second sight – the ability to see spirits, even as she moves between spaces. This night woman, who I have suggested is Lilith's mother, makes continuous appearances at Coulibre that encourage Lilith's rebellious growth while also serving to return her to Montpelier and, more specifically, to Homer and the coven of

other enslaved women of the rebellion. This is Lilith's first encounter with the night woman in Coulibre:

> The whole night Lilith in the kitchen but elsewhere. Dem cum was all over you, a voice say to her and Lilith jump. She turn around but here be nobody but her. Lilith take a candle out of the cupboard and light it with a stick of wood in the fire. As she set the candle down on a table, she look around at the orange walls and the black shadows jumping. A shadow move away from the others and go into a dark corner. Lilith have a start but catch her mouth. The woman again. The woman who belong to darkness. (201)

Although Lilith is at a new, different estate that has allowed her to ascend to a new form of enlightened, signified by her access to candles that light the shadows, her encounter with the night woman converts the space into one that parallels both the basement and the cave from Montpelier. The darkness can convert any space into the space of the slave, where they can escape the white owners and camouflage into the space. This night woman thrives within the dark spaces, leading Lilith to an association between "True darkness and true womanness" (229). Even Homer comments upon a visit to Coulibre that "You different, Lilith. You have more darkness 'bout you now. You turning into woman" (222). Hence, the kitchen of Coulibre serves as a spatial representation of Lilith's identity conflict; Lilith may be able to leave physically, but the mother spirit pulls her back into the direction of Homer, the rebellion, and her African heritage by reminding her of the violence of whiteness in every space.

Lilith ultimately discovers while at Coulibre that her ancestry prevents her from escaping violence if she wants to survive, as violence serves as an inherited trait from

both sides of her parentage and an encouraged trait from her motherly figure. In witnessing the trauma of Dulce being whipped to death, Lilith ultimately succumbs to the violence that everyone pushes her toward by killing the owners of Coulibre and burning their house to the ground, murdering white children and other slaves in the process. more and more like her mother as she stays at Coulibre, and it is this darkness especially that can benefit Homer and the other slaves in their plot. This act of violence brings her closer to both parents, especially upon discovering that "the woman in the dark want. Blood. The woman want blood," which Lilith gives a small amount of by killing the family (James 228-29). By the time Lilith leaves Coulibre, she comprehends why the woman keeps appearing to her. Lilith believes the woman to be the Abarra, which "take the form of somebody you know but she can't talk since the Abarra got no tongue. Lilith wondering if she seeing the same spirit but she don't look like nobody she know. She wonder if is somebody she supposed to know. Or somebody who know her" (224). Interpreting the spirit as her mother creates a clearer picture of the intent of rebellion; not only is her mother angry that she was denied the chance to raise her child because of slavery, but she is also furious that Lilith struggles with her own space of belonging. The woman, who continues to appear, is not satisfied with the blood of one white family but seems to want the blood of Jack Wilkins in particular. Staying present in Lilith's life allows the night woman to continue forcing Lilith into creating a space of belonging even as Lilith cannot escape her own physical trait of whiteness.

The Return to Montpelier and the Overseer's Cabins

Before continuing to discuss the overseer's cabins, I want to address an important piece of the spatial orphan's attempts to find a space of belonging, particularly the

purpose of the extranatural as a form of trauma healing as we consider the role of the night woman's appearance and Homer's Myal. Appealing to Lilith through the combined extranatural features of darkness and womanhood *should*, much like Homer believed, draw Lilith into supporting the rebellion plot and allow for a return to Africa. The role of the extranatural, however, is to help guide them through the traumas of displacement that can lead to healing and, eventually, belonging. Thus far, all elements of the extranatural have guided Lilith to spaces where those sources, potentially selfishly, want her to be. They do not work to help her heal her traumas, because those traumas can be used for their violent means. Yet what makes Lilith different than both the ghost of her mother and her father is her reflection on the violence and the traumas she undergoes. Her additional traumas separate her further from the women, because she has rejected those elements of the extranatural that may have helped her to heal. Indeed, upon returning to the basement, she stays "in the cellar hiding in the dark" from everyone, leaving herself to marinate with her trauma (241). This is also one of her final confrontations with the night woman in the basement as Lilith "see her and rage fly up in her head" (247). Lilith decides that if the night woman is a form of "true darkness and true womanness" then she "don't want to be a woman no more" (241). As much as Homer has tried to be a mother figure, the night woman shows Lilith the deep wrath that stems from being a Black woman. Hence, she not only rejects but refuses to recognize all of Homer's help in part because both the night woman and Homer have taught her the traumas that come from being a Black woman attached to African roots without any way to heal. Lilith "is willing and able to critically reflect on her violent actions and recognize her moral failures" while Homer and the night women remained consumed solely by violence and revenge (182).

Homer cannot accept this and shames Lilith, for refusing to recognize the importance of the mother/daughter relationship, both in terms of kin and country. Yet it is Homer's drive to avenge her sold children that leads the rebellion whereas Lilith's inability to recognize the importance of motherhood prevents her from going into the rebellion with a heart full of emotion instead of allows her to keep a head full of logic. By fully rejecting the mother, or lack thereof, Lilith claims her position as a spatial orphan disconnected from her motherland and motherline, and her time in the basement does help guide her through other spaces of indeterminacy by acknowledging her father and instructing her on what she desires in her a space of belonging.

The final spaces of indeterminacy Lilith enters include both Jack Wilkins' cabin and Robert Quinn's cabin, because both men serve as overseers at different times. Although Lilith found herself curious about Jack Wilkins' cabin before going to Coulibre, the return to Montpelier sparks Lilith's movement from main house to plantation grounds as she moves from the basement to the new overseer Robert Quinn's house. Over the course of the novel, Quinn replaces the master as the source of Lilith's sexual interest and her romantic interest, which he encourages by claiming her as his personal house slave. Much like Homer welcomes Lilith "home" when she returns to Montpelier, Quinn "promise[s] to teacher her [to read] one night when he is home. Home" (287). In the novel, the word "home" appears not only as its own sentence but its own paragraph as if this is the first time Lilith has allowed herself to contemplate the possibility of a home space. The concept of home comes with complications that Lilith is not unaware of; while she desires home and thinks of what that could mean for the first time, she also realizes that home is a privilege that being black and being a slave denies

her of. I suggest, however, that this is the first time Lilith has accessed a sense of home and its associations – family, safety, comfort, and even love – and as such, she is more likely to align herself with the person who has provided her this new safe space. I contrast this introspection with Homer's attempt to prescribe the basement as a symbolic space of belonging when she tells Lilith "Welcome home" upon the return to Montpelier (257). Just as Marjorie uses this phrase for Marcus's time in Ghana, as I discuss in the previous chapter, home connotes warmth and belonging, a place where family, safety, and community reside. Given that Homer welcomes her, home also doubles as the basement and as the community of at Montpelier, particularly as Lilith has now experienced traumas that should create community between herself and the other bondswomen. Home does not, for Lilith, appear with other women but in the desire to access a family structure that she witnessed growing up and associates with whiteness. Home represents privilege and safety, and, more importantly, a space to physically escape the violence that haunts her no matter where she turns.

Inhabiting a white space, one that surrounds her with Enlightenment ideals and distances her further from other bondspeople, allows Lilith the privilege of time to consider her race and her potential for belonging while keeping her relatively segregated from reminders of her past. This newfound introspection on space in combination with her new position as Quinn's house slave provides Lilith with the privilege of time, even more so than she had at Coulibre, because she faces less threat of punishment and can consider her trauma and identity: "She look at herself, at the one thing that make her not black. She not black, she mulatto. Mulatto, mulatto, mulatto. Maybe she be family to both and to hurt white man just as bad as hurting black man. Lilith wonder if green eye is the

only thing she seeing that any good" (James 286). This contemplation over her racial identity reaches a deeper complexity than her earlier understandings of herself. She considers herself as "family" to both races, but her eye is the one thing that makes her stand out as clearly being part white. It is ironic she associates goodness with the clearly white portion of her eye: the green eyes that are associated with overseeing so much pain and suffering are also the eyes that mark her as potentially good because it is a racial marker outside of skin color. The eyes give her hope that she can be a good person with a home and a family as Quinn continues to pitch to her, but they also serve as her marker of alienation.

The potential safety of the home space ultimately proves not to be the space of belonging that Lilith desires as the space is invaded by the extranatural, an unexpected shift that contrasts with many other texts from the 21st century that praise the extranatural and see it as a return to Africa as the ultimate home space. Like Morrison's Jadine, a character who many critics reject for her desire to leave America and her expected cultural role, James's Lilith continues to try to reject her expected role in the rebellion as a black female slave and the extranatural associations that come with it. The night woman appears in Quinn's cabin while Lilith is there alone making her space no longer safe, although her appearance no longer frightens Lilith. Instead, she becomes angry, reacting with violence that the woman works to provoke as she throws one of Quinn's plates at the spirit (306). Much like the time Lilith spends alone gives her the time to contemplate her identity, the new appearance of the white women provides new topic for contemplation:

> Night come and pass with nothing but her ghost to keep her company. Lilith wondering why the thin black woman keep coming to her. Maybe she not asking

> to kill but warning that a killing bound to happen. Maybe the woman be on her side and guarding her like the home spirit that come from the Africa or what the church call an angel… Or maybe the woman be the spirit of the head god and the fire of the revenge, and maybe is she and not Lilith doing the killing and she, not Lilith, who deserved the blame. (311)

As badly as Lilith wants to trust Quinn, she remains conflicted over the night woman. Lilith entertains that the woman is a "home spirit," an important phrase for someone who desires to find a home space where she belongs. That this home spirit comes from Africa shows Lilith's recognition of the place that she is *supposed* to recognize as home, yet ending with the belief that it is the spirit – the embodiment of motherhood – who deserves the blame for death shows that Lilith can no longer separate the necessity of killing for revenge from killing in general.

This lack of desire for violence separates Lilith from every other character within the novel; she does not desire violence, because she recognizes the moral implications, but this does not stop her from becoming violent when necessary for purposes of safety and protection. This all comes to a head when the rebellion happens. Lilith chooses to save Jack Wilkins and makes her final choice as to who she belongs to and where her space of belonging will be:

> She aim the gun at him balding head. But she couldn't shoot. She didn't even want to and don't know why. Surely of all the white mens to get kilt, he be the one who deserve it the most. The man who rape her mammy. But she don't know her mammy. She never touch her nor smell her nor know if the mammy ever want her…But he save her from the field and he stop them from whipping her – even

> Quinn didn't do that. And he be her pappy. She don't know what that mean. Mayhaps it mean nothing, especially today. But she shed enough blood already… She not shedding no more. She stoop down in front of him and aim for the window and stay that way till whoever come. (409)

Even though Wilkins is a horrible person, he is a physical person that can provide a physical comfort. For Lilith who grew up knowing physical comfort (one that Jack Wilkins provided), she depends on what she knows in the physical realm. Since she cannot identify the night woman as her mother nor has the night woman provided any of the motherly comforts Lilith desires and expects from that parental relationship, she chooses her father. Ozuma describes this as choosing comparative freedom: "being an enslaved person in form yet free in fact and perhaps ultimately free in form and fact" (141). Choosing comparative, and individual, freedom instead of working for revenge in the hopes of total freedom for all enslaved people causes "the skinny dark woman take leave of her and go through the front door. Lilith stay by the armchair and watch her father" (410). This is the night woman's final goodbye in admission that the battle over Lilith has been lost. She chooses to finally embrace the white part of her identity. As Forbes notes, "in the context of enslavement, becoming and dissolution are synonymous," so as Lilith becomes her own person through this choice, her ghostly form and the form of her mother dissolve (9). It is on the plantation with her father where she has a chance of protection from the white people of Jamaica rather than rebelling with the other slaves who are risking their lives and their futures for a chance to recreate a new home away from their home. In other words, she recognizes that both sides of ancestry engage with violence, but only one side can provide her with the protection to survive.

Harrison places Lilith's decision into spatial terms, noting that the final battle in Jack Wilkins' cabin represents the "very picture of personal and political in-betweenness" (11). Lilith serves as a new representation of Jadine from Morrison's *Tar Baby*, who also finishes the novel in a space of indeterminacy that frustrates readers. How, then, do we respond to a character and a novel that projects such a problematic message by unethically describing the horrors of slavery in vivid detail yet the protagonist turns against the other slaves and saves the accuser? Lilith's choice to align neither her race nor her gender but her family and her protector highlights her intelligence and growth throughout the novel and the need for current diasporic subjectivity to expand its alignment, a similar message that, I have suggested in my introduction, Morrison struggled with. In other words, Lilith's decision to choose her own identity, one rooted in the Caribbean, stems from a choice that diaspora should not force her to make but that should be embraced. Harrison phrases this as a critique on resistance at large, explaining that "Lilith's refusal to form alliances or acquiesce to allegiances simply on the basis of race, gender, or common status is a critique of essentialist race and gender-based resistance as a primary means of liberation that continues to underlie black subject formation across the diaspora" (12). We can extend this to the current conversation of the individual and collective in the post-Black period; Lilith proves that recognizing the individual and transnational aspects of diasporic movements are necessary if any hope of equality can exist.

This is not to say that Lilith's decision can be declared "right" or "wrong," and to do so does, I believe, a disservice to James' complicated construct of her character. To assuage this judgement, James provides what I see as a form a textual redemption in the

form of Lilith's daughter – the one she never intended to have. While Lilith made the choices she did to find her own space of safety in the hopes of belonging, her daughter Lovey, symbolic of the future and future generations, is much more aware of the problematics of slavery and chooses to balance the lessons of her mother with the extranatural influences of the new night women. Lovey Quinn, the narrator of the novel, writes, "Any niggerwoman can become a black woman in secret. This is why we dark, cause in the night we disappear and become spirit. Skin gone and we become whatever we wish. We become who we be. In the dark with no skin I can write. And what write in darkness is free as free can be, even if it never come to light and go free for real" (427). This freedom in writing not only represents a true historical reality for the slave as shown in other slave narratives such as Frederick Douglass but also a greater commentary on the importance of finding freedom through writing and understanding the impact of history for understanding Black identity in the 21st century.

Even more significantly, Lovey's narration emphasizes the important of witness as trauma resolution that allows her mother to find the spot where she can survive: "But she didn't teach me for me but for her, for when the time come to write her song, she have somebody true to be her witness" (426). The concept of witnessing is essential to recovering from trauma, as Eden Wales Freedman explains, and in telling Lilith's story, Lovey helps redeem their mother. This does not, however, showcase that either Lilith or Lovey choose the "right" or white form of freedom. Lauren Shoemaker notes, "Literacy did not offer her mother liberation, and Lovey feels it was given to her merely as a means to narrate Lilith's story and is therefore a burden, not a gift" (25). This helps process Lilith's trauma but increases Lilith's; both have the power to access white skills but are

still Black bodies. Indeed, it is Lovely, not Lilith, who narrates that "Lilith have a quilt on her back, but there be a bigger quilt, a patchwork of negro bones that reach form the Africa to the West Indies," showing the interconnected nature of the diaspora while, according to Vásquez, making her body into "a political site of cultural memory" or, in Hortense Spillers' terms "hieroglyphics of the flesh" (James 262, Vásquez 52, Spillers 67). While Lilith may make choices that we as readers cannot understand or want to support, Lovey makes the conscious decision to become more open to the night women's African identity while understanding that neither their Obeah nor Lilith's reading will provide her the singular path to freedom and her own space of belonging. Ozuna supports this reading, stating that Lovey's "ability to enter a metaphysical realm beyond coloniality signals her affinity to the 'night women's rebellious legacy, their maroon consciousness and embrace of afro-Caribbean spiritual percepts" (143). Yet, it is through her mother's journey of being a spatial orphan and the oral tradition of storytelling that Lovey can commune with her ancestral past and avoid being the same spatial orphan.

Counternarratives

Movement "on many levels" serves as a foundation aspect to John Keene's collection of stories and novellas entitled *Counternarratives,* he states in a conversational interview with Tonya Foster. This includes "movement in terms of the transition between forms, narratives, geographical and imaginative spaces, and between subjectivities" (Foster and Keene). In engaging with these various forms of movement, he also questions the role of reason from modernity to modernism, relating not only to the content but the form of his pieces, questioning "What is reason? What is rationality? How do certain systems of belief sometimes coexist, or not?" (Foster and Keene). As a method to exploring all of these themes, John Keene's *Counternarratives* brings to light the

unofficial narratives of history, narratives that may be hidden behind movement and reasoning. Although Keene's collection is still relatively undiscovered in scholarship, interviewers have been attracted to the novella within his collection: "Gloss on a History of Roman Catholics in the Early American Republic, 1790 – 1825; Or the Strange History of our Lady of the Sorrows." Keene's longest text within the collection begins as the smallest detail, a footnote within an apocryphal history book entry about a Kentucky nunnery with no written record. Keene uses the footnote to challenge the idea of an "official written history" through storytelling and giving a voice to lose who have been lost or unwritten from the historical archives, including spatial orphans. In recognizing these tales of exclusion from a greater narrative, on both a character level and a historical one, Keene draws attention to the effects of invisibility and the importance of identifying the impact that individuals can have when they are both willing to engage and accepted within a community.

John Keene's novella shares numerous similarities with Marlon James' novel, including their focus on a young, enslaved girl on a Caribbean plantation in the 18th century and their experiences with revolution. Set initially at Valdoré plantation in Haiti, Keene's novella focuses on a Haitian bondswoman named Carmel, a mute girl treated as invisible by the other slaves after the death of her parents. Carmel, as "the lone child" on the plantation, spends her time looking for places to hide and draw, until she becomes possessed and starts to draw prophetic images during these possessions (Keene 86). As she escapes from the revolution that destroys the plantation in Haiti, her mistress forces Carmel to accompany her to a convent in Kentucky. At the convent, Carmel becomes more developed and educated as a Roman Catholic, woman, artist, and mystic. She

eventually saves the lives of the nuns and her fellow bondswomen at the convent, changing the historical outcome of a deadly situation. In the same interview with *BOMB Magazine*, John Keene says of "Gloss on a History of Roman Catholics" that "the story starts outside Carmel, and slowly it moves into her consciousness, into her speaking." Rather than focus on the story's use of Carmel and how it moves *her* into consciousness, however, I suggest that we read Carmel as a spatial orphan who experience a doubled, simultaneous form of movement as she attempts to discover a place of spatial belonging: distance in the form of forced transnational movement and ascent through optional vertical movement.

Carmel's movement of distance – from Haitian plantation to Kentucky convent – causes a diasporic cultural transposition, bringing her Caribbean culture into the U.S., undergoing a double diaspora. Carmel's second movement of ascent, on the other hand, presents the development of an alternative form of Enlightenment ideals that highlights Black Enlightenment. By moving from the coal basement in Haiti to the sewing closet in the basement of the convent to the attic of the Kentucky convent, spaces that serve as footnotes to houses themselves, Carmel embraces the Haitian Vodou ancestral influences and showcases the potential path to a space of belonging. Even as Keene shows through Carmel how important Black individuals are within a community, however, the ultimate fact that this story is only a footnote to white history shows how quickly that path to spatial belonging for Caribbean immigrants (forced or otherwise) can be forgotten in the annals of history if not maintained by a larger community of Black writers. In other words, Keene's novella reminds readers of the significant of Black Caribbean bondspeople within the U.S., recognizing different cultural aspects that need to be

identified and celebrated, not relegated to the footnotes of American history in the fight recognizing and highlighting Black culture and equality.

Valdoré Plantation

The Haitian Revolution serves as the impactful background to Carmel's parental orphaning and spatial orphaning as the violence from the resolution causes the death of Carmel's parents and the resulting trauma removes any feeling of safety or belonging she had at Valdoré. Set in 1791, the start of the Haitian Revolution, Keene explains that the bondswomen and men "had already been freed, first across the sea and on these shores again by Sonthonax's pen… Then under the threat of Napoleon's gun they had been captured or forced to return" (86). After being shown freedom and then forced back into enslavement, the bondspeople had already experienced the potential for spatial belonging outside of the plantation, creating the desire to return to that space through the violent Haitian Revolution. This a violence that Keene explains in his novella as a turning against community, as the resistance was not concerned with who they killed and often involved killing slaves that had not joined their cause (Keene 87). Sibylle Fisher describes this violent environment in her manuscript *Modernity Disavowed*, noting that the desire and dreams of freedom conflicted with the realities of revolution, making revolutionary ideas appear "often only as the unspeakable, as trauma, utopia, and elusive dream. Imaginary scenarios became the real battle ground" (2). For Carmel, this conflict materializes through her master's orders and her treatment by the other bondspeople. Before Carmel's new mistress arrives at Valdoré, Carmel's life has two main purposes: do all of the duties asked of her by de L'Ecart (her master) and "identifying new hiding places in the event French troops or their black deputies or enemies commandeered the

estate" (91). In other words, Carmel's identity revolves around secretive places of transience, spaces where one should not belong but that serve as a temporary safety.

The other bondspeople force her further into alienation from their plantation community both because of her muteness and because they fear her abilities as the daughter of a Ginen. In one way, her muteness and essential invisibility provides with a power, since, as Maud Casey summarizes, "silence isn't negative space or absence or lack; it is the invisible world made visible" (76). She would not need to be invisible were it not for, in part, her own familial past. This personal mission of searching for transient safety, a sign of her spatial orphaning, stems from her parental orphaning. Carmel loses her parents to the violence of the revolution and never speaks as a result, rendering the trauma of her orphaning as literally unspeakable. Even still, she must consistently engage with the imagined violence of both their deaths and the violence that could come to her by searching for safe spaces. I quote this extensive passage regarding Carmel's mother at length, not because being a literal orphan is necessary for being a spatial orphan but because understanding Carmel's ancestry shows why Carmel's ancestry causes her alienation in addition to explaining her ancestral connection to the extranatural:

> Carmel's mother, Jeanne, was also known as la Guinee (Ginen)… In her spare time she was said to practice divination, and later, as the systems of social control disintegrated, she increasingly served as a translator and courier for several groups of insurgents.... She had learned her divination skills from her mother, Gwan Ginen, as she had from hers, and had performed it when necessary and without de L'Ecart's knowledge, as a secondary mode of manor religion and justice. Most of her fellow slaves therefore gave her a wide berth, though it was

> widely recognized that she seldom put her gifts to malevolent uses. Just days after her husband's death, she too fell, in factional fighting near the Spanish border. Her final utterance, according to the account of a fellow rebel from Valdoré, was a curse on all who had ever dreamt of betraying her. (87-88)

Ginen can be literally translated into Africa, although as Adam McGee notes, it is also "an eschaton —a place which is longed for, and which one hopes to see someday" (40). In addition, he writes, "To say that one serves Ginen it to say that one serves the ancestors and spirits that are perceived to come from, and continue to exist in, Ginen" ("What's in a Name?"). In calling Carmel's mother a Ginen, then, she is not just a practitioner of vodou but a representative of the ancestral space. The description of Carmel's mother also reveals that their ancestral connection has been passed down through generations of women and has earned respect and fear amongst the other slaves for performing a combination of religion and justice.

This passage further ties the loss of her mother with the loss of her father as they died only days apart. Unlike her mother, who was born on the plantation, her father was taken from Africa at nine years old and is described as a skilled artist to the extent that L'Ecart employed him to paint murals throughout the house (Keene 87). Both of Carmel's parents have talents and abilities, emphasizing the importance of her familial connections as well as their connections to Africa as a home space; as her parents die, then, Carmel is left dislocated from a space of belonging on the plantation and without access to the ancestral space that her parents represented, giving her no possible space of belonging at Valdoré.

Camel does take advantage of her invisibility from both the other bondspeople and her master, however, to search for hiding spaces and to entertain herself through drawing, particularly in and on the unused rooms around the plantation. Her images varied "from the plantation itself.… To imaginary realms she conjured from book illustrations, dreams, nightmares, and her rare night visitations with her mother" (91). The descriptions of her imagery here is brief, yet I note that the forms of conjuring here are to conjure images and to use them in her father's medium. Moreover, she chooses to use the unused rooms and hidden spaces to focus on the art from her father's lineage, only stopping to "create protective or curative powders and oils, as she had seen her mother do, in case the plantation was attacked or her master discovered her handiwork" (92). Rather than focus on honing these skills, which might allow Carmel more protection, Carmel chooses the ancestral abilities concerned with aesthetics and a reluctant rebel as opposed to her mother's form of religion and justice. This raises the question of responsibility, which the narrator questions early on: "What kinds of responsibility? The maintenance of the established order, that is: labor. What is the non-material or spiritual component? In the private sphere: to the ancestors, to memory, to the elusive community of the self and its desires – constancy or consistency. What if these are in conflict?" (90). Carmel's movements can help us address this question of responsibility and accountability, paying particular attention to her status as a spatial orphan. Carmel's drawing take place above ground, in small rooms throughout the body of the plantation; she physically stays in the same places she inhabited during her parents lives and, in a sense, replaces them. The extranatural does not guide her to anywhere new, because her invisibility renders her relatively safe at the plantation and allows her to

avoid confronting the trauma from losing her parents. As such, she cannot obtain a space of belonging, but the hidden spaces allow her to simply exist.

In order to begin her doubled movements that trigger her spatial orphaning, Carmel must begin at the very bottom of the plantation that reflects the removal of her hidden spaces above ground. L'Ecart dies and his brother and brother's wife and daughter become the new owners. Carmel becomes Eugenie's bondswoman, which shifts Valdoré from a pleasant space where Carmel could move around the plantation to place of servitude and pain. The basement of Valdoré serves as the starting place for her both forced and optional movements, and it is because of the extranatural that she leaves the relative comfort of her small, hidden spaces. "Carmel felt a strange and powerful force, unlike anything she had experienced before, seize her. As if she were in a trance, she rose and staggered down to the cellar where she found a small stub of coal" (Keene 94). Powerful, seize, and staggered all emphasizes the pain at being brought to the basement against her will, and Carmel feels as though "someone were twisting the sounds out of her throat" (94). As Carmel stays at the plantation, her world becomes smaller and more dangerous, eventually separating her from her connections to her father through drawings of her choice and bringing her closer to her mother through these entranced. In spatial terms, the extranatural forces physically move her to the basement of the plantation, that which according to Gaston Bachelard represents "the *dark entity* of the house," implying that the basement is not only the ghost of the house but the basest of all knowledge (18; emphasis mine). Carmel's reluctance to change matches her reluctance to confront the trauma of her parents' death as well as the violence of the revolution that surrounds her; in other words, avoiding the basement and maintaining her own small knowledge base

that keeps her invisible has also helped Carmel to ignore that she both a literal orphan and a spatial orphan.

Hurttstown Convent

Carmel's drawings serve as a form of her mother's protections as the premonitions tell the future of Valdoré: the revolutionaries burn down the plantation. This is the only home she has known, and even though Valdoré became unpleasant, the plantation acted as a space of comfort and invisibility. Although she successfully escapes the island, she does not do so willingly as both her mother's encouragement though extranatural communion and Eugenie (the daughter) force her to leave. While Carmel lives, she has no choice but to attend a convent in Kentucky with Eugenie as her personal bondswoman. The force of this distance movement in combination with the basement inhabitation at Valdoré means Carmel has, figuratively and literally, nowhere to hide from the now extensive traumas of the diaspora and the loss of the only home she has known.

Geographical similarities exist between Valdoré and the Hurttstown convent that I believe to be productive in understanding Carmel's ability to ascend amidst such a traumatic transnational movement, one that parallels the survival abilities of both historical and present migrants. Spatial similarities allow for a type of grounding that clears more mental space for finding how to belong within that space. Rephrased in considerations of the post-Black period, understanding how the different spaces of the U.S. function allows for more time to comprehend the individuality of the people who inhabit them, creating greater potential for the balance between individual support and community belonging. Within "Gloss on a History," the geography surrounding the

convent helps in maintaining relative isolation, much like at Valdoré, which was set west of the river. At the Hurttstown convent, "The Tennessee River separated the convent… from Chickasaw territory to the south and west" (111). So, while the places are similar, their overall locations are reversed.[31] In addition to being in rural Kentucky, the terrain also isolates the convent from much of the surrounding territory and "the grounds [are] enclosed… by a high, stilted fence" at all other places, which is as much for keeping the girls in as it is keeping the townspeople out (111). Describing the grounds themselves, Keene writes, "The convent's estate comprised what had once been a large, whitewashed mansion, in a rough version of the new Federal style, with a similarly designed carriage house and outlying buildings, as well as the extensive grounds" (111). Both the convent and the plantation are built on lands of violence and revolution, and both have extensive grounds and multiple buildings showcasing their lost opulence. In a continued similarity, the convent is constantly under siege from the villagers in Hurttstown; establishing a Catholic convent in a Protestant town after the Revolutionary War leaves the nuns under the threat of violence. Valdoré, on the other hand, was under a constant threat from the Haitian revolution. In both cases, Carmel's position as a bondswoman ensures she lives within a threatened space, yet the geographic similarities, even amidst a forced transnational move, present the opportunity for her to carry over and extend her knowledge to process her trauma and increase her own form of enlightenment.

[31] Toni Morrison's *Paradise* contains another significant plantation in African American literature that serves as a temporary home for spatial orphan and could produce additional comparisons in the transition between periods and the way this impacts the spatial orphan.

Unlike Lilith who undergoes a relatively set pattern of movements, the small size of the convent and her role as a personal bondswoman limits Carmel's spatial negotiation. This does not prevent her mother's extranatural guidance, however, as she consistently pushes Carmel to both strengthen her extranatural abilities and use them to escape the convent. Much like at Valdoré where Carmel chose drawing instead of protection, the convent provides Carmel with other distractions that challenge the Vodou beliefs her mother and from the other bondswomen: a Catholic education and access to drawing materials. On the one hand, her desire to learn and her engagement with learning languages at lessons separates her from the other bondswomen who look down on her for being better than them, preventing her from experiencing a sense of community. They also sense her Vodou abilities, which scare them just as at Valdoré. Her drawings, on the other hand, combine her inner visions from her mother and other combinations of Catholicism and Vodou in Haiti and Kentucky. Some of these visions are maps of place she has never been to, including "a map of the surrounding area – the county - a map of Kentucky and Illinois territory – a map of" (117).[32] Even as she still seems content with the difficult life that provides her with an access to education, her extranatural guide does not let her ignore her lack of spatial belonging. Rather, these visions of places come to her almost as a telepathic influence and allow Carmel to interpret her surrounding world. This is not to say that Carmel *belongs* in the space she lives. Rather, I would suggest this shows what occurs when she attempts to reject her ancestral connection through her mother's Vodou lineage. Her mother safely navigated Carmel out of Valdoré only for

[32] This cut off sentence is copied as written in the text. Much of Keene's novella contains this abrupt, mid-sentence stop that leaves a thought completed or unrevealed.

Carmel to once again reject these abilities at the convent in favor of what we can consider white Enlightenment. By encouraging visions of what she wants Carmel to draw, however, Carmel's mother ensures that Carmel will have the opportunity to avoid being a spatial orphan if only she is willing to process the traumas inherent in movement.

The push that separates Valdoré from Hurttstown and encourages Carmel to move beyond maintaining her rediscovered comfort space does not exist through Carmel's mother, who ultimately isolates more, in the form of community through a friendship with Phedra (Phebe). Community transforms the convent, because Phedra allows Carmel to embrace all forms of learning and encourages her to move about the grounds. Carmel gives her drawings and teaches her signs to communicate (126-128). Embracing friendship comes with another sacrifice: contact with her mother. Carmel's mother has significantly different priorities for her daughter, but because Carmel is orphaned, she cannot enforce the necessary ancestral connection that will ultimately make Carmel belong. Carmel even emphasizes her differences from her mother when Phedra asks: "PH askd do you know any spells from Ayiti I sd no spells but my mother knew how to call upon the other worlds but I do not have those powers she sd oh I think you do we laughed" (129). Phedra develops a greater interest in the extranatural than Carmel does, suggesting Phedra has a stronger desire to immeditely escape her bonds than Carmel. Carmel, on the other hand, does not admit she has special abilities and seems more content to laugh with her friend. Moreover, Phedra acts as a source of inspiration to connect Carmel's own desires for Enlightenment with her mother's Vodou practices by providing an important reminder: "she sd your power is in here & touches my brow" (130). In emphasizes Carmel's mindpower, she reminds Carmel that both languages,

drawing, and Vodou practices all prioritize thought, allowing her to accomplish that to which she sets her mind. This may be the first connection Carmel has ever had with another person who sees her for who she is and brings her one step closer to having a space of belonging through an intimate relationship.

Unfortunately, Carmel can only become most productive, closer to her mother, and closer to her ancestors through traumatic experiences that force her to turn to the extranatural. One day, Phedra disappears, but that night, Carmel sees her mother's face again during an attempted night visit (131). The pain of losing her friend motivates Carmel to give the extra effort to engage with her extranatural abilities in order to contact her mother during a time of need. It is this loss of community that ultimately pushes Carmel to confront her lack of spatial belonging, because she fully recognizes that which she has been missing by embracing her individuality. This experience parallels with a spatial shift that Carmel undergoes at the request of the Sisters. She now works in a sewing room, the name provided to the large closet where she spends her working time, that gets as hot and humid as Valdoré: "the warm, dense air, which filled the air as if I had *conjured* it from my childhood, enfolded me like a lullaby… When I awoke, having not missed a stitch" (132; emphasis mine). While she is not possessed, the air comes in *as though* she has conjured it, hinting at the potential power Carmel now has. Bachelard can also be helpful here. He notes, "in the daydream itself, the recollection of moments of… shut-in spaces are experiences of heartwarming space, of a space that does not seek to become extended, but would like above all still to be possessed" (10). The sewing closet represents a middle space in Carmel's ascent and is an important point of reconciling her forced possession with her upcoming abilities.

Environmental elements of Haiti, moreover, bring Carmel closer to her ancestral connection; as she almost seems to conjure the weather she is most comfortable in, she also falls asleep and wakes up with the power of invisibility, just like in her childhood. This final bridge between her two transnational locations reduces the sense of physical distance, and the loss of her friend recalls her previous losses. Combined, this is the final push Carmel needs to search for her space of belonging, and her extranatural abilities have reached a powerful level to aid her in that mission. As the "summer heat grew ever more tropical," Carmel's sewing room is moved into an even smaller closet near the basement, which may at first seem like a lack of ascension (140). But she is no longer in a coal cellar; she is in a furnished room and *welcomes* the potential for possession. Much like at Valdoré, this time in the basement signals the necessity for action, and Carmel begins practicing her abilities by changing or envisioning changes to the space around her. In the heat, Carmel becomes a ghost: "I glided along the wooden floors without a single creak. As usual I wore no shoes; my hem floated off the ground; my pace was slow enough that I might have even gotten behind time itself. The heat seemed to form a curtain through which I had to press myself, though I did so with minimal effort" (146). She can manipulate time and space; while no one else can pass through the curtain of heat, her unique experiences and connections to the island give Carmel the ability to access the entirety of the convent and perform tasks at her leisure with no interruption.

In a return to the silence, she experienced at the plantation, Carmel develops a new form of logic. Casey explains the correlation of all of Carmel's skills: "Prophesy, dreams, and art have their own logic, as crucial to our survival as anything else. This

logic requires a different sort of attention; it requires a different sort of listening. It requires silence" (92). I quote Carmel's own recognition of this logic:

> In terms of my own will and gifts, I had begun to figure out even more about how to initiate night visits with my mother, summoning the door before my eyes, though I had not yet found the right key, among the many arrayed before me, that would open it.. I had not yet developed a theory of knowledge by which to understand [my drawings]. Or rather perhaps I had, but lacked a language to characterize and describe them. It struck me that the spells and drawings themselves might be a language, but this seemed so exploratory and fantastic, that I set aside further consideration of it. (145-46)

Beyond the beauty of Keene's writing here, Carmel has clearly developed in terms of both her thought process and her skills in a way that she has not given the reader access to throughout the story. She seems to simultaneously have a distaste for and appreciation of the "other worlds." On the one hand, they often forced her into exhaustion through the drawings that the trance made her perform. On the other hand, they provided a sense of clarity in her immediate world. Overall, though, Carmel seems frustrated. She has overcome so many obstacles on her coming-of-age journey and that will lead her to no longer being a spatial orphan. Carmel figured out how to manipulate her physical space, learned multiple languages, taught herself to write, and has almost been able to access her mother again. Yet for all she has accomplished at the convent, there is still something blocking her from access this other world. I propose that it is the convent itself as a space that prevents Carmel from understanding this other world. While at the convent, she has

experienced being part of a community and being alone, but the convent prevents her from being both simultaneously.

This, I argue, is because she has not transcended into the cultural version of enlightenment that involves blending her cultural and familial backgrounds; she needs to make the ascending journey to the attic in order to combine the language she has learned at the convent, the spells of her mother, and the art of her father. Carmel has doubted her abilities to this point. She knows she can access the abilities, like in the closet, but she is not sure of the correct "key to unlock the door." As she moves up the stairs to the attic, however, Carmel faces a blank wall and the option to return to her childhood roots: "The wall outside the room leading down a store was an expanse of paint the hue of buttermilk, but, I now knew, I no longer needed it, nor the charcoal I kept in my pocket" (153). This scene directly parallels her first premonition drawing at Valdoré with the same color of wall and the nugget of charcoal as her drawing instrument. In a moment of recognition, however, Carmel realizes that she can gaze into the future and complete her task without the charcoal. In other words, she no longer needs to return to the basement of her journey and can reach full cultural enlightenment. And after she ascends to the attic the first time, she maintains her enlightened state as she travels throughout the convent by using her mind alone to open doors, turn on lights, and send the other bondwomen and the nuns to flee the convent.

Returning to the attic, however, Carmel achieves the ultimate goal of revolution. She no longer needs to paint and can see the advancing townspeople who are intent upon burning down the convent. Carmel protects herself by pouring wine that has been brought up *from the cellar* in a circle (Keene 155). The basement here is essential to her final

ritual; it brings together her past and present, much like she attempted to do in the closet. The circle, and Carmel's powers, are so powerful that she is unharmed, even though the convent burns to the ground with Carmel, her mistress, and the townspeople inside. This culturally enlightened state is incredibly commanding, but only because Carmel has finally accepted the importance of understanding and embracing her past. Continuing her ritual, she pours a bowl of water and searches for her mother's face in the "watery mirror," only to be interrupted by Eugenie begging for Carmel's help in their escape with a potential for her to free Carmel after they are all safe (157).[33] When considering Eugenie's pleas, Carmel thinks over the extensive traumatic, painful, and humiliating punishments Eugenie inflicted over the years, but then she considers a more geographic approach to her answer. She envisions how this journey would go: "… as we stepped through the land the Chickasaws still tenaciously had held onto, where she nevertheless would encounter her own people as well, as they had seeped like an underground leak from one end of this region to the other" (157). Carmel sees this battle against not only Eugenie but against the white people who insist on taking over the land the does not belong to them, like the town built on Native American grounds that were 'won' during the Revolutionary War and the convent built on a Chickasaw burial ground. She is no longer just fighting for herself and for her preservation, but to create a space, much like her countrymen in Haiti, where she can be free to live as a black woman and embrace her own cultures and friendship.

[33] McGee notes, "Ginen is the home of the spirits, a forested island residing simultaneously at the bottom of the cosmic waters (*anba dlo*) and at the backs of mirrors (*do miwa*)." Using this definition provides clarity as to some of the elements in Carmel's ritual.

Her response to Eugenie suggests this deeper connection between the importance of Haiti and freedom: “Fòk mwen te manke w pou m te kap apresye w” (157). There are the first words Carmel physically speaks in the entirety of the novella and they are in her home language of Creole. This phrase is from a Haitian meringue entitled “Souvenir d’Haiti” or “Memory of Haiti,” which often serves as a second national anthem. According to Averill, the song is “a turn-of-the-century treatise on the pain of exile” (Averill 262). The segment provided in Keene’s novella is part of the chorus and is translated as “I had to lose you to appreciate you” (Averill 263). The surrounding lyrics are as follows: “Haiti my dear, there’s no better country/I had to leave you to understand your worth/I had to lose you to be able to appreciate you/In order to truly feel all that you were to me. When you’re in the white’s country/There is a constant, despicable cold/all day you have to burn charcoal” (Averill 263). This speaks to the double displacement of the Haitian immigrant both historically and now. When Eugenie came along, she exiled Carmel from Haiti, her mother’s people, and her father’s drawings. In replying this way, Carmel suggests a form of comeuppance against Eugenie; she will only realize how badly she needed Carmel once Carmel is no longer there. I would also propose that this is a commentary on both the motherland and on the mother. Although Carmel was exiled from her country, she was also exiled from her mother while at the convent. It is only by going through the pain and the separation, both through Eugenie’s actions and Catholicism at the convent, that Carmel could discover the importance of rebellion and reclaiming a space that she considers home.

Though the novella began with a footnote to history, it ends with Carmel’s perspective on everything that occurred. She ends with this reflection: “I personally shall

never forget how that scene – so distant from where I was then that it required all my powers to concentrate – reminded me of nothing less than a forget-me-not, white with bright scars of crimson and azure, holding fast like a last memory or a reliquary of sorrows against the bluffs above a small, almost forgotten provincial island or inland colonial town" (158). In these final moments, Carmel draws a direct comparison between the two places she has inhabited. While I do not believe we can read this as a redemptive moment of Carmel finding a space of belonging – indeed, I am not convinced that Carmel is alive or telling this story from her mother's realm –she does recognize the final stronghold of herself within these places. There is no way to ever forget the traumas she went through at either place, but she can recall a final moment of beauty that refuses to give up.

In the post-Black period, Keene's commentary on movement, belonging, and identity proves insightful. Carmel's journey emphasizes the importance of individual backgrounds that make up the history of the United States to provides the unique make up of Black communities. Still, it is only when she becomes part of a community and then loses everything that she realizes how to use her individuality to contribute to the betterment of everyone in the convent. By rethinking the approach to Enlightenment, not through the white male perspective but through a combination of cultural approaches including art and the extranatural, Keene provides potential guidance into how communities can be created and combined to search for a space of belonging.

Conclusion

Both James and Keene show the importance of identifying Caribbean roots within the current conceptualization of Black identity. Averill explains this desire for connection

represents a common Haitian experience: “In the Haitian case, immigrants relate intimately not only to a host society, the society they left behind, and the Haitian diaspora, but to another transnational entity, the African diaspora, finding commonalities with this larger entity” (262). Each novel presents the importance of the individual in not only resolving the issue of the spatial orphan but in recognizing that the collective community cannot be assumed to have suffered through the same traumas. While resulting to white methods of progress, like Lilith, can result in a temporary space of survival, survival does not guarantee safety. In this way, the post-Black concerns of exactly *how* to attend to the individual without sacrificing the goals of the overall community are brought to the forefront. Keene’s novella provides a starting place for potential belonging; Black history and experience must take the forefront in recognizing the significant role that the double diaspora has placed for Afro-Caribbean peoples if there is to be hope of shifting ideals of enlightenment into recognizing alternative methods for knowledge, movement, and belonging.

CHAPTER 5

"SOMETIMES I THINK IT DONE CHANGED… IT AIN'T CHANGED NONE": SYSTEMIC VIOLENCE AND THE GENERATIONAL ORPHAN IN JESMYN WARD'S *SING, UNBURIED, SING*

To this point, I have shown how the third wave of the spatial orphan trope reflects this literary generation's response to the numerous social, cultural, and political shifts of the 21st century. Although these authors are responding to new concerns of identity and equality compared to previous waves, their spatial orphans share numerous commonalities that serve as holdovers from the second wave of the trope: young female protagonists, long distance movements, and dead ancestors. Perhaps the biggest difference between the second and third wave, however, is the lack of explicitly Southern novel. If, as I have suggested, these novels, and the revival of the spatial orphan, are a response to the post-race period, the lack of a Southern text seems to make sense; the "reversed Great Migration" suggests the desire to go back to the past instead of moving forward.[34] This leads to the question: can the spatial orphan exist in an explicitly Southern novel in the third wave? Admittedly, none of the novels I have analyzed thus far

[34] As I mentioned in my introduction, I differentiate between the terms "post-Black" and "post-race" in my project. Post-Black refers to consequences of racism and how these consequences appear in the conflict between the desire for the continuation of community healing in response to racist socio-cultural practices and the ability to be seen as an individual. Post-race, to which I refer throughout this chapter, implies a colorblind society, one that has moved beyond race, and supporters of this idea often point to Barack Obama's presidency as well as the increase in upper- and middle-class Black Americans as evidence.

have been explicitly Southern, yet I have shown that most of these authors, in some way, relate back to their ancestors through a journey that takes them through or to the South, be it physically, mentally, or extranaturally. I use explicitly Southern here to primarily refer to the novel's setting as occurring only in the South. And yet, the concept of an "explicitly Southern" text is troubling, particularly as the very concept of the South has shifted. Trudier Harris describes a conflicting feeling of "attraction and repulsion" for Black writers who fear the south but must also confront it (2). Even as "nonsouthern [B]lack writers attain a representative status," she writes, Black writers born in the South, and Black women writers in particular, uniquely "contain their fear sufficiently to show the beauty and the ugliness" of the South (15, 17). Like these Black women writers, Ward's novel tells the story of violence, a story she has experienced herself in the South and still sees the beauty through (PBS Newshour). In this way, Choi identifies *Sing, Unburied, Sing* as "part of American history and universalizing the… black story as the story of the American South" (435). As such, I would also argue that yes, a Southern novel can utilize the trope of the spatial orphan to respond to the overarching concerns regarding race in the 21st century.

Jesmyn Ward's 2017 novel, *Sing, Unburied, Sing* can be described as overtly Southern, much like Ward who has been described as one of the foremost Southern authors of the 21st century and draws frequent comparisons to Faulkner (PBS Newshour). Set entirely in Mississippi, *Sing, Unburied, Sing* tells the story of three generations of a Black family in present day through three narrative perspectives with Jojo, a thirteen-

year-old boy, being the main protagonist as he takes care of his younger sister, Kayla.[35] Jojo's mother, Leonie, had Jojo as a teenager and has been largely absent from his life to prioritize both his father and her drug habit while attempting to ignore the childhood trauma of her brother's murder. Based on these brief descriptions and the previous descriptions of third wave spatial orphans, one may assume Leonie is the spatial orphan due to her gender. After all, can the spatial orphan be male? Can cultural mobility occur within regional boundaries? This chapter aims to address these questions by performing a reading of *Sing, Unburied, Sing* to understand how the spatial orphan trope may function in the Southern novel. I suggest that Ward must subvert the reader's expectations of the spatial orphan within the Southern space to challenge the dominant post-Black narrative by showing, through Leonie, what happens when a character never finds a space of belonging and, through Jojo, the necessity of finding a space of belonging in order to maintain the balance between individual identity and community healing. In this way, Ward reminds readers: you cannot forget the South.

Choosing *Sing, Unburied, Sing* as the Southern novel to understand the spatial orphan trope may seem unconventional as Ward has at least one other novels that focus on the effects of orphaning that more aligns with the typical spatial orphan parameters. *Salvage the Bones*, published in 2011, tells the story of Esch, the pregnant fourteen-year-old whose mother died in childbirth, and her remaining family as they are forced to

[35] Bois Sauvage is the setting for numerous of Ward's novels. As a fictionalization of her hometown of DeLisle, Mississippi, Ward creates this fictionalized area across novels much in the way Faulkner created the county of Yoknapatawpha. Ward, who has stated the importance of Faulkner's own work in her development as a writer, helps to fill in the "gaps" of Faulkner's work by telling of the "unspeakable, the invisible, the excluded" (PBS Newshour; Choi 435).

confront her pregnancy concurrent with the landfall and destruction of Hurricane Katrina. While the orphan trope has appeared throughout the history of Black American literature because of the slave trade, as I have traced in my Introduction, I believe it is important to distinguish the orphan trope – one that has consistently occurred because of and in response to historical and cultural trauma – and the spatial orphan trope, which appears in wave-like response to specific cultural and historical shifts by combining both cultural mobility and engagement with the extranatural. Ward's second novel does not engage with the extranatural, but her fifth novel (and the focus of this chapter) does. As mentioned, the novel traces the relationship between three generations – Jojo, Leonie, and Pop (Leonie's father) – as Jojo's father is released from Parchman prison, the same prison Pop was imprisoned at as a young man. When Leoni takes the kids on a road trip to pick up their father, the ghost of a twelve-year-old boy who was imprisoned with Pop, attaches himself onto Jojo. Richie, the ghost, does not know how he died and convinces Jojo that he will be able to pass on if he hears Pop tell the story of his death. This plan fails, and Mam (Leonie's mother) dies during the spiritual battle that Richie evokes in jealousy. Instead of passing on, Richie joins a collective hanging tree of ghosts who are stuck on earth because of the traumatic violences left unresolved, or to use Eden Wales Freedman's term, unwitnessed. Jojo is unable to assist the ghosts but Kayla helps the spirits begin the process of passing on, and, like many other novels utilizing the spatial orphan trope, this leaves the novel with a potentially hopeful yet ultimately unresolved ending. Hence, Ward's novel provides an intriguing platform for a case-study-like analysis to explore the utility of the spatial orphan trope in novels outside of the standard gendered expectation for the character.

Gendered: Spaces and the Extranatural

Traditional gender roles still in place in the South necessitate the distinction between the female and male spatial orphan, both in the expected societal pressures the characters face and their engagement with the extranatural, and these roles relate to forced diasporic movements. According to Spillers, gender roles for Black people are inherently connected to forced diasporic movements. Initially resulting in the loss of "gender difference," American society prescribed its social, cultural, and political ideologies of gender upon the Black body (67). Hence, Black women in particular are still often expected to be the mothers, daughters, and caregivers – all positions that occur within the home space – while men are historically encouraged to be the breadwinners, taking on positions that necessitate their presence primarily outside of the home (Dib 138). These roles extend into parenthood. Black motherhood, Spiller writes, has historically been "outraged" and "denied" while simultaneously becoming "the founding term of a human and social enactment"; fatherhood, on the other hand, represents the Black body "and the captor father's mocking presence" (Spillers 80). These roles are policed, not only by political powers but by law enforcement, who use racist, violent tactics to ensure that these roles are maintained and then supported by the prison industrial complex. As Michelle Alexander notes in her 2010 manuscript, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, the prison system through the War on Drugs has become a way to create a racial underclass where black oppression can occur under legal means, means created with the intention of maintaining the racial hierarchy but under the guise of protection. As a result, "more than half of the young black men in many large American cities are currently under the control of the criminal

justice system (or saddled with criminal records)" (33). As a part of the systemic racist structure of power in the United States, these violences take away many of these male figures from the family, leaving women to hold the family line together; these same women still deal with labels such as "welfare queens" and are blamed for having a number of children without present fathers. And when women dare to step outside of their home-based roles, they are treated with equal force, as we have seen in recent years with the racialized arrest of Sandra Bland.[36]

The maintenance of these gender roles, especially in Southern spaces, forces us to reconsider not only the types of spaces female and male spatial orphans may inhabit but also how their movements and spaces of belonging conform to or challenge their culturally determined roles. In particular, Ward challenges us to consider how the spatial orphan undergoes cultural mobility both across long distances and between (gendered) interior and exterior spaces. Interior spaces, in this case, refers to spaces enclosed or associated with the home, the spaces historically described as "women's spaces." The home space, according to Sidonie Smith, serves to keep women "permanently planted, tenaciously fixed, utterly immobile" (x). Exterior spaces refer to the traditionally male spaces that often involve a combination of manual labor and mobility, such as tending to a farm or travelling on the road (Smith ix). Leonie rejects interior spaces when her presence requires her to perform her gendered roles and, as such, she prefers constant movement through exterior spaces. Jojo, on the other hand, takes on the role of caregiver

[36] This draft was written before the murder of Breonna Taylor. This shooting further reinforces the idea of "acceptable" roles and how easily the excuse of an improper household can be used as an excuse for violent policing.

but struggles to feel comfortable in either interior or exterior spaces, because danger and pain awaits him in both places.

Much like the gendered spaces, the extranatural too functions within gendered boundaries, and Ward uses these correlations between gender, space, and the extranatural to challenge the reader's expectations of the spatial orphan and emphasize the need to balance tradition with future progress. Ward embraces the extranatural through both character and plot, integrating ghosts and practices of conjure and Voodoo into the family's daily life. Mam and Pop practice conjure and Voodoo in different ways although both with protective intentions. Mam recognizes the extranatural abilities of conjure and healing as a feminine trait that involves using plants, spells, and prayers to heal. She tells Leonie that the gift of conjure in particular "runs in the blood, like silt in river water… Rises up over the water in generations. My mama ain't have it, but heard talk one time that her sister, Tante Rosalie, did. That is skips from sister to child to cousin" (Ward 40). Mam's simile to the natural elements of silt and water corresponds with the description Smith gives of women's spaces as "earth" (x). Associated with the feminine, then, Leonie should be the only one in the family to see ghosts. Jojo, who also inherits the gift, should not be able to see or speak with ghosts, and this gendered bias results in Mam forgoing his education on how to handle spirits. Pop represents a different approach to the extranatural as his ancestors taught him the importance of communication with animals and the spirit of the universe. For Pop, his idea of the spirits and power comes from his great-granddaddy. He believes "'there's spirit in everything. In the trees, in the moon, in the sun, in the animals… But you need all of them, all of that spirit in everything, to have balance… You need a balance of spirit'" (73). One way he expresses

this is in his gris gris bag, a small, portable bag full of earthly elements that correspond with the desired protections. For example, when Pop sneaks Jojo a gris gris bag that contains a feather and an animal tooth, which Jojo postulates are for aim and for protection against dogs respectively. These "African-based spiritual traditions," Mellis writes, "are not mere metaphors, but a way to protect, resist and survive in a hostile world" (403), but in gendering who can create these protections, Ward emphasizes the need to both respect the tradition of creation while recognizing the negative impact of solely following tradition.

Black people of all genders continue to experience the traumas from the racist past and present, traumas that ripple through families and communities and that cannot be ignored as part of the post-Black society. In playing with our expectations of gender by making Jojo the spatial orphan with a potentially hopeful resolution and Leonie as an orphan who could never find her space of belonging, Ward highlights the Southern spaces laden with traumas that continue and how healing can begin through finding a home: a journey necessitated by acknowledging the traumas of the ancestors to create a space where one can belong. Indeed, while Leonie's rejection of the extranatural prevents her from finding belonging, it is through the extranatural that Jojo attempts to come to terms with his space of belonging, an all-encompassing space of "home." Yet in the larger scope of the 21st century ideologies of individuality, Ward's use of the spatial orphan trope reinforces the necessity of community in ways we have not seen. Kirsten Dillender, phrasing this challenge in her ecocritical reading, writes that "black subjects must acknowledge the impact of the past on the present before they can prepare for futures unfettered by structural antiblackness" (132). Especially considering the intense

political and cultural shifts of the Trump era that re-normalized white supremacy and racism, the era in which Ward published her novel, the post-Black era (as I have defined it) needs to not only consider the effects of historical racism but recognize that it is still occurring on an individual *and* community level. Considering both the individual's healing from trauma through a localized space of belonging and the community's trauma through literary witnessing reinforces this message. Ultimately, *Sing, Unburied, Sing* reminds us that to have the hope of finding spaces of belonging in the 21st century, there needs to a balance between the individual and collective, the past and present, and the traditional and progressive.

Leonie: The Lost Orphan

Ward presents us with a character in Leonie that answers the question: What happens to a family line when a spatial orphan never finds their space of belonging? This answer lies, I argue, in Leonie's representation as a spatial orphan who chooses to settle for a person-of-belonging instead of continuing the search for a space of belonging. I create this phrase – person-of-belonging – to contrast with the concept of space of belonging, particularly within the formulation of the spatial orphan and in differentiation from normal orphaning. If a person is orphaned from a space, then finding a person with whom they feel comfortable will not resolve spatial alienation. It could, in some cases, lead to a sense of community that would help in the process of finding a space of belonging. Considering the turn to the post-race in the late 1990s, Ward uses Leonie as an example of the conditions that led to the idea of the post-race concept, particularly the conflict between individuality and community (and which communities one chooses) and how dangerous leaving the South out of the conversation can be. During this time of

realism and less overt racism in the national conversation, spatial orphans existed but lacked the cultural tools to move and find a space of belonging, especially given that the previous generation were focused on healing their own traumas, particularly those of the Civil Rights movements. This resulted in the next generation feeling doubly removed: the country, they were told on a national level, was becoming more equal, but their own experiences proved that things were getting worse. Leonie cannot find her space of belonging because she is a product of her times: unable to work through her traumas as the past generation cannot work through theirs. She has a sense of the home she wants but that home does not exist, allowing her to settle for that which can make her happy enough on the surface while attempting to ignore the depth of the personal and cultural traumas underneath. By playing off of the reader's expectations of gender – that Leonie will be a spatial orphan who finds her space of belonging through the reader's desire for a happy ending – Ward encourages the reader to examine the exclusion of spaces of belonging when ignoring the South in an attempt to move beyond race.

Leonie does not begin as a spatial orphan, but dual traumas spark this abandonment. Her parents stayed physically present, but they became emotionally absent upon the murder deemed "accidental" of their son and Leonie's older brother, Given, by a white man. Unable to face the trauma of losing a son and the lack of justice due to the racist culture of the town, both Pop and Mam disappear into their grief (Ward 53), leaving Leonie to be an invisible "walking wound" (Ward 54). Because Mam and Pop primarily ignore Leonie afterward, unable to heal from their own trauma, Given's death creates a wound that Leonie cannot heal either. Unwillingly, Leonie falls into the pattern of intergenerational trauma that stems from the history of racism in the United States,

which Choi identifies as a trauma that comes "simply by being a black woman" (441). The "aftermath" of trauma continues to be experienced and renewed "in survivor's families and cultures at large" (Wales Freedman 32). She thus becomes a spatial orphan because her house no longer feels like a safe home and her parents have all but abandoned her in their grief; her house is now empty of connection and love, meaning she needs to find a new space of belonging where she can feel safe in order to let her traumas heal.

Leonie, however, does not have the tools to search for the space of belonging that a spatial orphan needs to find a safe space, both because of her inability to engage with the extranatural and her lack of mobility. Before Given's murder, Mam attempted to teach Leonie how to participate in the extranatural through the generational practice of herbal healing, showing Leonie "a map to the world as she knew it, a world plotted orderly by divine order, spirit in everything, [so] I could navigate it" (105). Mellis suggests that in learning "African-based supernaturalism" Leonie could learn to "protect and heal" with so much power that she could help "even the most traumatized and dysfunctional communities" (403). Leonie rejects these lessons, however, because she cannot see how Mam's world shares any similarities with her own. While Mam takes comfort in the divine order, Leonie sees how small town, while not technically segregated, still follows racialized constructs that ultimately harm the Black community. So even though Mam provides her with the tools and the knowledge to understand that not only healing but seeing ghosts "rises up over the water in generations… to be seen. To be used," the lack of intergenerational communication and community creates a deep divide between mother and daughter (40). Leonie cannot see past the everyday realities

that surround her to engage with the spiritual. Living in Bois Sauvage, the small Southern town where the sheriff is the uncle of her brother's killer, further challenges Leonie's belief in the extranatural healing and prevents her from cultural mobility. After Given's death, Mam cannot communicate with his spirit nor do her curative remedies work. She is diagnosed with cancer. In a way, Leonie's rejection of her family's practices before Given's death seems justified, as though putting herself first instead of her family's beliefs better prepared her to cope with the realism of the situation. In reality, the rejection causes her to be constrained within the small town, unable to move and with no spiritual help to lead her to a space of belonging.

Leonie's attempt to find a space of belonging without the proper abilities further complicates the web of trauma not only for her but for her family. She falls in love and gets pregnant by Michael, the sheriff's son and the cousin of her brother's killer, placing her within the cycle of racialized violence of which she is now an unwilling-turned-willing participant. To this point, she wanted to be "a different kind of woman" from her mother, one who had the potential to escape from Bois Sauvage and become an independent person, separate from the confines of her small town and the spirits guides her mother believes in. Becoming a mother herself removes this possibility, and the sheer act of act of looking at her mother made her "wrestle with wanting to be a mother, with wanting to bear a baby into the world, to carry it throughout life" (Ward 158). Leonie faces two conflicts here. The first involves her personal freedom; having a baby requires her to return to the house and enter into a caregiving role in a space that still holds intense trauma. The second conflict relates to the child itself and her role as mother. Leonie understands that she will not only physically carry her child throughout her life but will

need to emotionally carry her child in a way she believes Mam did not. She does let this dissuade her, however, because she "thought of Michael, of how happy he would be, of how I would have a piece of him with me always" (158). The difficulty here lies with understanding Leonie's decision, which upon reading, seems foolish to have a baby for the sake of a man and not for the child, especially after she has experienced the rejection by her own parents. As Wales Freedman notes, however, Ward does not seek to make her characters unbelievable; she works to keep them real as her novels ultimately "bear witness to an oppressed people's strength in struggle" (170). The only source of happiness in her life has been Michael, and she chooses her happiness as a passable resolution to her trauma and the physical time spent with him as her personal space of belonging. Without healing, though, generational trauma is bound to repeat itself, and through Leonie, Ward reminds readers that the struggles of Black people are not only individual struggles to heal but institutional, generational, and unhealed traumas that need to be confronted as both an individual and community. Without the skills or community to approach this healing, Leonie chooses personal survival in making Michael her person-of-belonging.

Ward troubles this idea of people-of-belonging, however. Although Michael fills the hole left by the reciprocal rejection between Leonie and her parents, I suggest that "wherever Michael is" does not qualify as a space of belonging because the connection requires physical closeness that evokes an amnesia-like quality to her trauma. In other words, he does not guide her to a safe space where she can work to heal and confront her past. Rather, his presence allows Leonie to enter into a childlike state of regression to a time before her most intense trauma. In this childlike state, Leonie wants to feel love and

affection. More importantly, she wants to be visible. She describes sex, the closest physical connection people can have, as "Losing language, losing words. Losing myself in that feeling, that feeling of being wanted and needed and touched and cradled" (149). Ward's language here mimics the desires of a small child, implying a form of age regression that Leonie seeks in order to reach a safe, innocent mindset. This also keeps Leonie from having to engage with the caretaker role herself, allowing her to feel safe outside of the home and away from the expectations of the community of mothers and ancestors that her own mother attempted to introduce her to. Her narration at a separate moment with Michael reinforces this desire to lack not only her role as caretaker for her children but caretaker of her own body. Leonie thinks, "I could lie like this forever… *my kids silenced, not even there,* his fingers on my arm drawing circles and lines that I decipher, him writing his name on me, claiming me… I'm already home" (153; emphasis mine). Leonie sees home as a space where she does not exist as her own person but rather as Michael's property where even her children are not there. She accepts his decision to "claim" or own her by evoking language that resonates with the branding of enslaved people, drawing problematic connections between her attempt to deal with immediate individual trauma while ignoring, or perhaps believing herself to be past, the cultural trauma of slavery even as she engages in updated practices of it. Moreover, without language in her childlike state and with Michael placing his own language and name onto her, she cannot tell the story of her trauma, making her regression both a form of coping and an avoidance mechanism for healing.[37] In essence, Leonie allows herself to become

[37] We might see a similar comparison with Cora from *The Underground Railroad* who identifies more with the young children on the plantation than she does with the adult women because of their unifying status as "strays."

part of the historically silenced collective who had violence done to them, because healing involves not only healing individual trauma but confronting the idea that a space of belonging does not exist without pain. Her choice to forget parallels what Morrison refers to as "national amnesia" (Angelo and Morrison). By choosing to not remember the horrors of racism, such as slavery, Jim Crow, segregation, and the prison industrial complex, America can move into a post-race time of false collective bliss.

Losing the physical connection immediately returns her to the feeling of being orphaned, unlike a space of belonging in which the spatial orphan can stay with the potential to heal and can often only reach by first overcoming the trauma that orphaned them to begin with. Without this, Leonie searches for another escape and her connection with Michael helps her find work at a bar in the "upcountry, where Michael and his parents are from" (32). This south to north movement echoes a smaller version of the Great Migration, but moving to the North does not help her find a safe space by virtue of mobility itself. Much like Lila Mae in Chapter Two, who throws herself into her work to avoid coping with her traumas, Leonie's northern movement provides her with work and keeps her out of the traditionally gendered role of homemaker and caretaker. Unlike Lila Mae, Leonie turns to drugs – methamphetamine specifically – to create an even greater mental distance from her life. Colloquially, methamphetamine can be referred to as speed, giving Leonie a chance experiences an internalized form of constant movement as well as a metaphorical one. Speed, as an addictive substance, keeps Leonie in this state, making it impossible for her to find a space of belonging.

On the other hand, this relaxed state while high does allow her to remember her trauma without reverting to a childlike state without being forced to immediately confront

it, thereby providing her access to the gifts she has worked to repress and a potential way to find a home through a connection with the extranatural. It is while high with her white co-worker that Given appears as a ghost and acts "like he wanted to support me. Like he could be flesh and blood. Like he could grab my hand and lead me out of there. Like we could go *home*" (36, emphasis mine). Although Choi suggests that Given is a drug-based hallucination, I propose that the relaxed state of mind in the midst of a desperate situation of drug use and abandonment allows the family gift to finally arise (443). As Mam told Leonie, ghosts and the gift to see them needs "to be seen. To be used" (40). Ghosts are not meant to be seen without a message. There is a purpose for seeing and the trauma must be resolved to accomplish the purpose of the gift. Indeed, Given's haunting could be considered a trauma response. According to Kathleen Brogan, we can understand hauntings as a form of cultural memory often caused by trauma. Brogan identifies the concept of pathologies of memory to help explain how an individual's ghost and trauma become communal, explaining "[t]raumatized individuals suffer from an unlikely combination of amnesia and abnormally precise (and usually automatic) recall" (6). Haunting, then, is "the return of a past that can neither be properly remembered nor entirely forgotten" (Brogan 63). Given appears in a lifelike form, just as Leonie remembers him, because this is the moment when she both needs him most and has finally gone beyond amnesia and into recall. Given's appearance serves as an attempt to resolve her trauma by guiding her as much as possible through the map her own mother could not impress upon her, a map that provides the knowledge of how access the ancestors, how to be the parent that their parents stopped being, and how to go home.

If Leonie only has access to Given while high, his ghostly encouragement to confront her trauma as a method of healing by returning home also means she will lose him while sober. Indeed, it is while both being sober and without Michael on a journey North to the prison that Leonie comes the closest to starting her path to a space of belonging. She exclaims, "'I'm tired of this shit'… I don't know why I say it. Maybe because I'm tired of driving, tired of the road stretching before me endlessly, Michael always at the opposite end of it, no matter how far I go, how far I drive" (98). At this one moment of clarity, Leonie acknowledges that her actions to this point have all led her further away from the possibility of belonging. She continues to travel, following Michael wherever he goes in an attempt to chase the high of forgetting her traumas and feeling safe, yet these in-between times and spaces leave her feeling equally abandoned by her boyfriend as she did with her parents. At this same moment, she also desires a new chance at being a caretaker for her daughter and son, where Kayla's "little tan body sought mine, always sought mine, our hearts separated by the thin cages of our ribs, exhaling and inhaling, our blood in sync," just like her mother's description of the female line. Jojo, however, exposes her failures by reminding Leonie that she must admit to and confront her past trauma and heal them before she can be a better mother and find her space of belonging. He focuses "all his attention on [Kayla's] body in his arms," while Leonie's "attention is everywhere" (98). Jojo, in this case, has become a better parent than her, seemingly more able to cope with the traumas of his life than she is with hers. The exhaustion of following Michael, chasing the high of both drugs and attention and being in a state of constant movement instead of a singular space of belonging, becomes

worth it when compared to the pain of confronting not only her individual traumas but the familial and collective traumas that come from being Black in the South.

By this point, Leonie has been provided some tools to lead her to a potential space of belonging if she chose to confront her traumas along the way by connecting with her ancestry. And Ward uses gender to create the expectation for readers that, much like the other spatial orphans who have found a way to start coping with their traumas and looking for a space of belonging, Leonie will find a way to embrace her role as a woman: a caregiver, a mother, and a daughter. Black women, after all, have been tasked historically with these roles of caregiving and then used as a scapegoat when something goes wrong. The final step in Leonie's path to resume this role would be rejoining her mother's ancestral line through successfully utilizing the extranatural. This should allow to her to find a space of belonging. However, Mam's recognition to Leonie that "'You my baby'" comes only as Mam asks Leonie to perform an emotional labor that adds even more trauma (216). Mam asks Leonie to help her die. Told from Leonie's perspective that denies the reader access to Jojo's monologue, Richie attempts to force Mam to follow him as a spirit because he wants a mother after seeing Pop as a betrayed father. The chant that everyone in the room keeps repeating is "Not. Your. Mother" (266). "'Come with me, Mama,' he says. 'Come on.'… 'Not my boy,' she says" (266). Black women are often – and unfairly - expected to be the source of strength for the community, a mother for everyone. Seeing her mother giving this last bit of strength and fighting for her own way to die reduces Leonie to a childlike state that reaches to the heart of her original trauma; she desires to create a ritual that will allow her mother to die in Given's graces as opposed to Richie's, following her mother's wishes but in a stressful and traumatic

circumstance: "'Mama,' I choke, and it's as weak and wanting as a baby's. 'Mommy.' My crying and Mama's entreaties and Michaela's wailing and Given's shouting fill the room like a flood, and it must have been as loud outside as it is in here, because Jojo runs in to stand at my elbow and Pop's at the door" (267). While Leonie is in charge of the ritual, she almost makes the mistake of completing it while Richie is still pulling at Mam's spirit. Jojo not only has to attempt to protect Mam from Richie, but also has to stop Leonie from performing the ritual telling her things like "You don't know. You don't see" (268). It is up to Jojo, with the assistance of Given, to clear Richie from the room by reminding him "Ain't no more stories for you here. Nobody owe you nothing here'" (268). With these words, Given becomes fully realized, Richie leaves, and Leonie completes the ritual. Jojo has now helped to disentangle both of his grandparents from their traumas by allowing Pop to tell his story, releasing his guilt, and by helping Mam be reunited with Given. Yet it has taken the whole family – a community of seers and spirits – to help Mam pass. Unfortunately, though, there are some traumas that cannot be overcome.

While this promotes the ability for Mam to move on by witnessing her trauma, choosing to engage in the extranatural only adds to the rift between her and Jojo. No matter how much she wants to, Leonie cannot take on all of the pain that comes with being a Black woman. When given the choice between confronting generations worth of cultural trauma and her individual ability to survive, Leonie chooses individual survival. The final word we hear from Leonie is this conversation with Michael: "'I can't,' I say, and there are so many other words behind that. *I can't be a mother right now. I can't be a daughter. I can't remember. I can't see. I can't breathe*. And he hears them, because he

rolls forward and stands with me, picks me up, and carries me off the porch to the car" (274). In this powerful statement, we immediately recall the last words of Eric Garner, the Black man killed by New York City police in 2014 while telling them "I can't breathe." In a further show that we are indeed not in a post-race society, these words have been uttered once again by George Floyd. This weight of cultural trauma is too much for Leonie to bear when she does not have the support of her family. Michael allows Leonie to turn back into the child she was when they met: he carries her, he comforts her, and he removes her from the trauma of her own childhood and her failed motherhood.

By viewing Leonie as a spatial orphan who never finds that space of belonging, Ward reveals the importance of remembering ancestral history amidst the desire to declare racial equality, particularly in the Southern spaces. The expectation that Leonie will be able to find a space of belonging because of her gender further reminds us that even as many claim the society to be post-race, it is not post-racialized gender. Even if the present feels okay – such as Leonie's moments with Michael – the intergenerational traumas of racism prevent equality and a truly post-race society from occurring. The impact of these traumas, when left ignored, create the spatial orphan without a space of belonging. Ward creates the need for remembering the past in order to improve the future by keeping families whole and creating spaces of belonging for all Black Americans.

Jojo: The Male Orphan

Swapping the gendered expectations of Leonie and Jojo in their roles as spatial orphans challenges the reader to not only can reconsider cultural mobility through a gendered lens but to consider who society still expects to do the work of equality – and what work remains invisible – in 21st American society. I suggest that Ward imbues Jojo

with many of the typical characteristics and expectations associated with Black women while subjecting him to the cultural expectations of masculinity. Indeed, Mellis notes that Jojo is a character of duality: "two worlds: black and white, impoverished and affluent, imprisoned and free, leaving and remaining home" (403). I add interior and exterior to this list, as he must find out how to bring these two spaces together in order to identify a space of belonging. By reading Jojo through the spatial orphan trope and the gendered expectations associated with space and movement in the novel, then, we glean greater insight into the (lack of) accessible spaces of belonging for black men in America and recognize the systemic violence that has and continues to create this orphaning. Ward reminds us that Blackness and its diasporic history does exist, and that in some spaces, particularly Southern spaces, the individual alone is not powerful enough to overcome all trauma. There must be a blend of the individual and the collective for there to be any hope of finding a space of belonging.

The intergenerational aspect of unresolved Black trauma creates an environment that subjects Jojo to being a spatial orphan upon his birth. As I have explained, Leonie's own experiences prevent her from being a good and active parent, propagating the cycle of trauma. Although Jojo has almost always recognized Leonie's abandonment, Mam and Pop supported him emotionally and allowing their home to be his space of belonging. The first time they leave him with Leonie, however, she and Michael have a fight and leave him home alone. Jojo becomes a spatial orphan at this point because "they weren't there" (12). He questions how long they have been gone and "how soon I could expect them to come back so I could go inside the house" (15). Without any adults around, Jojo feels excluded from the house that always represented his space of care and belonging

from Mam and Pop. Nothing physically prevents Jojo from going inside, except his lack of family. This moment also further categorizes his home as a space of failed caregiving. Mam and Pop were gone because she had an appointment for cancer treatment, and Jojo, who works to take care of her, sees this as an additional failure. For Jojo, the inside space, traditionally associated when feminine gender roles and associated with the feminine for this novel – even more so a space associated with trauma – cannot no longer be associated with his space of safe belonging.

External spaces are also marked with death, but considering these external spaces are typically associated with masculinity, Jojo believes he needs to cope with these deaths. The novel begins with Jojo's attempt to showcase his manhood and maturity by helping Pop kill a goat for his 13th birthday, and he is concerned about what Pop will think of his reaction to violence: "I don't want him to read my slowness as fear, as weakness, as me not being old enough to look at death like a man should, so I grip and yank" (5). Ultimately, Jojo vomits from this experience, an abject response to the violence and his ability to empathize and understand the goat's experience through the extranatural, traits that can be considered more feminine. Pop responds by suggesting Jojo go inside because he "'Thought I heard the baby cry'" (6). Pop's response is to both protect Jojo by mobilizing Jojo into his protective role while still leaving Jojo's desire for masculinity intact. Yet Pop just realizes the dangers that await Jojo when he grows up. In addition to Pop's own prison sentence by virtue of being outside, Given chose to go outside to hunt and was murdered. Instead, Pop wants to preserve Jojo's childlike nature. Unfortunately, Pop doesn't realize that by sending Jojo in to look after Kayla, he is sending him *inside* to grow up, believing, in a way, that real world dangers only exist on

the outside and ignoring potential trauma on the inside. Yet, the inside maintains a space of caretaking that Jojo only enters for his sister and grandmother as their caretakers, neither roles that he, as a child, should need to hold.

Pop's protective nature in keeping Jojo alive results in Jojo being unprepared to face the racist practices that exist for Black people and Black men in particular, but his protectiveness leaves Jojo unable to search for his space of belonging. While Leonie rejected the map that Mam attempted to provide her, Pop prevents Jojo from ever accessing the map. Hence, as Leonie forces Jojo further away from his residence in his first trip north to take Michael out of prison, the outside spaces become more treacherous. Jojo does not understand how to navigate through these spaces both because Pop (and his absent mother) did not teach him and because he does not want to leave in the first place. As such, Jojo can only contrast his family's experiences, particularly how they define "life" with the version of life in northern Mississippi. His version, the version learned from and embraced by Pop's, is symbolized in the gris-gris bag, full of a feather, a rock, a tooth, and a note. This bag meant for protection of their lives is contrasted with the billboard he sees. In this billboard, "a picture of a new baby in the womb: a red-yellow tadpole, skin and blood so thing the light shines through it like a gummy candy. *Protect Life*, the sign says" (72). This sign showcases two different aspects of the outside world that causes Jojo to say, "I think I know what my friends mean when they talk about north Mississippi" (72). The sign firstly represents the personal battle in Jojo's life. Leonie made the choice to protect his life by having him, yet her purpose was to keep her relationship intact. Leonie also believes she can protect her own life, not through the extranatural, but by returning to her own childlike state. On a larger scale, the sign

represents who the state of Mississippi, and by extension the country, see as worth of protecting. The state views an unborn fetus, one so small that Jojo sees it as a tadpole, with as much importance as a gummy candy. For Jojo, this sign makes little sense. A gummy candy, like a singular tadpole, might be considered small and insignificant. The state places a high emphasis on a fetus before it is born and shows no race… yet. Pop tells stories of the violence of Parchman, of the black lives that never mattered to state. The contrast between "Protecting Life" and the impersonal nature of the north with the personalized protection bag from Pop shows what life really matters to whom and where. Birth is important. Lives, themselves, are not. The South to North movement, then, one so typically associated with the spatial orphan's journey to finding their space of belonging, brings Jojo further away from potential safety, showcasing a different expectation for the spaces of belonging within the Southern novel.

As one of the hallmarks for the trope of the spatial orphan that I theorize in the introduction, the path to finding a space of belonging follows the spatial orphan's entrenchment within and understanding of the extranatural. While Jojo has learned of gendered extranatural aspects from Pop and Mam and has been able to access minor extranatural aspects through hearing animals speak, his first encounter with a spirit, what I consider a major extranatural experience, does not occur until he is at the further possible place from any place he could belong: Parchman Prison. Giving some of the history of the Parchman, Alexander writes that "the convict population grew ten times faster than the general population… as they are today, the prisoners were disproportionately black" (48). Choi provides additional information on Parchman, describing that "Parchman Farm is not in the modern structure of state prisons. Rather,

this is a transmuted, 'reformed' penal system modeled after the Southern plantations, and a suspended version of convict leasing on a designated site" (439). I would suggest that it is because Jojo moves so far from his space of belonging that this is the moment where he encounters a ghost for the first time; he needs someone to help guide him back to Pop and Mam. Jojo is the third male in his family line to enter Parchman: his black grandfather, his white father, and now himself. While he is not imprisoned, he does help a ghost, Richie, to escape the grounds. Jojo has heard about Richie in Pop's stories from Pop's time at Parchman. Using Avery Gordon's explanation that "specters or ghosts appear when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view," we can see how both Jojo and Ritchie find each other (xvi). Jojo is no longer under Pop's protective wing, and Ritchie finally recognizes someone who can see him. Unbeknownst to Jojo, Richie and he, while differentiated by the violence done to them, share similar journeys that keep them from belonging. Much like Jojo, Richie sees the return to Pop as a journey home (131). Richie thinks: "[River] was my heart. Him my big brother. Him, my father" (135). Both young boys recognize the importance of the paternal line as a source of love and caregiving, but it also the disruption to and violence against this line that has impacted the boys' ability to fit into their world.

As a form of a spatial orphan himself, Richie serves as the educator that Pop cannot be because of the pain of his own trauma and his desire to protect Jojo from that pain. Although he is not a direct ancestor, Richie is a cultural ancestor who helps guide Jojo back to a space of belonging through "an attempt to recover and make social use of a poorly documented, partially erased cultural history" (Brogan 92). One concept Richie

educates Jojo on is home, since Jojo has felt like he belongs in either internal or external spaces with Pop and Mam. In particular, Richie breaks down the difference between internal and external spaces, as he narrates that home is not about the physical house. Rather, "Home is about the earth. Whether the earth open up to you. Whether it pull you so close the space between you and it melt and y'all one and it beats like your heart" (182-83). We see parallels here between Richie's understanding on home and both Mam's and Pop's explanations of the extranatural; both are inherently connected with the earth. In this description, I see Ward explaining what a space of belonging should be– it is not the house or the building, but it is the place where the character joins their ancestor. Home, or a space of belonging, is a timeless concept of unity, and Richie believes he can find his space of belonging in the afterlife by hearing the story of his death. To no longer be a spatial orphan while alive, Jojo needs to find a space where he belongs, a combination between the internal and external spaces that he has never fit in and that the world may not allow.

Intergenerational traumas prevent the family from healing, but this is in part because the source of the family's traumas have not been solved either. Racist police practices continue to invade the Black male spaces, looking to arrest without warrant based on racist stereotypes and practices that serve to maintain a cultural hierarchy of white supremacy. As Jojo's experienced ancestral guide, Richie warns Jojo of what will happen when Leonie is pulled over by a policeman. Richie warns Jojo "'They going to chain you'" (169). Dib calls Richie's warning a "carceral anxiety," a holdover from Richie's own experiences at Parchman that represents a greater societal anxiety for Black people in general (146). Although Jojo rejects Richie's warning at first, reaching for his

own personal feeling of safety through the gris-gris bag Pop sent, this incident helps Jojo to understand that while things may appear different than Pop and Richie's time at Parchman, little has changed. Richie, in disappointment, states "'Sometimes I think [the word] done changed. And then I sleep and wake up, and it ain't changed none'" (Ward 171). In presenting an incident that could be set in either generation, Ward reminds us of the progress that has yet to be made even with a Black president. There is a false sense of security in believing the world has changed but incidents like these remind us of the systemic nature of police violence and racism.

Ward provides readers with a small sense of hope through the appearance of Given and his ability to communicate with Kayla. Richie is paralyzed by this carceral anxiety but Given, another victim of racism, acts as a protector. Leonie sees Given and "it looks as if [Kayla] sees him, as if he can actually touch her, because she goes rigid all at once, and then a golden toss of vomit erupts… Phantom Given claps silently, and the officer freezes" (165-66). This scene parallels Jojo's vomiting after killing the goat. Twinning these scenes of violence suggests that the police violence could have been much worse, yet the entire family's ability to interact with the extranatural Given potentially saves Jojo's life. This restores the small hope that home can be found where family comes together to help one another survive and heal but only by overcoming the racist system that prevents a space of belonging from existing.

The journey north to Parchman makes clear that Jojo's space of belonging is more likely to be at his house, but the death, trauma, and hopelessness in both interior and exterior spaces create hurdles he must first overcome. Jojo must face two different challenges with the help and hinderance of his extranatural abilities in order to locate a

potential safe space. Paralleling his story with Richie's, Jojo must first help bring the trauma of Parchman to light. Brogan's distinctions of memories are helpful here. Traumatic memory occurs when the conditions of the experience are recreated. Narrative memory, on the other hand, is an act of recreation that the listener often prompts through questions (Brogan 6-7). Pop experiences narrative memory throughout the novel as he revises his memories in telling the stories of Parchman to Jojo. While these revisions are necessary to survive by helping Pop to cope with his trauma, they prevent Pop, Richie, and Jojo from collectively healing. In his attempt to help Richie, however, Jojo forces Pop to confront this past in a form of what I am call cultural rememory.[38] While storytelling does allow Jojo a small insight into his grandfather's past, his grandfather's refusal to complete the story allows for the dominant history to continue.

Richie's ghost forces Jojo into a form of cultural rememory, a version of the past that can overcome Pop's revisions and that forces Jojo to confront the larger trauma of violence against black families in the south. In an attempt to free Richie from his earthly bindings, Jojo confronts Pop by pointing out that he never tells the end of Richie's story. It is then that Pop reveals the truth: He killed Richie to save him from a much worser fate. This release returns Pop to the traumatic moment when he was a child, and in a reversal of roles, Jojo holds him "like I hold Kayla." Jojo becomes the protector, and the family can start to start to heal. Both "bow together as Richie goes darker and darker,

[38] I use the term cultural rememory here as a combination of both Leila Kamali's concept of the cultural memory of Africa and Toni Morrison's concept of rememory from *Beloved*. Kamali writes that "that "the cultural memory [of Africa] in African American novels espouses the values and aesthetics of community life and communal storytelling" (6). In combining this with rememory, however, I propose that Jojo recognizes the memory of his America-based ancestors. He goes through the re-memory process of their lives, deaths, and traumas.

until he's a black hole in the middle of the yard, like he done sucked all the light and darkness over them miles, over them years, into him, until he's burning black, and then he isn't" (Ward 222). This appears to allow the healing process to begin for Pop by directly confronting his trauma through verbalization. However, as Wales Freedman explicates, "confronting trauma may be the best way to heal," but there is no way to "avoid injury" while trying to heal (177). Narratively, Pop is no longer revising to make himself better and the memory has become actualized. Richie, however, absorbs their trauma, all of their happiness and their potential for healing, and he burns black with it as he is "psychically shattered" (Wales Freedman 177). Drawing associations to the burned bodies of Parchman, ghost-Richie undergoes the same trauma he dealt with in life, further illuminating that healing one individual's traumatic incident does not resolve the collective trauma, especially as the sources of that trauma continue to act on Black bodies.

The historical trauma of systemic racism in the United States has caused generations of ancestors to be earth-bound, unable to heal and move on while they too have no space of belonging. The extranatural abilities the family possesses, an ancestral practice and inheritance itself, presents a way to connect with the past in order to learn, cope, and potentially heal. Unable to understand death and spirits, even as he has been able to contact them, Jojo turns to Mam, who tells him "I think that [being a ghost] only happens when the dying's bad. Violent" (236). In other words, people become ghosts because they have experienced something so traumatic and violent that they leave a mark

upon the earth, much like Beloved in Morrison's novel.[39] Mam attempts to soothe Jojo by explaining that "I'll be on the other side of the door. With everybody else that's gone before. Your uncle Given, my mama and daddy, Pop's mama and daddy… We all here at once. My mama and daddy and they mamas and daddies... My son.'" (236). Past, present, and future are all the same without a change in the system. Choi considers this as Mam's "atemporal [and] diachronic space of remembrance" which contrasts with Pop and Richie's views of the violence at Parchman (Choi 446). Yet, Mam suggests there is something beyond this for those who die peacefully, a list in which she includes her son not once, but twice. Reflecting her own traumas, Mam never recovered from losing Given and looks forward to seeing him again. Unfortunately, the reader knows what Mam does not. Given, too, walks the earth in a protective mode, unable to move on from the violences done to him and reassuring that the trauma that befell him does not happen to his sister or niece or nephew. Mam relies on Given's spirit being able to move on for her own hopes of a peaceful death, one where she is reunited with him, suggesting that her life has been unfulfilled as she only hopes to see him again. This obsession with her son's death, a murder that came too early and was covered up by Jojo's other grandfather, prevented her from being Leonie's mother just as cancer prevented her from being Jojo's grandmother. The hope for a space of belonging, then, comes from finding a way to resolve even more traumas while recognizing the difficult, draining work that can haunt someone for a lifetime.

[39] Numerous scholars have analyzed comparisons between *Beloved* and Ward's Mississippi novels, including Wales Freedman, Leader-Picone, and Choi.

Mam's death, however, irreparably damages Jojo's ability to find a space of belonging within his own house. For Jojo, who always saw Leonie as someone who kills things, Mam's death is not a mercy but a murder, and this changes the interior space of caregiving into a confirmed space of death. Simultaneously, Jojo relates to Leonie by feeling the physical embodiment of trauma – "An itching in my hands. A kicking in my feet. A fluttering in the middle of my chest" – that makes him want to flee the house now that he no longer belongs there (279). He finally understands why his family wanders with almost no one choosing to stay inside the house. Leonie runs away with a person who temporarily stops trauma from following her. Stag, his great-uncle, wanders the streets in search of a space where he can belong without the oppression. Even Pop lays in his bedroom at night and speaks the name of his dead wife over and over. Ward showcases the effects of historical and cultural trauma on one family, and the access they have to the extranatural, while allowing them the chance to protect each other on the surface, also forces a division that keeps everyone isolated, each searching for a space and a community where they can belong.

A Tree of Spirits

Sing, Unburied, Sing tells Jojo's coming of age story as he becomes a Black man in America. At the age of 14, he witnesses the intergenerational traumas of police brutality, drug overdoses, and Mam's death, while learning how these traumas have impacted his ancestors to an even greater extent. This is also why Jojo does not find a space of belonging even once Mam has moved on and the family has had the opportunity to experience communal healing. Because Jojo and Richie parallel each other, kindred spirits of a sort, their journeys also inform us of *why* Jojo cannot locate his space of

belonging inside. He turns to the outdoors where he rediscovers Richie who has been unable to move on. Richie believed that hearing the story of his death would allow him to move on from his traumatic life and find his way home, and yet, spirits who remain on earth when their deaths are so horrific that they cannot move on. Hearing his own death does not resolve the betrayal that Richie feels over being killed by the man he saw as a brother and father, just as helping Mam and Pop move on does not heal Jojo's pain of being betrayed by Leonie and Michael. Dillender further describes this as Ward's denying Richie "a neat denouement, implying that there is no way to meaningfully offset his stolen life" (144). Richie represents one person who had his life cut too short by systemic violence, but he once more guides Jojo, this time to a tree full of spirits who are also unable to move on. The tree resembles a hanging tree with branches "full with ghosts, two or three, all the way up to the top... There are women and men and boys and girls. Some of them near to babies. They crouch, looking at me. Black and brown and the closest near baby, smoke white. None of them reveals their deaths, but I see it in their eyes, their great black eyes" (284). These are the people Mam told Jojo about, those who suffered deaths so violent and without any chance to heal that they are permanently stuck in an in-between space of death, witnessing their pain and rewitnessing the cycle of violence that continues.

The tree as a symbol has a dual meaning, relating both to the history of Black violence as well as the literalization of a family tree, much like the tree on Sethe's back in *Beloved*, as a visualization of trauma but also a symbol that signifies the will to survive in the South amidst historical violence. With so many Black bodies on its branches, the tree forces the reader to recall lynchings that have been used not only as a way of murdering

Black people, often in the name of justice, but as a warning to others. If Richie alone represents the inability to offset his life in a meaningful way, the tree full of ghosts becomes a striking, haunting symbol of system violence against Black people and Black communities. The tree simultaneously represents ancestry, each limb showcasing generations of black families whose roots run deep in America from slavery to what Alexander called the New Jim Crow. In speaking their stories of trauma – rape, starvation, hanging, eye gouging, drowning – Jojo recognizes the ghosts are transhistorical through their clothing, representing historical and cultural trauma from generations of ancestors. As the sun sets, it makes "scarlet plumage of the clothes they wear: rags and breeches, Tshirts and tignons, fedoras and hoodies" (285). In seeing the tree full of ghosts, Jojo reconstructs what bell hooks calls "an archaeology of memory [that] makes return possible" (343). The tree turns into a tree of blood, reflecting the violence of their deaths. And while these clothing choices refer to different decades, the final pairing – fedoras and hoodies – reference Emmett Till and Trayvon Martin, both victims of white violence against black teenagers.[40] These are all spatial orphans who have been prevented from discovering a space of belonging and, as such, represent what Dib calls "a collective history of immobility" (140). Although he could help Mam and Pop, Jojo has already been impacted by the systemic violence as a black boy turned man in Mississippi, and he is caught somewhere in between: able to access to extranatural but feeling alone in his ability to help. After all, as Choi reminds us, "Living or dead, black males remain spectral as their frustrated black bodies are endlessly rejected and

[40] Emmett Till is often pictured wearing a grey fedora, while Trayvon Martin's black hoodie had become one of the symbols of the Black Lives Matter movement.

disembodied" (434). In being a figurative ghost, like Richie and the others on the tree, the external space also loses its potential to be a space of belonging.

Summarily, Jojo's movements using the extranatural have only served to exclude him from all spaces regardless of gender because he is overwhelmed with the pressures of the cultural traumas that prevent him from recovering to his individual struggles. Hence, Kayla's role becomes invaluable a child who does not yet realize she will be affected by racism but with the positive caregiver in Jojo, who has worked to make sure that Kayla will not have to suffer from the same orphaning he did. Kayla also represents an amalgamation of every one of her ancestors – including Michael – and, as such, has the ability to communicate with the spirits in the tree. I quote this passage at length:

> 'Go home,' she says. The ghosts shudder, but they do not leave. They sway with open mouths again. Kayla raises one arm in the air, palm up, like she's trying to soothe Casper, but the ghosts don't still, don't rise, don't ascend and disappear. They stay. So Kayla begins to sing, a song of mismatched, half-garbled words, nothing that I can understand. Only the melody, which is low but as loud as the swish and sway of the trees, that cuts their whispering but twines with it at the same time. And the ghosts open their mouths wider and their faces fold at the edges so they look like they're crying, but they can't. And Kayla sings louder. She waves her hand in the air as she sings, and I know it, know the movement, know it's how Leonie rubbed my back, rubbed Kayla's back, when we were frightened of the world. Kayla sings, and the multitude of ghosts lean forward, nodding. They smile with something like relief, something like remembrance, something like ease. *Yes*… Kayla hums over my shoulder, says 'Shhh' like I am

> the baby and she is the big brother, says 'Shhh' like she remembers the sound of the water in Leonie's womb, the sound of all the water, and now she sings it. *Home*, they say. *Home.* (285)

Kayla is one individual, but she begins to heal the trauma of the community through a form of call and response, encouraging them to speak as she provides them a way to start to pass on. Her songs and movements serve as a way to help heal their trauma, particularly through movements that recall a connection to not only their mothers – such as Leonie – but also anyone who gave them care and comfort (Wales Freedman 179). Wales Freedman places this call and response in conversation with Morrison, suggesting that "the ghosts must sing their agony together. They must meet Baby Suggs, holy in the Clearing… until they hurt and haunt no more" (178). Using Christina Sharpe's framework from *In The Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Dillender identifies Kayla's work as a medium here as a form of "wake work" that "acknowledges the social, political, and economic forces that destabilize black existence" (144).[41] Kayla sends the spirits from the hanging tree, reminding them of their mothers who they may have never met, back into the water where many of their ancestors also died, allowing them to move on home. The fact that Kayla must open a home space for these spirits by allowing them to go through the water and connect with their ancestors in a healing ritual fully implies the deep trauma that the slave trade caused. Her healing must take them all the way back to this oceanic space. The intense trauma from their lives caused by a lack of closure and sudden, violent death prevented them from healing and joining their ancestors, which, in

[41] We might compare Kayla's "wake work" here to that of Amy Denver in *Beloved*, who performs a type of wake work by shifting the perspective of Sethe's lashes into the beautiful image of a tree, or as that of Baby Suggs.

turn denied them a chance at a home. In using her extranatural abilities – a combination of the abilities of her family and healed home – Kayla ensures that these spirits can have the same privilege: to overcome their trauma.

Conclusion

In many ways, *Sing, Unburied, Sing* helps us to understand Ward's own migration home to Mississippi, where she, "decades later and with the migratory experiences of the previous generation as their guides, [returned] to reckon with, redefine, and write from within the region in an attempt to make it a place of liberation rather than confinement" (Williams 119). Mellis writes that home, for Ward, invokes "a sense of rest and comfort facilitated by ancestral knowledge and a sense of community" (403). I would suggest, however, that home needs to go beyond rest or comfort. Kayla helps provide this for Jojo. While she cannot give him the same freedom she experiences, they become a healing community with the potential to their extranatural abilities to find a space of belonging, not only for themselves but for others. A sense of community is an important step, but it necessitates a feeling of belonging to that community; this serves an even greater conflict when, like Leonie, the character also wants to maintain their individuality. To resolve being a spatial orphan, a character needs to not only sense community but be a part of it. The spirits in the tree are a community, but it is not until Kayla comes to send them home that they are able to find their place in the ocean with their ancestors to belong. Hence, the novel may end here, but Jojo does not clearly have a resolved space of belonging. We might consider all of Jojo's travels through hooks' statement that Black people undergo a "journey to a place we can never call home even as we reinhabit it to make sense of present locations" (343). We ultimately hope, however, that the community he has

recognized will help resolving the balance between the interior and exterior spaces and eventually lead to "home."

Ward's reversal of gendered expectations throughout the novel shows both the pressures placed on Black women and men to perform certain roles associated with home and mobility. Leonie fails as a spatial orphan by using traditionally masculine spaces of travel to reject her cultural inheritance and relies on escapism to cope. In considering Jojo as a male spatial orphan, by recognizing his struggles to find a space of belonging through his ancestral connections and struggling to heal everyone in all spaces, Ward makes clear why the spatial orphan has reemerged in literature: to show that it should not need to exist in the first place. But, in acknowledging and remembering the cultural and historical trauma, refusing to render the trauma invisible, Ward recognizes the need to both acknowledge the individual within the collective in order to heal while reinforcing the idea that the United States is not a post-race society until Black people have a space of belonging.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

When I was first introduced to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* as a high school senior, I vividly recall being equally entranced and frustrated. I wanted definitive answers. Was Beloved real or a ghost? What really happened to Beloved after she disappeared? Will Sethe and Paul D. stay together? I faced questions similar to these as I read *Paradise* in an undergraduate class – Who is the white woman? Are the convent girls ghosts or alive? It wasn't until my first time reading *Tar Baby* in my first year of graduate school that I developed an insight into these questions that Morrison's work evoked. In *Tar Baby*, Jadine's storyline ends in a 707 airplane above the Isle des Chevaliers and on her way to Orly, France. Whilst in the air, she considers her future plans to "Let loose the dogs, tangle with the woman in yellow – with her and with all the night women who had *looked* at her… No more dreams of safety, no more… A grown woman did not need safety or its dreams. She was the safety she had longed for" (*Tar Baby* 290). Jadine recognizes that she cannot belong anywhere, and any space in which she lives will be filled with battles to exist. And still, Morrison does not reassure us of Jadine's future; ending in a liminal space refuses the reader closure. This ending prompted an idea: we cannot know the endings these characters face because they do not exist in an environment where the world allows them to belong. Jadine, I realized, was a spatial orphan, and it was this realization that sparked this project.

Like Jadine's ending, the texts I have addressed throughout this project almost all lack a sense of definitiveness. Some, like Whitehead's *The Intuitionist* and Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*, end in a space of liminality that imply a potentially hopeful future. In telling Marcus "Welcome home," Gyasi at least acknowledges that a home does exist, even as I have argued the ending of her novel to be oversimplified in its hopefulness. Other texts, such as Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, end on a pessimistic note, reflecting the state of increasingly overt racialized violence in the U.S. These authors engage with similar concerns unique to the 21st century appearance of this trope as identified by the concept of the post-Black era. As I have argued, the spatial orphan not only responds to concerns about the lack of belonging within a space but also the conflict between an indebtedness to the community of the past and the present, as well as potential future, of the individual. The extranatural creates a guide that does not often lead to healing but leads to a confrontation with trauma that helps to blend these ideas of past and future, community and individuality. Yet even as the authors of the post-Black era work to distinguish themselves and represent unique 21st century concerns, Fred Moten notes that the "strains against this interplay of itinerancy and identity – whether in the interest of putting down roots or disclaiming them – could be said, also, to constitute a departure, though it may well be into a stasis more severe than the one such work imagines" (1745). Indeed, while grappling with new concerns over how to integrate individuality with community, these authors do so through the same character trope present throughout the 20th century.

The cyclical nature of this character trope, one that represents an overall concern with the lack of spatial belonging for Black Americans, highlights the lack of change in America over time. And while I wrote in the introduction that we may not have reached

the crest of the third wave, I maintain the hope that at least a fourth wave of this trope does not appear in Black American literature and the analysis of spatial orphans can remain a past study; the permanent disappearance of the spatial orphan would mean that Black communities have indeed found spaces of belonging. Simultaneously though, the silence of this trope could be equally concerning. In the time between the second and third wave, Black American literature embraced realist genres while the surrounding world seemed to support an increase in equality, a false equality that concealed greater economic and gender divides. The reappearance of the spatial orphan challenges these inequalities by embracing the extranatural as a method of creating community and acknowledging the continuation of history into the present and future.

Unfortunately, the spatial orphan is a character we are likely to see continue in Black American literature, be it as a continuation in the third wave or reappearing in a fourth wave. *Sing, Unburied, Sing* perhaps shows us the clearest example of why the trope will continue. Writing at a time when both Barack Obama and Donald Trump were president, Ward experienced the dangerous backlash that can occur when one president disrupts societal norms and the other works to revert them as far into the past as possible. As we move into a post-Trump era, this opens the door for future studies of the spatial orphan that may come to light as a result of Trump era politics and racism. Even as the country moves into the Biden presidency, many of those police officers investigated for racist acts have been declared innocent. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, moreover, has served to highlight the racialized disparities of the medical system. This has resulted in many false overgeneralizations, such as the notion that the monolithic Black community does not trust vaccines, that work to overlook the history of racist

medical experiments that cause some understandable discomfort with medical treatments and to excuse the lack of accessibility to those who live in poor or rural communities. Shifting public perception to a push for these racialized stereotypes and suggesting that Black communities are against herd immunity for America could indeed trigger a continuation with modifications of the spatial orphan trope.

The lack of a space of belonging in Ward's novel, and all of the texts I have discussed, does not stay within fiction but reflects reality. Although I have focused on prose throughout this project, I want to end with a reference to poetry. Since the original publication date in 2014, Claudia Rankine has released a new edition of *Citizen: An American Lyric* each year to expand upon a list of names. That list co-exists with this verse: "because white men can't/police their imagination/black people are dying" (Rankine 134). In the summer before I began graduate school at the University of South Carolina in 2015, the nine victims of the Charleston church massacre were added to the list. Since that time, Rankine has added fourteen more names, and four more in 2020 alone: Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Rashard Brooks (Rankine 134). Each name in Rankine's list serves as a reminder of Black people and communities living in the United States who have not allowed a safe space of belonging. These are the traumatic pasts, presents, and futures that each author I have included in this project has addressed. Yet Rankine's pages also include blank spaces. In these blank spaces exist the names of their parents, siblings, and children who also suffer from and become a part of the lack of belonging. To stop both the list we see and the invisible list from growing, the cycle of violence and trauma needs to be broken, but in order to change the future, the

spatial orphan in 21st century Black American literature proves we must remember and connect with the past.

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