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## Octavia Butler's *Kindred*: a Study in Postmemory and Trauma

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### **Abstract:**

*This paper studies Octavia Butler's Kindred (1979) as a collective postmemory and time-travel novel. The term "postmemory," coined by Marianne Hirsch, describes the relationship the children of survivors of collective trauma have with their parents' memories. The term depicts a theoretical approach to analyze narrative representation of generational impact of traumatic memory in a diversity of cultural contexts and resulting from a variety of experiences. In spite of the temporal and spatial distance from slavery, contemporary African American writers engage slave history in their literary creations as the ancestral trauma in whose shadow all African Americans are raised. In the absence of reliable historical records of slavery and with the erosion of direct memory of that experience, sites of memory become important expressions of African American collective postmemory. Butler's Kindred is a compelling site for exploring and re-establishing the generational continuum and the possible meanings of the traumatic experience of slavery.*

**Keywords:** postmemory, collective trauma, slavery, Octavia Butler, *Kindred*

→ Pity me, and pardon me, O virtuous reader! You never knew what it is to be a slave; to be entirely unprotected by law or custom; to have the laws reduce you to the condition of a chattel, entirely subject to the will of another.

*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Jacobs, 2001, pp.61-62)

In 1619, the Dutch introduced the first captured Africans to America, planting the seeds of a slavery system that eventually turned into a nightmare of abuse and painful memories not only to those directly involved but also their descendants. In 1903, the black intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois (1999) anticipated that the problem of the twentieth century was the problem of the color line (p.17). In fact, the institution of chattel slavery continues to affect American society even in the closing years of the twentieth century. The persistent, infinite pain and shame of slavery remain in the American consciousness. That the House Resolution 96---proposed by representative Tony P. Hall (D-Ohio) in 1997 to apologize to slave descendants--- died in session represents yet another example of how unwilling Americans are to discuss that pain and shame, much less to face it (Mitchell, 2002, pp. 1-2).

The memory of a past of racism, in which millions of black people were destroyed because of their race, becomes more painful. Ashraf Rushdy (2001) notes that "Slavery [...] functions in American thinking as the partially hidden phantom of a past that needs to be revised in order to be revered"(p.2).As such, he acknowledges that the need to remember the trauma of slavery is significant for America's present and future. More recently President Barak Obama states that "[the] memory of slavery...[is] in almost every institution of our lives, that casts a long shadow, and that's still part of our DNA that's passed on. We're not cured of it.... Societies don't overnight completely erase everything that happened 200-300 years prior" (qtd in Bordin & Scacchi, 2015, Introduction).

The aim of this paper is to analyze Octavia Butler's novel *Kindred* (1979) as a typical trauma novel. The paper will make use of critical trauma theory with special reference to Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory. The paper will explore transgenerational and collective trauma and highlight their effect on the descendants. The paper will also show how Octavia Butler chooses time travel as a feminist technique to represent the trauma of slavery as a collective memory which crystalizes around certain parts of attachment to the past. The paper shows the novel based on binary opposites; present and past, slavery and freedom, text-based knowledge and experience.

The term postmemory was coined by Marianne Hirsch to describe the relationship the children of survivors of cultural or collective trauma have to their ancestors' memory. Hirsch (2008) believes that postmemory is neither a movement nor an idea. It is rather "a structure of inter-and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience. It is a consequence of traumatic recall but...at a generational remove" (Hirsch, 2008, p.106). Although Hirsch initiated the term in relation to Holocaust, it has been used to analyze narrative representations of the generational impact of traumatic memory in a diversity of cultural contexts and result from a variety of experiences. In fact, modern history described by Shoshana Felman (1995) as "post-traumatic" has "survived unthinkable historical catastrophes"(p.13) that had their impact on generations of descendants of their survivors. One of the most notable mass traumas is the horrifying experiences of the enduring legacy of new World Slavery. Hirsch (2008) explains:

postmemory describes the relationship of the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among

which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory's connection to the past is not mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. (pp.106-107) As witnesses of their parents' traumas, children of postmemory experience what Cathy Caruth (1995) calls "the traumatization of the ones who listen"(p.10). Rushdy (2001) describes this phenomenon in the characters of Gayl Johns' *Corregidora* (1975) "Johns' characters listen to others' stories so attentively as to feel that they are living out the experiences they describe, hearing with such intensity that they assume an inter subjective communion with their narrators"(p.35). A suitable representation of postmemory is the idea of "inter subjective communion". It proposes a space occupied by narrators and listeners, survivors and descendants, in which temporal and subjective boundaries are blurred, permitting the memories of one to haunt and infect the other. This shared space allows the child of postmemory to understand his/her traumatic inheritance and its effect on his/her contemporary identity.

Hirsch's (2001) tendency to consider postmemory more generally as "the relationship of the second generation to the experiences of the first"(p.12), agrees with Sandra Kim's (2007) notion of postmemory as simply the "inter/transgenerational transmission of memory" coupled with "the identifications forged within familial space" and thus applicable to a wide range of historical and cultural experiences (p.340). The contemporary era's collective traumas combined with the cultural authority of ethnic American women create a profusion of narratives that explore the relationship of the contemporary individual to her traumatic inheritance or postmemory. Since official history has never told the full story of the experience of slavery, the loss of living witnesses created a certain cultural anxiety and forced the question "of who would be a witness to slavery and how it would be remembered"(Keizer, 2004, p. 5). In response to this question, African American writers, beginning with Margaret Walker and Ernest Gaines began to write narratives that took the form of first-hand accounts of slavery, thus creating a literary space to preserve memories that threatened to be lost.

Although contemporary African American writers are removed from direct memory of slavery, they are obsessed with re-creating the experience of slavery both to memorialize it as the foundational event in the African American experience and to re-assert its importance in an era when African Americans are prone to forgetting both their history and community. In the contemporary era, full engagement with the slave past requires acknowledging it as "a tear in the fabric of history," an experience that "makes the present incomprehensible" and renders contemporary life unlivable (Rushdy, 2001,p.4). These literary interventions often use fantastic, or innovative means to bridge the temporal and psychic distance separating contemporary African Americans from their enslaved ancestors. Thus enabling contemporary characters and readers to engage the slave past and explore its traumatic impact on its survivors. Caroline Rody (2001) observes a trend in these interventions into the slave past as "dramatic, often fantastic encounters...[that] foreground the mother-daughter relationship as the site of transhistorical contact" (p.3). Rody (2001) represents this trend with the "Magic Black Daughter," who can "be seen traveling through time to recover the mother-of-history"(p.3). Rody further debates that the twentieth-century African American writer remedies the separation or tyranny of the heritage of slavery by creating a narrative that connects a literary daughter to that lost history. This literary daughter who overcomes temporal, geographic, and psychic distance from her ancestors, bridges this distance through fantastic means making her a magic black daughter. (pp.6,8).

In the period following the civil rights, feminist and ethnic empowerment movements of the 1960 and 1970, ethnic American women writers started to be progressively engaged in trauma's ghost. Kathleen Brogan (1998) states that the trope of haunting in contemporary ethnic American literature exhibits an attempt "to re-create ethnic identity through an imaginative recuperation of the past and to press this new version of the past into the service of the present" (p.4). The literal presence of ghosts in the fictional narratives of contemporary ethnic American women writers is meant to recover the histories and experiences repressed from mainstream social consciousness in order to understand and represent them in multiethnic traumatized society.

In "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photograph and the Work of Postmemory," Hirsch (2001) suggests that the children of postmemory actually "remember" the experience of their parents "as the narratives and images with which they grew up, but that [these] are so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories of their own right"(p.9). Maria Rice Bellamy (2016) asserts that the children's experiences are not of recall, "but more akin to a haunting resulting from interpersonal rather than personal experience"(p.4).Hirsch (2008) speculates post memorial work as a means both of counteracting traumatic loss and helping the child of postmemory to work through residual traumas. Post memorial work "strives to *reactivate and reembody*" traumatic histories by representing them in new forms and make them available to new audiences. (Hirsch, 2008, p. 111) In their post memorial work, the descendants of trauma survivors reimagine survivor memory and traditional histories and rearticulate them in their own temporal and cultural perspective. Though the consciously constructed and unplanned histories may be considered incomplete and untrue, yet they are important in facilitating a descendant's sense of mastery over the haunting effects of traumatic memory. They also provide the means to share this experience in community with other witnesses.

In her article "Marked by Memory: Feminist Reflections on Trauma and Transmission", Hirsch (2002) explores the possibilities of a feminist postmemory using Toni Morrison's *Beloved* to illustrate her points. She further explains that feminist representations of postmemory engage "modes of knowledge" that are "embodied, material, located and thus also responsive and responsible to the other" such that memory is transmitted in forms "capacious enough to transcend gender and familial role and thus they expand the circle of postmemory in multiple, inviting and open-ended ways"(p. 88). Bellamy (2016) also believes that feminist postmemory "resists exclusionary and hegemonic impulses which engender collective and cultural violence as well as the devaluation of certain histories, and invites empathy which fosters affiliative postmemory and cross cultural understanding"(p.8-9).

In her first-person narrative of the experience of enslavement and emancipation, *Kindred*1979, Octavia Butler (1947-2006) creates a dialectic between two specific historical moments in American history: the period of chattel slavery and the richly symbolic bicentennial year of 1976. When Butler's twentieth-century black protagonist Edana (Dana) Franklin travels to antebellum Maryland, both she and the reader learn how the past shaped and continues to shape the present. While unpacking boxes in her new home in 1976

Los Angeles, Dana is snatched away from the present to find herself in antebellum Maryland. The first thing she sees is a drowning child, instinctively she rescues him. When the boy's father arrives, he threatens her with a shotgun. Suddenly she is transported, wet and muddy back to the present (Butler, 1988, pp.13-14). Although her first brief trip to the past ends before she fully realizes where she has gone, in the subsequent trips, Dana becomes intimately acquainted with what she discovers to be her ancestors' home. Alice Greenwood, black female slave, and Rufus Welyin, her white master are her ancestors. Out of fear both of forgetting the past and of discovering how little Afro Americans know about their past, Dana, a literal and cultural orphan is forced to engage her ancestral past. Bellamy (2016) believes that underlying Dana's time travel is the idea that traumatic events leave a haunting vestige both on those who experience them and on their descendants. Bellamy states, "I call this vestige 'trauma's ghost'"(p.1). According to Bellamy (2016) trauma's ghost affects the descendants of trauma survivors whether they acknowledge it or not. Thus the contemporary individual needs to engage in the past in order to understand the present. (p.1)

In fact, trauma's ghost haunts every person descended from American slaves and slaveholders. It haunts anyone who has been imprinted by the institutions of racism that have so defined the United States. It affects everyone whose cultural identity or collective history is colored by experiences of violence and exclusion from mainstream American society. By revealing different facets of trauma's ghost, the reader becomes aware of unrecorded, unacknowledged and repressed history. Avery Gordon (2008) maintains that ghostliness in contemporary society reveals that what "appears to be *not* there is often a seething presence"(p.8). Trauma's ghost manifests the unacknowledged suffering of others and implicates the contemporary haunted in their traumatic histories. Trauma's ghost, while exposing the social dysfunction in contemporary society, challenges those it haunts to respond to the repressed knowledge it reveals.

Narratives like *Kindred* that explore traumatic history from the contemporary perspective have become prevalent in American literature in recent decades. Among these are Gayl Johns' *Corregidora* (1975), Phyllis Alesia Perry's *Stigmata* (1998). Such works are designed to include different audiences that seem to confirm Caruth's (1995) claim that "trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures"(p.11). Bellamy (2016) adds that "traumatic memory provides a lens through which a large portion of contemporary American literature can be read and offers thematic unity in writings of ethnic American authors, who represent a vast spectrum of experiences"(p.2).

As an ethnic American woman writer, Butler uses her narrative to give body to experiences and perspectives denied in mainstream history and culture. Her narrative revises received histories and recovers the female body from patriarchal domination. Butler recognizes as Jennifer Griffiths (2009) does, that "people of color have entered the public space in body only" (p.7). Similarly, Butler explores the traumatic history written on and reproduced through gendered, ethnic bodies and work to restore the subjectivity of ancestors. Post memorial work represents the completion of the child of postmemory's process of working through her traumatic inheritance. Bellamy (2016) explains the post memorial journey as "the defining characteristic of this genre and [is] comprised of a three-step process of identification, translation, and differentiation"(p.6).

In this process, the American-born protagonist first identifies with or bears witness to his traumatic inheritance, then translates it into the term of his/her lived experience, and finally differentiates from it by re-articulating it in a form appropriate to his/her generational or cultural perspective. Dana, Butler's protagonist goes through the same process. Butler connects her protagonist Dana to her female forebears and acquaints her with her traumatic inheritance in order that she might, in Lisa Woolfork's words, "remember and reauthorize" her traumatized ancestor. (2009, p.3). As an ethnic American woman narrative, *Kindred* (1979) represents the special vulnerabilities women experience in both ordinary and extraordinary circumstances and recover the female body from violation and voiceless traditional historical and fictional narrative.

In its crossing of the temporal boundary, *Kindred* constructs a range of oppositional categories that parallel the divide between the past and present, the most central of which is slavery and freedom. These include physical immediacy and nostalgic distance, presence and absence. As Christine Levecq (2000) says, "event and memory, raw encounters and retelling, reality and textuality" (p.527). Woolfork (2009) adds that the novel presents two additional sets of categories "that provide a context in which to address the discursive practice of trauma theory: observer and participant book learning and lived experience"(p.21).

One of the opposing categories that Butler creates is that of present versus past, freedom versus slavery. She uses the body of a contemporary protagonist as the primary site of memory and bridge to the past. In *Embodying American Slavery*, (2009) Woolfork proposes her theory of bodily epistemology to analyze how contemporary African American cultural observances, films and literary works, such as *Kindred* use the body "to mediate multiple forms of knowing the past"(p.4). Dana's body bears silent witness to the history of slavery, she experiences a "corporeal resonance" that makes her susceptible to the pull of the past and responsible for what she finds there. (Woolfork, 2009, p. 4). Inscribed with histories that twentieth-century Americans have forgotten or refused to acknowledge, Dana's body becomes a living archive in flesh. In fact Butler's speculative neo-slave narrative depicts the past and the present as mutually constitutive spheres allowing for the body to travel in between. The novel suggests that to know the "there" of the traumatic past one should go there. Woolfork (2009) states that, "This insistence on a view of the traumatic past as "accessible" by fantastic or paranormal means is a way to remember the slave past, to keep the event alive for the protagonist"(p.4). In fact, the danger of not referencing the past includes the risk that slavery will be forgotten or misinterpreted.

Butler uses the fantastic narrative mode to position contemporary individuals, the protagonist and the reader, to engage slavery directly. This approach enables them to present how the legacy of slavery continues to haunt twentieth-century American society and encounter America's willful forgetting and refusal to acknowledge this traumatic history. Rody (2001) notes that "for an African-American writer, slavery is a story known in the bones, and yet not at all" (p.24). Despite their temporal distance from slavery, contemporary African American writers engage this form of trauma's ghost in their literary works. In the contemporary era, however, full engagement with the slave past requires recognizing it. Appropriately, Butler renders her protagonist physically and

psychologically shattered by her encounter with the past and her facing the impossible task of incorporating her historical knowledge into her twentieth-century life. Employing the device of time travel, Butler offers from a feminist perspective, a meditation on the nature of American freedom by creating a metaphoric Middle Passage between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In *Kindred*, Butler links past and present through the time travels of her heroine Dana whose travel from the present to the past brings to mind the African's voyage of no return. "In her experience of being kidnapped in time and space," Robert Crossley (1988) states, "Dana recapitulates the dreadful, disorienting, involuntary voyage of her ancestors"(p.xi). In fact, in theme and plot structure, *Kindred* resembles the older slave narrative. Angelyn Mitchell (2001) reads Butler's *Kindred* as a 'liberatory' narrative. Mitchell (2001) defines liberatory narrative which "seeks to recuperate the past by engaging the tradition of the emancipatory narratives"(p.52) that are centered on how female slaves pursue their freedom, empowering themselves in the process.

That Dana's first journey takes place on her twenty-sixth birthday indicates that she is experiencing a sort of rebirth. The text never explains how Dana travels. Robert Crossley (1988) speculates that Butler's implied vehicle for time travel is "the vehicle that looms behind every American slave narrative, the grim death-ship of the Middle Passage from Africa to the slave markets of the New World"(p.xi). In fact, the imagery, "death ship", does lend credibility to the idea that Butler's liberatory narrative is a metaphoric Middle Passage designed to take its passengers from freedom to bondage and, unlike the original passage, back to freedom. Through time travel, Butler not only bends the reader's conception of time to allow Dana to share space with her ancestors, but also facilitates the protagonist's full identification with her ancestral past and extends her haunting experience to the readers. In *Kindred*, the contemporary individual interacts with dead ancestors, essentially speaking to ghosts, thereby engendering an experience of haunting. Butler's work, as Lisa A. Long (2002) states, is an intensification of impulses to "raise the dead." The novel strives "to *become* the dead, to embody and enact the protagonists' families' personal histories and [America's] national past (p.460). Whenever the life of her white ancestor Rufus Weylin, a great-great grandfather, is in danger, Dana is mysteriously summoned to rescue him. Dana is returned to the twentieth-century when she herself feels that her life is in danger. Rufus lives only because Dana saves his life several times. By protecting him Dana preserves her ancestry and herself. Neither she nor her family would exist were Rufus not to survive to father her great grandmother Hagar. Dana's mission as she herself describes it is "not only to insure the survival of one accident-prone small boy, but to insure my family's survival, my own birth"(Butler, 1988, p. 29).

It is only after Dana has fulfilled this responsibility in the past that she can have control over her life in the present. Dana's struggle is compelling as she asserts her violation against the invisible forces which place her in slavery as well as against the obvious consequences of her enslavement. Rushdy (1993) explains, "By becoming an agent capable of transforming history, Dana becomes to the same degree *subject to history*.... When she gambles against history...she can also lose to history"(p.145). In fact, *Kindred* represents a different view of history. While the space-time continuum is flexible, allowing Dana to travel from twentieth-century California to nineteenth-century Maryland, history is not. As Kevin, Dana's white husband, tells her on his only trip with her to the past "We're in the middle of history. We surely can't change it"(Butler 1988,p. 100). This representation of history as static is not at all accidental. Butler could have chosen to make the past as flexible and fluid as she did with space and time. However such malleable history would not permit *Kindred* to stage a return to the traumatic past. In an interview with Randall Kenan (1991), Butler remarks, "I don't use a time machine or anything like that. Time travel is just a device for getting the character back to confront where she came from" (p.496). The primal scene is represented in *Kindred* on two levels. As an individual, Dana is forced to challenge the traumatic nature of her family heritage. On a larger scale, *Kindred* uses time travel to recapture "the peritraumatic, or impact, phase of American slavery"(Woolfork, 2009, p. 24). In fact, the return to slavery in *Kindred* is an opportunity to consider the institution of slavery as an original trauma for African Americans.

The primal-scene fantasy is played out in the text's present-day and past settings. According to the detailed genealogy written in her family's Bible, Dana's roots are based in nineteenth-century Maryland. When Dana returns to the past and encounters Rufus and Alice as children, she wonders how they will marry, "or would it be marriage?"(Butler 1988,p.28) and engender her family line. Dana also wonders about the flexibility of time and her role in history. She considers, "[Rufus's] life could not depend on the actions of his unconceived descendant. No matter what I did, he would have to survive to father Hagar or I could not exist. That made sense...But this child needed special care. If I was to live, if others were to live, I didn't dare test the paradox"(Butler, 1988,p.29).

Thus Dana finds herself expediting a primal scene. Dana's generative moment is based on rape. Dana states, "it was hard to watch him hurting her---to know that he had to go on hurting her if my family was to exist at all" (Butler 1988, p. 180). Historically, "[s]lavery forced Afro-American culture to see that the woman raped by the master or used as a breeder *did* survive, did carry on with daily life"(Kubitschek, 1988, p.49). Watching Rufus hurting Alice, not only does it refer to the frequent beating Alice receives but it also implies the pain inflicted by forced sex act. In this way, Dana's primal scene can be called a traumatic primal scene. Not only is repeated rape a trauma for Alice, but Dana also must live with the traumatic knowledge that her family life was generated by intimidated sex. In fact, the insured promise of future dependent upon Alice's violation parallels, in Linh U. Hua (2011) words, "the speculative logic that insured the value of African bodies across the Middle Passage. In this way, history and patriarchal bloodlines subsume Alice's sexual violation as a necessary event for Dana's eventual benefit"(p.398). Dana has no option to discourage Rufus from raping Alice. She needs this sexual violation to happen if she is to exist. Diana R. Paulin (1997) speculates, "In order to put history back 'in place', she must enable Rufus to rape Alice"(p.192).

As a white male, Rufus has the privilege to transcend time and space, thus enabling him to summon Dana to him. This privilege ironically coincides with Dana's need for self-preservation. Dana's desire to protect her present future family life, even at the expense of her past family, is vital. Given this priority, history is represented as a stable entity in *Kindred* to allow the characters access to a past significantly marked by trauma. If history is presented as flexible, then Dana and Kevin would have never known the physical, mental and emotional complexity of life in slavery.

As for the observer and participant dualism, part of its exploration of the slave past, *Kindred* reveals the difference between an observer who watches an event and a participant who actively engages in it. These categories matter, because they parallel the essential tension between the traumatic moment and its recognition as trauma. Thus Dana's exchange of the observer role for that of participant signals her physical and moral immersion in the slave past. Dana's first encounter with the brutality of slavery is when she witnesses the beating of Alice's father by patrollers. Alice's mother was a freewoman, but her father was one of the Weylin enslaved men. Since children born of black women followed the condition of the mother, Alice was free. Since breeding men and women were considered livestock who equaled profit, Weylin disapproved of his enslaved men fathering free children. Thus he rejected the relationship between Alice's parents. Shortly before Dana's arrival at Alice's cabin, the patrollers, who are supposed to maintain orders among slaves, arrive to retrieve Weylin's property. They drag the naked couple from the cabin and beat Alice's father who lacked a traveling pass. This scene recalls Frederick Douglas's (2004) story of the beating of his aunt Hester in 1845 *Narrative*. In Butler's recreation of the following scene, Dana highlights what is missing from the recorded history of slavery:

I had seen people beaten on television and in the movies. I had seen the too-red blood substitute streaked across their back and heard their well-rehearsed screams. But I hadn't lain nearby and smelled their sweat or heard them pleading and praying, shamed before their families and themselves. (Butler, 1988, p.36)

Although she is an adult when she witnesses this beating, Dana realizes that she reacts very similarly to the child Alice, who recoils away. Moreover, after taking away Alice's father, one of the patrollers, who has already physically beaten Alice's mother, returns to rape her. Instead, he finds Dana and tries to rape her. Though Dana successfully defends herself against this attempted act of violation, she realizes that she is threatened to experience such brutal attacks anytime. These moments initiate in Dana a new awareness of the conditions of slavery, knowledge for which she will soon be considered "a witness and participant". They serve as "an early moment of identification with Alice, her nineteenth-century twin, through whom Dana will learn the full context of sexualized violence and her moral complicity with slavery" (Bellamy, 2016, p. 56). The most graphic example of sexual assault in *Kindred* occurs when Evan Fowler, the Welyins' overseer, viciously strikes Dana brutally to punish her for her failure to work efficiently in the field. This brutality inflicted on Dana's body signals the devalued and humiliating position of a black woman.

Several trips later, after running away from Welyin plantation, Dana is shortly caught and is whipped. During a previous trip, Dana experiences her first whipping, and her fear to die transports her back to the twentieth century. During this second whipping, she remains painfully present for every lash of the whip, having realized that "this was only punishment" (Butler, 1988, p.176). She feels instead an overwhelming desire to kill. Calling herself "a wild woman...totally beyond reasoning," Dana recalls, "I had never in my life wanted so desperately to kill another human (p.176). The absence of mortal fear during the second beating proves Dana's adjustment to violence of the time. Her desire to kill further reveals a growing comfort with violence as well as her mind's inability to submit completely to enslavement. This combination of factors will eventually help her to use deadly force to gain freedom. This direct and corporeal engagement with the ancestral past engender a form of postmemory that leaves Dana to cope with psychological and physical scars, which are not easily incorporated into her twentieth-century narrative. In consequence, Butler "blurs history and the present" to create what Marc Steinberg (2004) terms an "inverse slave narrative" that employs a concept of history that is "cyclical, not linear" (p.467).

Facilitating the first step in Dana's post memorial journey, Butler creates a deliberate doubling in the characters of Dana and her ancestral grandmother, Alice Greenwood, both enslaved in the nineteenth century. Of this doubling Kubitschek (1991) observes, "[t]o a certain extent, each woman feels the other's choices as a critique of her own; each sees, in the distorting mirror of the other, her own potential fate" (p.39). Butler's explicit twining of Dana and Alice causes Dana to identify with Alice and feel deeply the horror both of Alice's victimization and her own participation in it. The trait of vulnerability and the action of violation inextricably bind Dana and her ancestor, Alice in common bond of sisterhood. Since they are blood relatives, Alice and Dana physically resemble each other so much that Rufus considers the two as "only one woman" (Butler, 1988, p.228). Consequently, Rufus has a complex triangle relationship with Alice and Dana. "This triangle," Beverly Friend (1982) notes, "degenerates into an extraordinary painful relationship, one compounded by rivalry, passion, guilt, love, lust, punishment, pride, power and implacable hatred" (p.93). Rufus loves the two women but in different ways. In her characterization of Rufus's complexity, Alice pointedly tells Dana, "He likes me in bed, and you out of bed...all that means we're the two halves of the same woman" (Butler, 1988, p.229). Juxtaposing the two, Butler proposes that in different time Rufus and Alice might have a relationship like Dana and Kevin.

Alice, Dana's freeborn ancestor, seems to possess awareness of her individuality and of her free will when she rejects Rufus's sexual advances and choose to marry Isaac, an enslaved man from a neighboring farm. Incensed by Alice's rejection of him and by her determination to choose her lover, Rufus rapes her. Rufus then mocks her choice: "she got so she'd rather have a buck nigger than me!" (Butler, 1988, p. 123). Although powerless to protect his wife legally, Isaac fights Rufus and seriously injures him. Shortly afterwards, Alice and Isaac try to escape to the North, knowing that Rufus will seek revenge from Isaac. After Alice recovers from the injuries she sustains during her capture, Rufus asks Dana to nurse her. Dana's situation, as Kubitschek (1991) argues, mirrors one of the worst moral challenges of the slave woman's existence. "Through nursing and reeducating Alice, Dana has experienced a relationship analogous to that of the slave mother/child and felt the terrible burden of socializing kin into slavery" (p.36). Reverting to a state of infancy induced by trauma, Alice calls Dana "Mama" (p.153). Later, Alice mockingly predicts that Dana will become one day the "Mammy" of the plantation. By referring to Dana as "Mammy," Mitchell (2002) states that "Alice misinterprets both the archetype of the mammy as well as Dana's endeavors either to improve the enslaved community's conditions to protect it through passive resistance" (p.53). Forced by Rufus, Dana persuades Alice to submit to his sexual advances, rather than being beaten or raped. Finally, Alice postulates her strategy of resistance by submitting only her body to Rufus not her spirit.

Alice's journey of self-possession is thwarted by the institution of slavery and the experience of motherhood in slavery. Butler shows how motherhood for enslaved black women complicates their lives in ways that are fundamentally insurmountable. Of the four children born to Alice and Rufus, the first two die in infancy due to improper medical treatment. Rufus uses the remaining two, as Alice explains, like "a bit in [her] mouth"(Butler, 1988,p.236). The children become tools Rufus employs to control Alice's affection and sexual behavior toward him. Although Alice loves her children, the institution of slavery restricts and demarcates her love for them. Unable to own herself or her children, Alice lives in a liminal state, always vulnerable to Rufus's impulses. Although Alice, the enslaved mother, desires to escape north, she knows that she cannot run away with her children. Though Alice seems to forsake her right to self-possession, she does not completely resign. She still has hope that one day she and her children will be free. Mitchell (2002) says that she "even secretly plants seeds of hope by naming her children Joseph and Hagar, the Biblical names of formerly enslaved persons in the Old Testament"(p.54), believing that , "[in] the Bible, people might be slaves for a while, but they didn't have to stay slaves"(Butler, 1988, pp. 233-234).

Rufus's final act of manipulation and intimidation pushes Alice to death. He pretends that has sold their children when they have only been sent from the plantation just to remind Alice of his dominion over her. This brutality causes Alice to resolve, like Dana, "that killing and dying look better than living"(p.243). Unlike Dana, Alice chooses to kill herself not her enemy. In Alice's case committing suicide is not an act of emotional weakness. In fact by choosing death, Alice exercises her right to freedom of a different sort, over her captivity. Apparently, the powerless Alice proves to be more powerful than the savage slaveholder Rufus. By dying she succeeds to escape her bondage without the risk of recapture and return. Mitchell (2002) speculates, "In a final volitional act, Alice usurps Rufus's institutionally sanctioned power and opts to exercise her own personal power, which she does by removing herself permanently from him"(p.54).

Shortly, after Alice's suicide, Rufus summons Dana to the past the last time. Having already enslaved Dana through his ability to call her across time and space, Rufus attempts during this trip to take full possession of what he believes to be his property. Rufus's attempt to replace Alice with Dana, brings to fulfillment the conflict that the novel has been predicting, Rufus sexual assault and Dana's violent self-defense. As Mitchell (2001) states, "Killing Rufus, instead of submitting to him as Alice does, is Dana's way of maintaining her self-esteem and psychic wholeness"(p.59). Terminating her involvement in Maryland on July 4, 1976, the year of bicentennial, Dana kills the patriarch she has been protecting. By killing Rufus, Dana dislodges herself from the burdens of history. Rufus's claim to Dana ends when it shifts from the pressure of history to the materiality of sexual oppression. As a daughter of postmemory, Dana's murder of Rufus differentiates her from her traumatic ancestral legacy, asserting her difference from her enslaved ancestors. In addition, her use of violence reflects the damage Dana's character has sustained during her time in the past. Trudier Harris (2009) argues that "the good person from the twentieth century...resorts to the same ...methods of destruction that the slaveholder would"(p.78). In fact the evils of the institution and the time period interrupt Dana's twentieth-century moral base, pushing her to act against her morality. This manifests Harriet Jacob's (1973) conviction that "the condition of a slave confuses all principles of morality, and, in fact, renders the practice of them impossible"(p.55).

In fact, sexual violence against slave women by their masters engendered a class of people born out of violation and raised under the oppression of society. In these instances, identification with the traumatic inheritance requires the post memorial daughter, Dana, to recover the silenced voice, violated body and discredited knowledge of the victim, while recognizing herself as the inheritor of legacy of violence. Through Dana, Butler debates against contemporaries who criticize the choices made by their antebellum ancestor. In an interview with Kenan (1991), Butler says that *Kindred* is "a kind of reaction to some of the things going on during the sixties when people were feeling ashamed of, or...angry with their parents for not having improved things faster, and I wanted to take a person from today and send that person back to slavery"(p.496). Butler explains that she wants to take that angry young people back to the past to show them the difficulty of those choices and to force them to see the ethical complexity of those conditions. Butler herself recalls when she was occasionally going to work with her mother and seeing the disrespectful and disgusting way white people treat her. In a 1997 interview with Charles Rowell, she adds:

as I got older I realized that this is what kept me fed, and this is what kept a roof over my head. This is when I started to pay attention to what my mother... my grandmother and my poor great-grandmother, who died as a very young woman giving birth to my grandmother, what they all went through. (p.51).

Thus, improving the lens through which her readers consider the past becomes Butler's aim. She attempts to make her readers, perhaps black readers more specifically, understand that in the same situation, they may have done any differently than their ancestors. According to Bellamy (2016), "Dana's actions also address two levels of traumatic haunting: Rufus ability to call her across time and the resonance within her that makes her susceptible to that call"(p.59). On one level, after Hagar is born, Dana, 'the black magic daughter' has accomplished her mission with the past. Rufus summoning her after Alice's suicide surpasses the bounds of historical haunting. Gordon (2008) states that "haunting as a way of life...must be passed on or through [because]...to remain haunted is to remain partial to the dead...and not to the living" (p.182). In fact, Dana frees herself from one level of haunting by terminating Rufus and his ability to call her across time. This action brings to an end her obligation to protect Rufus and the slave community as well as restoring her completely to her own time. On the second level' murdering Rufus, avenges Alice's victimization and heals the traumatic wound passed down through generations "by rewriting and undoing the traumatic moment"(Schiff, 2009, p. 110). In fact the return of the twentieth-century individual to the past enables her to visualize the traumatic moment and "merge her two selves-the contemporary self-haunted by but dissociated from her past and the historical traumatized self"(Bellamy, 2016,p. 60). The reconciliation of these two parts of her being results in a unified identity in the present and removes her vulnerability to the call of the ancestral past.

Having learned and revised her ancestral history, Dana's experience of haunting has consummated its purpose and her post memorial journey is now complete. However, in order to become whole psychologically, Dana must be maimed physically. This finally leads us to the opening line-the image of the severed arm, which is mysteriously lost on Dana's way back to the present. Dana recollects, "Something harder and stronger than Rufus's hand clamped down on my arm, squeezing it, pressing it." Though she is back at home, "in my own house, in my own time. But I was still caught somehow, joined to the wall as though my arm were growing out of it-or growing into it"(Butler, 1988,p.260-261). Dana's arm is amputated just above the spot where Rufus had maintained his grip. Thus the loss of her arm reads as Rufus's last pervasive authority over Dana's mind, body and history. The missing arm, as Linh U. Hua (2011) suggests "resonates as the impact of pressures and solutions that comprise black feminist action" (p.401). The injury serves as an ultimate physical marker of her direct engagement with slavery. "I couldn't let her come back whole," explains Butler in an interview with Kenan (1991) "Antebellum slavery didn't leave people quite whole"(p.498).

Nevertheless, Butler seems to problematize the idea of Dana being whole after her time travel. Dana's ability to assimilate her ancestral legacy into her contemporary existence is threatened by her discovery that she is the descendant of abused and violated foremothers and abusive and violent forefathers. Not only does the blood of both the victim and violator run through her vein, but Rufus's murder may also suggest that Dana has chosen her own descendent line or *Kindred*. In fact, Butler's decision to marry Dana to a white man in the twentieth century carries "the historical relationship at the core of her own identity" into her present, eliminating her ability to favor one part of her ancestry over the other. (Parham, 2009a,p. 86). This situation represents the message in postmemory narratives that the contemporary individual is heir to both sides of the legacy of violence. Thus, Dana's loss of an arm becomes "a permanent reminder of the physical and moral disfiguration she experiences during her post memorial journey"(Bellamy,2016, p.60).

By juxtaposing the past with the present through the vehicle of time-travel, Butler suggests that one can never have enough of the past which informs the present and the future. By revisiting the historical moment of chattel slavery, Butler offers, as "a literal paradigm of coming to terms with a history of slavery and oppression [by] excavat[ing] history, then accumulating knowledge, and reinterpreting it from a forward-looking perspective"(Kubitschek, 1991, p.51). In point of fact, Kubitschek (1991) echoes Bellamy's definition of post memorial journey as a process of identification, translation and differentiation. Butler moves beyond our knowledge of the enslaved black woman's life by offering her mediation on the nature of black womanhood in the present as well as the historical past. *Kindred* also engages our imagination by intensifying our understanding of the condition of black women both in slavery and freedom.

Although Kevin travels with Dana on her third trip hoping for an adventure in the splendid frontier years of American history, the five years he spends in the past force him to confront the realities of living in a society founded on slavery. As an African American woman and descendant of slaves Dana instantly realizes the antebellum period as "one of the most dangerous"(Butler, 1988, p. 77). Kevin on the other hand, willingly travels to the past with Dana "thinking what an experience it would be to stay in it-go West and watch the building of the country"(p.97). He even believes that the picture of slavery he sees on the Weylin plantation is not as bad as he has imagined: "No overseer. No more work than the people can manage"(Butler, 1988, p.100). Dana informs him "'you don't have to beat people to treat them brutally'"(p.100).

As Dana assumes the role of Kevin's slave and Kevin that of private tutor, they work to fit into their roles as much as possible, but are bothered by their easy adjustment to plantation life. As Dana says, "It seemed as though we should have had a harder time adjusting to this particular segment of history-adjusting to our places in the household of a slaveholder"(Butler, 1988, p.97). She believes that their move to a more chronologically and ideologically regressive time should have created more tension and Dana questions the capability with which the two adjust to and even comply with racist attitudes so hostile to their own. Dana feels that things fall into the master/slave, dominator/dominated order of things much too conveniently for her and Kevin. Having no mechanism to return to his own time except through Dana, he is forced to decode the traumatic past into his lived experience by literally making a life for himself in a time that soon becomes terrifying and alien. Butler must use more risky means to show him that his return to glorious white, male American past is also "his nightmare"(Butler, 1988, p. 73,74). During his five years in the past, Kevin, like Dana, experiences the full post memorial process including a moment of identification and becomes emotionally involved in the horrors of slavery and develops "an *ethical* relation to the oppressed or persecuted other" (Hirsch, 2001, p. 10). Like Dana, Kevin's "entrance to the hell of slavery" is a whipping of a pregnant black slave strung up by her wrists and beaten until her baby falls to the ground and the woman dies. Confronted with such injustice and violence, Kevin decides to stand in opposition to the social order around him by helping the runaway slaves. Accordingly, Kevin is able to stay faithful to his twentieth-century concept of freedom and equality.

Like his black wife, Kevin returns from the past physically scarred. He too has been injured, involved and permanently changed by his engagement with past history. When he returns to the Weylin plantation, Dana at first does not recognize him "He looked more than ten years older than when I had last seen him. There was a jagged scar across his forehead-the remnant of what must have been bad wound. This place, this time, hadn't been any kinder to him than it had been to me"(Butler, 1988, p. 184). Both Dana's and Kevin's "disfigurements may also be read symbolically: both black and white Americans have been scarred by the institution and legacy of slavery" (Mitchell, 2001, p.70). Butler also suggests the possibility of Kevin's moral implication in the violence of the past. Dana wonders, "what might he be willing to do now that he would not have done before?" (p.184).

Through Kevin, Butler advocates that white Americans should be aware of the complex structure of racism in the United States and take responsibility in eliminating injustice. In fact, Butler's liberatory narrative shows that both black and white Americans must confront their shared past of racism, must recognize the pain and scars of the past, must live together as *Kindred*. Dana establishes the possibilities of racial reconciliation and relational equity with Kevin after she has confronted her familial heritage of violence and sexual exploitation through Rufus and Alice.

While Butler explores the means by which Americans of both races can come to terms with their nation's violent past, she does not model how the fully historicized man and woman can live in society and share their experiences with others. Actually, the time travel leaves both Dana and Kevin like ghosts who have outlived the historical circumstances and people that can make sense of their experiences. Sarah EdenSchiff (2009) argues that "part of the difficulties Dana faces becoming fully reconciled with the traumas of the past in her inability to communicate with anyone other than Kevin" and lack of any true "sense of community"(p.127). While Kevin and Dana complete a post memorial process of "identification, translation and differentiation", they do not create post memorial work in their contemporary moment that fully differentiate their ancestral past from their present. The reader is left with the hope that Dana and Kevin will create sharable post memorial work. It is not a coincidence that Butler represents Dana and Kevin as professional writers and suggests they might write their experiences. During her travels, Dana keeps a journal in shorthand and wonders "whether [she] could weave [those] pages into a story," that might become *Kindred*. (Butler, 1988, p.244).

As for the significance of text-based narrative and knowledge through experience, *Kindred* in its use of the time-travel device, seems to drive a conceptual wedge between the possibility to know the past through books and to know it by experience. Whereas in trauma theory the traumatic event can be referenced only indirectly, *Kindred's* dubious fantasy offers a scenario that claims it is only through direct experience that it can be fully appreciated. *Kindred* is a book that stands in ironic relation to textual depiction. The novel's deploys a scenario that resurrects the past and forces two contemporary people to know it. As the story of Dana's abductions grows more complicated, *Kindred's* reliance on textual knowledge begins to fade. Just as Dana's frequent journeys erode the boundaries between past and present, so does the novel's faith in the belief that books are the only way to reference a traumatic experience.

Since both Dana and Kevin are writers, books are significant markers of their twentieth-century lives. In Dana's present, text-based knowledge is a suitable means to understand the world and the only way to know the past. Butler criticizes this dependence on books by planning Dana's first abduction into the slave past from her home library. In fact, this site among books sets the background for the tension between textual representation and primary experience as ways of knowing the traumatic past from home library. This epistemological conflict is centered on the six trips Dana makes to the past in order to know her family origins and the traumatic experience that produced it. Through these trips, the novel presents a progression of ideas. At the beginning, the text based knowledge is shown as a reliable means of understanding the past. Then, faith in text-based knowledge retreats in favor of primary experience as the best way to apprehend the past. At the end, the novel presents a balanced methodology that combines text-based knowledge with primary experience.

During her first journeys to the past, Dana relies on her superficial readings of black history books to gather important information about slavery. From her readings, she learns that white people "won't kill [her]. Not unless [she's] silly enough to resist the other things they'd rather do-like raping [her], throwing [her] in jail as a runaway, and then selling [her]" (Butler, 1988, p.48). However, Dana continues to enrich her knowledge of her ancestors with African American history texts, believing that this information is vital to her survival in the antebellum period. Dana and Kevin try to create a basis of knowledge that will assist Dana in her ordeals in the past by consulting books, only to find "[n]othing. I hadn't really thought there would be anything in books"(Butler, 1988, p.48). Dana returns for her third trip to the past equipped with little information from these texts, even though at times they help her navigate different subject positions.

Although Dana's text-based knowledge has helped her navigate different subject positions, she does not rely exclusively on this knowledge. Significantly, she learns more about her role from a balanced view of book knowledge and primary experience as listening to slaves for example. Motivated by her anger that Rufus has not sent her letters to Kevin, who is left behind, Dana runs away in search for Kevin herself. Her escape is discovered when one of the slaves betrays her to the Weylins. Dana blames herself and the failure of her books to adequately prepare her. Comparing her escape attempt with the one Alice made earlier, Dana remarks:

We were both failures, she and I. We'd run and been brought back, she in days, I in only hours. I probably knew more than she did about the general layout of the Eastern Shore. She knew only the area she'd been born and raised in, and she couldn't read a map. I knew about towns and rivers miles away—and it hadn't done me a damned bit of good! (Butler, 1988, p.177)

In fact, Dana's comparison of her approach to escape with Alice's approach is an explanation of the difference between text-based knowledge and primary experience. Whereas Dana has read a lot about local experience, Alice is illiterate. Thus, Dana's failure to escape the nineteenth-century slavery can be viewed as failure of texts to fully prepare one of the vagaries of the past and as a critique of textual representation as mastery of the historical past. Dana's predicament suggests that the past must not only be seen but also be actively engaged. Dana realizes that her book learning has been relatively useless in the nineteenth-century, particularly as it relates to attaining her freedom. "Nothing in my education or knowledge of the future had helped me to escape"(Butler, 1988, p. 177).

When Dana and Kevin fail to find concrete remnants of Rufus house, they turn to archives to know about the past. Thus in their time travel as Kubitschek (1991) argues, Dana and Kevin "have acquired understanding of the past, not as some procession of abstracts like 'slavery' and 'westward expansion', but as a collection of known individuals' experiences."(p.26). Although text-based knowledge may pale in comparison to primary experience, *Kindred* ultimately decides that both are necessary to know about the past. Dana's need to "touch solid evidence", as Kevin puts it, is partially satisfied by the combination of text-based knowledge and primary experience. The archival records give her some indication of what happened after the house was set on fire to disguise Rufus's murder. This representation of Dana touching her scars is also "a metonym for the importance of accessing traumatic knowledge using both symbolic gestures and physical evidence...to acknowledge the meanings of trauma in the body and in narrative representation" (Woolfrok, 2009,p. 33).

The novel also makes the simple yet important point that corporeality is vital part of slavery. Butler's use of present-day black body to reference the slave past echoes the meanings of the black body in slavery. In fact, Dana's body represents history. *Kindred* introduces the concept of bodily engagement to the broad practice of trauma theory to produce a representation of traumatic knowledge that



combines the literal and figurative, and equally values body and mind. Finally, the reader is left with an image of Dana and Kevin, “scarred dismembered and years beyond their proper ages... commiserating in their knowledge that history has not preserved even for them the world they once knew. (Parham, 2009b, p.1326).

Finally, Dana’s travel may be considered as literal transportation between separate times and places, made possible by the “turning of her own body, folding inside out and back again. It is a journey into her own interiority, a place beholden to the facts of her own body’s history”(Parham, 2009b, p.1326). This journey is one through which symbols tend to actualize, “as the act of reading becomes an enactment of the text, which for the reader is a book, but for Dana her own body that bespeaks history” (Parham, 2009b, p.1326). As the traumatizing elements of Dana’s past are made accessible to her, the boundary between the self as a self and the self as another, as well as the boundary between now and then collapses.

Thus, as has been shown, Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* is a typical postmemory narrative. Butler uses her narrative to theorize her relation to her inheritance and highlight the influence that relationship has on the formation of contemporary identity. Thus, the novel conforms to Marianne Hirsch’s postmemory theory. Butler has effectively used the technique of time travel to relive the experience of slavery by enabling the contemporary Dana to go back to the past to meet her ancestors who were living in slavery plantation. In fact, Butler creates “a dialectic between two specific historical moments in American history: The period of chattel slavery and the richly symbolic bicentennial year of 1976” (Mitchell, 2001, p. 43). Through the protagonist’s body which became the site of memory, Butler emphasizes the need of both experience and historical documents to come to terms with the past to enable one to live the present and future.

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