

Chapter 1: Introduction

Kindred and *Twelve Years a Slave* as Narratives of Trauma

This dissertation seeks to explore the link between slavery, trauma and African American identity. It draws from theoretical perspectives related to trauma and applies them to study trauma originating from the experience of slavery, and the centrality of memory and history of slavery in the formation of African American identity. It argues that narrating the direct experience of slavery is both an attempt at writing history and recovery from trauma. Similarly, revisiting the history of slavery is an attempt at recovery from the intergenerational transmission of trauma, and cultural wounding. Understanding based on the realization that though the present may be infected by the past yet is different from it helps one see oneself in a new position, a new and different context. For this purpose, this dissertation undertakes two representative narratives- *Twelve Years a Slave*, a slave narrative that depicts the experiential trauma of slavery and *Kindred*, a neo-slave narrative that deals with the memory and history of slavery. Locating trauma in, but not limited to, displacement, psychic, cultural and physical violence, and cultural, social and racial denigration, this study attempts to examine the possibility and the need for recovery from the trauma of slavery. In addition, it takes into account the need to understand the experience and memories of slavery in the formation of African American identity.

Slave narratives and neo-slave narratives use writing to reveal and change the black's imposed "subject-position," which, according to JanMohamed, can be defined only "in terms of the effects of economic exploitation, political disenfranchisement, social manipulation, and ideological domination on the cultural formation of minority subjects and discourses" (9). The black protagonists of both the narratives suffer from imposed lack of identity. They resort to writing to upend and reclaim their agency. In

Kindred, Butler positions Dana, a contemporary black subject, in the locus of slavery. The contemporary black character with her new consciousness problematizes the ethos and worldview of white supremacist American culture. Dana's twentieth century worldview and consciousness allows Butler to frame a referential narrative that becomes a counter hegemonic discourse establishing what Goran Therborn has called a narrative of "alter- ideology" (28). Situating her black protagonist at once in conjunction with white counterparts both in nineteenth century and contemporary milieu, Butler can examine the racial and gender relations then and now to offer solutions to existing social and racial problems. By positioning Dana, the black protagonist, in the nineteenth century milieu of slavery Butler presents history as embodied experience. Similarly, establishing her ancestry to a white male, Rufus, Butler depicts the difficult question of race as marked by whiteness in Dana's past and blackness in Rufus's future. Intermingling of blood then points not only to the heterogeneity of American population but more importantly, history as shared, reconcilable, and total.

Historical writings, slave narratives and neo-slave narratives attempt to undertake the difficult questions regarding slavery and its representation. The Civil Rights uprising and Black Power movement of the sixties engendered a change in the historiography of slavery. Alluding to the change in the contemporary narrativity of slavery, Ashraf Rushdy coined the term "Neo-slave narratives" to refer to those writings that, "assume the form, adopt the conventions, and take on the first-person voice of the ante-bellum slave narrative" (3). The Neo-slave narratives, informed by a new subjectivity and conscience, examine the issue of racial identity. The impetus behind these narratives is to reconstitute and question the gap and reality of slavery against what is typically depicted in the slave narratives. In "Serving the Form,

Conserving the Order,” Rushdy interprets Charles Johnson’s *Oxherding Tale* and asserts that there is a “dynamic interplay in which form gives shape to and is shaped by the materials of narrative” (182). The dynamic interplay, then, between the form of writing and history, legacy and memory of slavery as its material conceives Neo-slave narratives.

Timothy Spaulding focuses on neo-slave narratives that rely on fantastic and antirealistic depictions of slavery. According to Spaulding, “These novels call into question our tendency to regard realism as the ideal narrative mode for history and historical fiction; they implicitly assert that claims of authenticity, realism, and objectivity result, particularly in the discourse on slavery, in a potentially oppressive obfuscation of the past” (5). Spaulding identifies the role of postmodern discourse “placed in flux all faith in traditional conceptions of identity, aesthetic or cultural value, and history” (13) in understanding contemporary African American lives. Using various writers like Butler, Morrison, Johnson, etc, Spaulding illustrates the ways how counter histories steeped in the fantastic, anachronism, time travel, “rememory,” and even vampires allow writers to depict “a more complex, nuanced view of black identity in the context of American slavery”(4). This view of history partakes the larger narrative of the history of slavery and attempts to makes it one and inclusive. Further, Elizabeth Ann Keadle in “Fragmented Identities: Explorations of the Unhomely in Slave and Neo-Slave Narratives” deals primarily with identity of survival and recovering painful memories so as to excavate the debris of slavery to form a new sense of kindred and speak the unspeakable. The attempt here is to create and understand the ‘Self’ as affected and reconfigured by the experience of slavery.

The history of slavery is embedded in the cultural memory of the blacks.

Though black slavery is a thing of past and legally abolished, it is deeply rooted in the

collective memory of the African Americans. Collective memory of enslavement is not a deep recess of history that the blacks wish to forget, rather, it acts as a mirror through which they can view themselves better. Collective memory is not just something of the past that resonates in the present but it is a veritable site of experiences of everyday life. Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka assert that “cultural memory preserves the store of knowledge from which a group derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity- a kind of identificatory determination” (130). This determination enables one to differentiate oneself in terms of difference or similarity with regard to members of other group. Though “no memory can preserve the past,” collective memory and cultural memory have the capacity to reconstruct the past (Assmann and Czaplicka 130). Northup’s lived reality of slavery in 1800s serves to add to the cultural and collective memory of the blacks. Butler resorts to this collective and cultural memory to reconstruct the history of slavery. This reconstruction of the lived experience of slavery allows her to depict the past and facilitate the understanding of its implications on the present.

The study of history of slavery is indispensable to the understanding of the formation of African American identity. It is in this collective memory of slavery where cultural trauma of the blacks is situated and the African American identity derived from. *Kindred* partakes in the reconstruction of the past through contemporary perspective with recourse to the memory of the lived experience of the past. The conception of *Kindred*, according to Octavia Estelle Butler, is associated with the black consciousness raising that was taking place in the 1960s, and that she was involved with some people who had gone off the deep end with the generation gap (*The Black Scholar* 15). Relevant here is LaCapra’s statement that, “Reference is dual or multiple in that references to the past involving truth claims- more broadly,

readings and interpretations of the past- are intimately and constitutively bound up with dialogue and debates in the present which bear fruit on the future” (203). Viewed from this sense, *Kindred* becomes a dialogue with contemporary African Americans who outright dismiss the survivors of slavery without consideration to their context. Deriving from black cultural memory, Butler reconstructs the slavery past and appropriates it for the understanding of the African American present. It attempts to depict how revisiting the history of slavery enables understanding the difficult past of slavery and problematics of the formation of African American identity based on the shared experience of it. Overcoming physical and cultural dislocations they had experienced in the past has to be grounded in the new sense of identity, ‘new history’ and infused with contemporary reality. Therefore, the reference to slavery as a traumatizing event simultaneously functions as the locus of African American identity and demands overcoming its traumatic legacy to come to an understanding of the contemporary American nation.

While *Kindred* is devised on reconstructed memory of slavery, *Twelve Years a Slave* portrays its protagonist experiencing and representing experiential trauma. Northup’s experience in the plantations is a matter of social dislocation that inflicts him with fractured identity. Northup’s narrative depicts a constant struggle of coming to terms with the forcibly ascribed identity of a slave, and the various incidents of resistance and attempts of escape signal his desire to assert his former ‘freeman’ identity. I argue that for Solomon Northup enslavement is both an individual traumatizing experience and shared experience of the atrocities of slavery. Similarly, I read his recourse to the memory of traumatic experience of slavery and subsequent narrativization as an attempt at recovery via ‘acting out’ and ‘working through’

trauma. As a traumatized subject, he attempts to reconfigure his sense of self that was problematized and shattered by the experience of slavery.

Over the twelve years of his bondage, Northup lives in the border space between slavery and freedom; during her transposition to the Maryland Dana embodies the experience of slavery bordering between past and present. In *Borderlands*, Gloria Anzaldúa describes the border space as “a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary,” a space “in a constant state of transition” (3). In the following chapters, I read how this applies to both *Kindred*'s Dana and *Twelve Years a Slave*'s Northup who are border subjects positioned between cultures and past and present consciousness. In terms of the female characters of the two undertaken narratives, this state is aggravated by what Castillo calls in *Massacre of the Dreamers* “double sexism, being female and indigenous” (7). Dana, Patsey and other black woman's identity is further problematized by subject-position conditioned by both racism and misogyny.

The institution and legacy of slavery is a historical reality demanding rigorous interrogation. Tendency to overlook history as simply bygone is commonplace leading to ‘historical amnesia’. It is imperative, then, the tendency of ‘historical amnesia’ be prevented by revisiting and speaking about it to bring about an understanding that can illuminate historical reality. It is relevant here to bring the African word ‘sankofa’ from the Akan tribe in Ghana, meaning “it is not taboo to fetch what is at risk of being left behind.” It expresses this quest for knowledge of the past based on “critical examination, and intelligent and patient investigation. The imperative then is to “return and claim our past in order to move toward our future. It is in understanding who we were that will free us to embrace who we now are” (“Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing” 40).

The recognition of the past as a storehouse of cultural and collective memory can help us avoid the repetition of past mistakes and enable us to accept who we were then and what we have become now.

In the context of American slavery, the experience and memory of enslavement lies at the core of African American identity. We can observe the differing perspective of black and white Americans regarding slavery. The difference in perspectives of both parties involved- slave and slaveholders- marks slavery as a sensitive, contested experience and memory. Undertaking the study of slavery thus becomes a fragile terrain to tread on. Asserting that the relation between collective identity and memories of trauma “are deeply intertwined” (336), Pier M. Larson in notes the interplay of differing perspectives of the perpetrators and the victims in the following words:

Most ethnic minorities anchor their collective identities in the remembrance of past and present victimization. Victims of social trauma and their descendants often engage in purposeful and explicit remembering as a form of empowerment and identity formation. Conversely, perpetrators and descendants seek to obliterate and question the validity of such memories and thereby undermine the empowerment and the identities they generate. (336)

In the American context, the white perpetrators and their descendant present the history and legacy of slavery in perspective that contradict the African American’s perspective who emphasize its centrality in their cultural memory. Larson emphasizes the point using David W. Blight’s remarks that the study of slavery becomes, “study of cultural struggle, of contested truths, of moments, events, or even texts in history that thresh out rival versions of the past which are in turn put to the service of the present”(Qtd 34). As with every extreme, traumatic limit events in history, the study

of slavery from the viewpoint of the blacks invokes interpretation opposed to the mainstream narrative of slavery.

Echoing the same sentiment, Ron Eyerman sketches a theory of slavery as an African-American cultural trauma that is foundational to black American identity. It is not the experience of slavery but the memory of slavery, its reconfiguration in the minds of later generations of blacks that constitutes what Eyerman terms the cultural trauma. He argues that “African American” is a historically formed identity that is rooted in the collective memory of slavery. According to Alexander, the process of meaning making, or “story-telling,” which effectively transforms catastrophic events into cultural traumas, may not derive common apprehension but can become a “complex and multivalent symbolic process that is contingent, highly contested, and sometimes highly polarizing” (“Toward” 12). Smelser suggests that this often results in a “fascinating type of cultural accumulation — a nonending, always-expanding repository . . . a continuous and pulsating process of remembering, coping, negotiating, and engaging in conflict” (“Psychological” 50, 54). This helps us to trace the nuances that inform black slavery, the introduction of a new identity- the politically correct African American from racialized ‘black,’ and the path through which American history has unfolded- through differing interpretations, contestations over the meaning and legacy of slavery and the need to revisit the very site of slavery.

The varying and often contradicting perspectives that slavery is treated with, coupled with the reemergence of the issues surrounding slavery in public domain prompts Berlin to ask rhetorically, “Is the new presence of slavery an incitement to racial conflict or the beginning of a healing process?” (1261). The answer to this question can be either affirmative or negative, and arguments for and against it might be equally strong. Quoting Eric Foner, Bethany Johnson emphasizes:

African Americans possessed special authority over the meaning of slavery. While white Americans could profitably forget or “sugarcoat” slavery, for blacks “slavery was a historical experience, which would remain central to their conception of themselves and their place in history.” They did not have to swallow the whites’ interpretation; slavery’s brutal reality would remain alive in blacks’ collective memory. (32)

The legacy of slavery thus becomes integral to the formation of African American identity. It is in relation to the historical experience that they can come to an understanding of themselves.

Both fiction and history are mediums of engagement with the past. Many scholars have commended the role of fiction in engaging with the past- more so of history about controversial or divisive issues. Grant Rodwell in the chapter “Understanding the Past through Historical Fiction” of his book *Whose History?* asserts that historical novel’s capacity, compared to traditional history textbooks, to build empathy in students is ‘well established’. In his discussion of writer’s engagement with the past, Rodwell, citing Taylor, suggests that, “by asserting a metonymic contiguity of the past with the present, the moment of origin that the past is sensed to contain may be touched by narrative travel along the diachronicity of history” (313). The unfolding of historical events shapes what is to follow. So, the present can be better understood as being shaped by past; the imprints of the past are markedly visible in the now. To understand the black American experience and identity one needs to delve into the past- their enslavement, their struggle, their freedom and memory of it all that is emblematic of their present positioning.

Much scholarship has focused on *Kindred* as dealing with the issues of gender and identity, with emphasis especially on black female sentimentality. These can be

surmised as Butler's attempt as an initiative to intervene for recognition of subjects or identities that were once nominally included or suppressed altogether in practice in national-popular. Linh U. Hua critiques the naturalization of tendency to "sentimentalize history, intimacy, and love to the detriment of what I call a black feminist sentimentality" (391). She adds that "black feminist sentimentality refuses speculative time as a temporal narrative that insures the future on the continual violation and management of black female subjects" (392). Read in this light, *Kindred's* becomes an attempt to upend the national-popular version by documenting the continuation of race and gender oppression that continue late into the 20th century. *Kindred* has been repeatedly read as an attempt to rewrite slave history and its prominence as moving away from male-centered authorship of interpretation and writing history. Using the lens of biopolitics and history, Robertson examines the intersection of a science fiction of the body with the American history. He argues that, for Butler, "history is immanent in and inseparable from the bodies of those who experience it" (363). Connections between bodies and history then become the central preoccupation of *Kindred*. Only by reading *Kindred's* treatment of embodiment can we come to an understanding of Butler's radical concept of American history that requires its inheritors to embrace the past, no matter how painful or problematic it may be. Robertson argues that "Butler understands history to always already involve the terms that form the biopolitical: life and politics" (376). Viewed through this lens, the particularity of embodied experience and affective relationship with the world is "bound up in politics and the identities that such politics inform, but that is only the case because it cannot be otherwise" (Robertson 376). By positioning Dana, the black protagonist, in the nineteenth century milieu of slavery Butler presents history as embodied experience. Similarly, establishing her ancestry to a white male, Rufus,

Butler depicts the difficult question of race- whiteness in Dana's past and blackness in Rufus's future. Intermingling of blood then points not only to the heterogeneity of American population but more importantly, history as shared, reconcilable, and total.

Gregory Hampton in "*Kindred*: History, Revision and (Re)memories of Body" focuses on the narrative architecture, imagination, blurring of the genre bodies in his reading of *Kindred*. Hampton emphasizes the "figuration of bodies... dependent upon a narrative history and the memories that constitute the past and present" (105). He states that the provision of time travel "allows us to imagine how the past can exist in the present and how the present can be manifested into the past" (105). Furthermore, he infers the difference in twentieth-century American value of white and black bodies as influenced by the legacy of slavery. Conforming to the notion of cultural identity, in "Lost Memories: Memory as a Process of Identity in the Fiction of Octavia Butler" he exemplifies *Kindred* as examining marginalized bodies retaining memories of the past identities. He asserts "Butler's fiction demonstrates how despite great efforts to redefine marginalized bodies according to the wishes of a dominant hegemony, those bodies retain memories of their past identities" (277). Even if the body loses memories inscribed on it, the marginalized body creates "a new identity of its own" drawing memories from remnants of such memories and often times fictional/mythical history. The body that experiences events and absorbs meaning instinctually generates memory and identity. This does not remove the body from marginalization, he asserts that it "does begin a process that can facilitate self-identification and actualization" (Hampton 277). Butler, through *Kindred*, uses the intersection between historical knowledge and imaginative narrative to facilitate African American identity.

Numerous scholars have dealt with *Twelve Years a Slave* as a slave narrative focusing on its eminence in portraying the experiences of slavery in the Deep South. Janet Eileen Neary in “Fugitive Testimony: Race, Representation and the Slave Narrative Form” focuses on the problematic of European tradition of autobiography in dealing with the issues of race, representation and experiences of slavery and argues that “ex-slave narrators actively write against it” (59). Neary examines the ‘manipulation or undermining’ of the conventions of authentication which structure slave narratives and how “ex-slave narrators undercut the racial assumptions motivating that structure” (59). Northup acts as a double bind of participant and observer of the tradition of the slavery and Neary studies how his inscription as both Solomon, a free citizen of New York, and Platt, a slave, fractures Northup’s narrative. Historically, in the antebellum south, Northup’s blackness is an imposed difference, a site of vulnerability to enslavement, a racial oppression systematically exploited. His blackness downgraded him to a nonperson- without agency and without voice, so much so that the “‘evidence’ of his black skin must be overcome by written documentation attesting to his free status” (60) before he can be released from slavery, a problem that is reflected in the literary conventions of all slave narrative. Northup eventually produces written documentation before he gets his freedom back.

Northup’s narrative is a narrative of trauma originating in the episodes of forced relocation, experience of enslavement, longing for the stolen past, attempt at escape and, finally, liberation. For Northup whose world was complete, whose identity was rooted to being a “free citizen from New York” (39) finds his world and his identity shattered by the sudden kidnapping into the undesired world of slavery. The disjoint, the dislocation that slavery inflicts upon him renders his life traumatic, and his endurance over the twelve years of slavery becomes his quest for freedom; his

narrative becomes an act of recording history. He exemplifies Horvitz's assertion that, "the greater one's ability to 'make story' out of trauma...the more likely s/he is to regain control of her or his life after that trauma" (6). His narrative memory becomes a way of recovery from trauma and reconfiguring his sense of self, his place in the world. Silvia Pellicer-Ortín asserts that autobiographical works "respond to the double need to voice the collective and individual traumatic experiences triggered by the Holocaust and of providing a healing mechanism for the transformation of these traumatic memories into narrative memories" (71). Drawing an analogy, we can argue that Northup's narrative performs the same function regarding his experience of slavery. Affirming that his narrative "is no fiction, no exaggeration" (321), Northup reminds his readers that the purpose of sharing his narrative is to "give a candid and truthful statements of facts: to repeat the story of my life" (18). Thus repeating the story of his life, his traumatic experience as a slave and giving voice, as a witness and co-sufferer, to fellow slave's predicament enables Northup to voice the collective and individual experience and transform those memories into narrative memories. The creation of narrative memory facilitates his coming to terms with the new situation and enables his recovery. For Northup, his goal is not only the attainment of freedom and the obliteration of the traumatic past; rather it is in retelling his experience to the exigencies of his post-freedom situation. This retelling or narrative memory of his experience would not only enable him to work through his traumatizing experience but also enable him to relate his identity as subjected to his positioning in a specific milieu- in and out of slavery. Viewed in this light, Northup's narrative memory is both an attempt to recovery and a site of cultural memory where the experience of the blacks in contemporary times could be reverberated, and thus reconstructed and revisited to understand its implications.

The issues of historiography, identity, legacy and memory of slavery have occupied special attention in the literature and criticism of slavery. Many scholars, informed by the temporal dimension of trauma, have studied slavery as a limit experience of traumatizing event. In addition, the key scholarship tendency has been to attach much significance to the temporal dimension of trauma culminating in “a homogenous interpretation of representation of trauma” (Balaev 149). Having discussed the overarching issues related to the trauma of slavery, this study attempts to conjoin the importance of place- the spatial dimension with the ‘temporal’- in order to illuminate slavery, as depicted in the experiential and reconstructed narratives of slavery, as an event that happened in a specific place in a specific point of time. Furthermore, it renders a close examination, which reveals that place, as a geographic location of human experience in a specific empirical context, as a bearer of historical memory and site of trauma, holds key to understanding the unfolding of slavery and evocation of traumatic memory. For this, it also takes into account the unbreakable dialectic between man and place and examines how place act back on slave and constrain and channel their actions. It helps us to understand how the slaves’ positioning in a specific place of enslavement- place being a product of immanent intersubjectivity- defines their experience, reality and interpretation of slavery.

A comparative study of the cultural politics of configuration and reconfiguration of identity based on both the experience and recreation of the experience of slavery as explicated in slave, and neo-slave narratives could be an interesting area of further study. This dissertation deals with the issue of identity, it does not examine the problematic of socially constructed nature of our entire repository of terms to define and bound identity, nationality, race and ethnicity. The entanglement of cultural and historiographical perspective; attempt to read slavery as

a significant event of personal and social dislocation and individual and cultural trauma; and finally mapping trauma to the originary experience of slavery and its intergenerational transmission to the necessity of overcoming it makes this dissertation somewhat discursive and lengthy.

To sum up, slavery occupies a significant status in both history and memory of the American experience. Looking holistically, Northup's 'wounds' are the mark of the history and Butler recalls and (re)embodies these wounds in an attempt to obtain, at present, an acknowledgement of the suffering and abuse they passed by calling for a cognitive and affective engagement with the traumatic past. Unbounded privileging or negating the history of slavery thwarts the possibility of reconciliation for it demands that recovery be made from the resultant trauma. By incorporating slavery's memory into history, a collective and shared past can be formed. Through this collective past infused with both the troubling legacy and acceptance of the history and memory of slavery the traumatizing experience of slavery can be transcended, worked through, and recovery achieved.

Chapter II

Theoretical Framework for Reading Issues of Slavery and Trauma

This chapter discusses some paradigmatic theories and their distinct conceptualizations of trauma, memory, and reconstruction of traumatic events and their relation to the formation of identity. Conceptualizations of the effects of traumatizing events, meaning of such events and the transmission of trauma propel the discussion to identify the need for recovery and ways and possibilities of it. Briefly touching upon the nature and influential notions of trauma, it takes into account the problematic issue of identity connecting it primarily to the concept of dislocation and representation. Then it moves on to discuss the idea of memory and reconstruction of trauma. The chapter relates the meaning of place and time to situate experience and memory of trauma of slavery to come to an understanding of its implication in the contemporary times in order to open an avenue where the need and possibility of recovery can be assimilated. The body of literature undertaken for this study provides an overview of theoretical perspectives and arguments that can illuminate the reading of narratives of trauma from heterogeneous perspectives.

Narratives and Trauma:

The experience, memory and the idea of an African American Slavery is a cultural marker, a primal scene, a founding narrative and a site of memory in the formation of African American identity. Captured or sold from their native lands, the story of the Africans is the story of traumatizing physical and cultural dislocation and displacement from the very beginning. Laurie Vickroy equates slavery to the holocaust in the sense in which both “attempted cultural destruction, redefinition and dehumanization of victims for ideological purposes, and a traumatic aftermath for survivors living with these devastations and designations” (123). Slavery is thus an

event of psychological and cultural trauma for the enslaved blacks. It is also inscribed as a primal scene and founding event of cultural trauma for the succeeding generations African Americans.

Succeeding generations of African Americans have formed their own sense of identity by reflecting upon and re-interpreting the meaning of slavery. The articulations and (re)constructions of slavery constitute what we can call African American collective memory and collective narrative. As components and site of such collective memory, slave and neo- slave narratives depict life under slavery, either experiential or reconstructed, and narrate the traumatizing experience of their characters. Narratives, as James V. Wertsch in *Voices of Collective Remembering* highlights, have an important role and place in relation to individual and collective memory. For him, we use narratives in making sense of our history and ourselves. He asserts while universal, narratives are at the same time particular, rooted in “the particular cultural, historical, and institutional settings in which we live” (57). The autobiographical slave narratives though are seemingly personal, express at the same time what is mostly common to the experience of all slaves. Similarly, in Balaev’s words, trauma narratives “convey profound loss or intense fear on individual or collective levels” through an individual protagonist who, “functions to express a unique personal traumatic experience, yet, the protagonist also functions to represent and convey an event that was experienced by a group of people, either historically based or prospectively imagined” (150,155). These perspectives assists reading slave and neo-slave narrative’s referential function of making reference to the real or fictional events of slavery, or its dialogic function of referring to other narratives of slavery.

Slave and neo-slave narratives provide a roadmap for analyzing both

psychological or physical and cultural trauma arising out of slavery. The psychological trauma involves an individual suffering a traumatic event. Such trauma may or may not be transmitted generationally. However, this does not deny that such trauma may be a part of the larger cultural trauma, provided the grounds of commonality on which the event is inflicted upon the individual. Eyerman distinguishes between cultural trauma and psychological trauma in the following words:

As opposed to psychological or physical trauma which involves a wound and the experience of great emotional anguish by an individual, cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people who have achieved some degree of cohesion. In this sense, the trauma need not necessarily be felt by everyone in a group or have been directly experienced by any or all. ("The Past" 163)

Eyerman's definition helps us to understand how contemporary African Americans or the blacks living in the same period of slavery can identify and relate with the experience of slavery, something they might or might not have undergone.

The consensus about a traumatic event, in the words of Judith Herman, is that it "overwhelms the ordinary human adaptations to life...involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death" (33). A traumatic event leaves the victim unable to assimilate or process the event, and the victim responds through various mechanisms such as psychological numbing, or shutting down on normal emotional response. For Caruth, a traumatic event inflicts 'a wound not upon the body but upon the mind' and this infliction hampers "the mind's experience of time, self, and the world" (16-7). Unlike a bodily wound that is 'simple and healable,' traumatic event is "experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully

known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor” (17). These repetitive actions point towards Lacapra’s notion of acting out. If the traumatic event is not worked through, it becomes a speaking wound. The speaking wound analogy applies across the interrelated ways of conceptualizing trauma:

...trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature- the way it was precisely not known in the first instance- return to haunt the survivor later on. (4)

The speaking wound demands our attention to the reality or truth which otherwise may not be available or represented. “This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our everyday actions and our language”(17). Caruth explores the complex ways in which knowing and not knowing are entangled in the language of trauma and the stories associated with it. The victims of traumatic events like slavery depict such features of the trauma they have gone through. This notion of trauma will be applied in the textual analyses that succeed this chapter.

The insights of cultural trauma are highly applicable in the readings of slave narratives. In their 2004 collection of essays, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, Jeffrey C.Alexander, Ron Eyerman, et al. propose a model of collective trauma emphasizing the meaning making process of cultural trauma formation. Denying that event itself-however large or catastrophic- is inherently traumatic, they instead place the traumatizing aspect on meaning making: “It is the meanings that provide the sense of shock and fear, not the events themselves” (Alexander, “Toward” 10); or, as Smelser puts it, “cultural traumas are for the most part historically made, not born”

(“Psychological” 37). Eyerman suggests the need to “establish some event or occurrence as the significant ‘cause,’ its traumatic meaning must be established and accepted, a process which requires time as well as mediation and representation” (“The Past” 160). In the introduction to chapter 1, Eyerman, in *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity*, locates cultural trauma not in the experience of slavery but in the memory of slavery as reconfigured in the minds of the later generations of black Americans. He asserts that, “A cultural trauma must be understood, explained and made coherent through public reflection and discourse” (“The Past” 160). Further, he offers the more formal definition of cultural trauma provided by Neil Smelser:

A memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation which is (a) laden with negative affect, (b) represented as indelible, and (c) regarded as threatening a society's [or group's] existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions. (“Psychological” 40)

The black slavery in American experience and history is at once an event that is indelible in African American’s memory and the experience they relate their identity to. For Alexander, cultural trauma arises, “when members of a collective feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever” (1). Cultural trauma changes their “future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (1). For the blacks, slavery was such an experience and all succeeding generations of slaves can identify with.

The invocation of memory of trauma and its transmission paves the way to bring in the question of the referentiality and representation of trauma. “Cultural

trauma calls attention to the negotiated recollection of events and to the role of representation” (Eyerman 163). Representation of trauma calls for recreating the event for “Accurate representation of trauma can never be achieved without recreating the event since, by its very definition, trauma lies beyond the bounds of 'normal' conception” (*Worlds of Hurt* 15). This notion of trauma and memory demands the necessity to recreate or abreact through narrative recall of the experience. This abreactive model asserts that traumatic experience produces a temporal gap and dissolution of the self. For Tal, “the remembrance of trauma is always an approximate account of the past, since traumatic experience precludes knowledge, and, hence, representation” (qtd. in “Trends”150). Traumatic experience affects the sufferer’s sense of self and consciousness. This impact, derived from Freudian notion of Trauma, is an inherent characteristic of traumatic experience and memory.

The need for reconstruction of traumatizing experience can be alluded to the notion that “interpreting events may take time and distance,” (Eyerman 163) for significant events of trauma denies immediate understanding and comprehension. It refers to the temporal structure, the belatedness or the “inherent latency within the experience” (*Unclaimed* 17). Moreover, that which is “not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time” (*Unclaimed* 17). It is in this framework that neo-slave narratives reconstruct the experience and memory of slavery in a new understanding, a new frame of reference attempting to bring to prominence what previously was not understood or repressed.

Dislocation and Trauma

Historically, Black slaves were either alienated from their own culture, which distanced them from their origins, or ostracized because of their ethnicity. The same motif of displacement, that is to say the lack of a concrete position on the level of both

identity and geography, structures both undertaken narratives. At the center of these texts lies the quest for freedom and identity- for Northup, emancipation from slavery, and for Dana- freedom from the memory of slavery. The idea of place is one of the key components of both narratives' logic. The narratives' space is divided into both temporal and spatial dimension- 'here and there', and 'now and then' and it is from these bifurcations that much of the traumatizing tension results. Primarily, Northup is from 'there' but his forced relocation in the 'here' is traumatizing. Similarly, Dana is from 'now' but her transposition in the 'then' is her event of trauma. Their attempt is to belong to their assumed time and place.

Dana and Northup are dislocated, and their removal from the comfort of their home engulfs them with the feeling of what we can term as unhomey. In "The World and the Home," Bhabha terms the word 'unhomey' as awkward and asserts that unhomey moment creeps up when "taking the measure of your dwelling in a state of incredulous terror" (141). Unhomey house marks a deeper historical displacement and that is the condition of being black in racial America. The metaphor of the house of racial memory that Northup and Butler construct is built on private and the public, present and the past and, the psychological and the social realities of their observation and experience. Bhabha further adds, "The unhomey moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence" (11). In a way, the private, personal life experiences resonate the underlying socio-political conditions of one's life- the displacement, "the uncanny literary and social effects of enforced social accommodation, or historical migrations and cultural relocations" ("The World and the Home" 141). Slavery created cultural crisis of dislocation in the life on black people. Marris stresses that as relocation generally involves discontinuity, disruption of normal life, and a decline in quality of

life, those who are uprooted define it as a traumatic event (qtd. in Nuttman 271).

Northup and Dana experience a cultural crisis of dislocation when they are relocated in the plantation life among enslaved blacks whom they cannot easily identify with and in a way of life that is foreign to them.

Enslavement for Africans was not only violent and life threatening but marked a journey into dislocation, alienation, identity-loss and cultural annihilation. Katrina M. Powell's definition sums up the predicament of slavery and dislocation in the following words:

...the paths of displacement are violent journeys...the shifting of an identity is arguably violent...If we think of displacement not in terms of moving from one place to another...displacement then becomes a temporal space where identities are in metonymic relation to one another. Narratives of forced displacement are typically a resistance to that liminal space- such displacement is a shattering of identity, one that is forced rather than chosen.

(301-2)

For the blacks, historically their capture engenders the beginning of a violent, life-threatening journey. Their previous sense of self faces disjunction in the alien land to which they cannot identify themselves. Their experience from the capture until the emancipation is one that of trauma- psychological, physical and cultural. The resulting trauma is engraved into their collective memory and is an integral part of their identity formation as Katrina M. Powell underscores:

An actual body may be physically removed from a space, but the discursive identity of that body, that is, the stories told by and about that body, are inscribed on that body. However, the new physical space, the new identity, does not completely overtake the old identity. (301)

Forced into a different place away from home and violently ascribed a new identity, their body bears the brunt of enslavement and a deep nostalgia for the past identity remains. The experience of slavery shatters the identity of the slaves and invalidates the previously held assumptions about him and the world in the encounter with the truth of slavery.

The slave trade and plantation slavery not only uprooted the slaves from their home environment, but also subjected them to systematic racial denigration. Using Debra Hawhee's explanation of moving bodies, Powell reiterates, "Complexities arise as identities interact and move across space and time as they are displaced from 'home'" (300). The predicament of dislocation and cultural displacement evokes the trauma of not belonging to any place and culture. This cultural confusion one experiences when placed in an alien culture and society is termed as 'dislocation.' According to V. Saraswati, the individual may experience anger, frustration, fear, curiosity, fascination, repulsion and hatred in the state of cultural shock (223). Stripped off their home, sense of belonging and identity, the sense of being unfit, dislocated, and the duress of replacing one's culture to another marks the experience of slaves.

The native place or one's place of belonging performs an important function in the existence and identity of an individual. Ashcroft et al. assert that the concept of place is variable and "can have quite specific political as well as literary effects in the extent of displacement" (792). However, it is "not a visual construct, a measurable space or even a topographical system but a tangible location of one's own being. (Ashcroft 792) Thus, place and being are correlated. People express their identity in relation to culture, history or attaching oneself with their native land. Slaves were forced to cross cultural and geographical borders, thus fracturing their sense of

belonging and problematizing identity. If they are viewed as displaced bodies, “their individual and community identities are in the middle of enormous change” (*Anguish of Displacement* 142). Further, the notion of “moving identities” helps us understand “the complex ways that identity construction within relocation can occur (and reoccur)” (*Rhetoric of Displacement* 300). The gulf between cultures, language and disjunction in socio-political milieu create the base for dislocation. Ashcroft et al. write, “The concept of place and displacement demonstrate the very complex interaction of language, history and environment in the experience of colonized people and the importance of space and location in the process of identity formation” (177). Slaves ostracized in a violently relocated territory experience dislocation and displacement, and this coupled with the harsh treatment under slavery makes living miserable and deeply traumatic.

The reconfiguration of identity requires the embrace and commitment to contingent, ambiguous definitions of self. “They relate to the invention of tradition as much as to tradition itself, which they oblige us to read not as an endless reiteration but as ‘the changing same’: not the so-called return to roots but a coming-to-terms-with our ‘routes’” (Hall, “Introduction” 4). From Africans to enslaved black chattels, ex-slaves, Negroes the identity of what now comprises the politically correct African Americans we can trace the formation of identity as contingent to, moving and based on newer socio-cultural consciousness. In common sense language, identification is constructed on the back of recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation (Hall 2). Discursive approach of identification sees it as a construction, a process never completed- always in ‘process.’ It has “determinate conditions of existence- material and symbolic

resources” and is in the end conditional, lodged in contingency (Hall 2). From its psychoanalytic usage, Freud calls it “the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person” (qtd. in Hall 3) superficial differences. It accepts that identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation. Hall asserts:

...identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves.

Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation.

(“Introduction” 4)

In this sense, identity is contingent on representation and specific socio-cultural consciousness and positioning.

Transmission and Recovery from Trauma

The issue of memory of traumatic event holds key in the discussion of *Twelve Years a Slave* as central to its narrative structure and in *Kindred* as the seedbed for its inception. Northup's memory is immediate while Butler invokes the cultural memory of slavery to deal with the issue of ‘what now’ when all survivors of the slavery are dead. This question relates to my discussion of the impending crisis of trauma in the contemporary generation of African Americans and the need and way to recovery from such trauma. Furthermore, the concept of trauma as timeless, repetitious, and contagious supports a literary theory of transhistorical trauma, which has implications on contemporary individual, racial or cultural identity. This theory supports the notion

of shared experience and memory of trauma that can be handed down to an individual by a group in the historical past; or of an individual trauma that can be passed to others, provided that the individual and the group share same biologic, ethnic, social, racial, or gender attributes.

Trauma narratives can recreate and abreact the experience for those who were not historically there - the reader, listener, or witness. It is primarily through the workings of memory that traumas can be transmitted intergenerationally. Toni Morrison frames her *Beloved* as the working of remembering or rememory- “the act of imagination that is bound up with memory” (97) to unveil the interior lives of the slaves that was historically missing in previous slave narratives and “complement the matrix of slave narratives” (99). *Kindred* similarly is a work of imagination combined with the memory of slavery and through Dana it evokes “what the nerves and the skin remember as well as how it appeared” (Morrison 99).

Trauma can be transmitted intergenerationally through rememory or postmemory. Implying that rememory is characterized by *appropriation*, Hirsch defines postmemory as “an identification with the victim or witness of trauma, modulated by an admission of an *unbridgeable* distance” (89). Those not present in the traumatic context can attempt to understand the impact of the past’s traumatic experience through postmemory. She conceptualizes postmemory as, “...distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection” (*Family Frames* 22). So, postmemory acts as a passage through which succeeding generations of trauma survivors receive generational trauma. Furthermore, Hirsch asserts that “postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation . . .” (*Family*

Frames 22). This imaginative investment allows for the reconstruction of traumatic event by referring to the past events. Nevertheless, she applies this notion to characterize “the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated” (22). Appropriating Hirsch’s account of postmemory, we can infer that the descendants of survivor parents suffer a belated retraumatization to the traumatic event. Hirsch situates postmemory between memory and history. Postmemory is, therefore, a product of intergenerational transmission of trauma.

Traumatic experience can be transhistorically passed across generations through verbal recitations or through narrativization of the traumatic incidents. Caruth’s contagion theory of trauma states that trauma “is never simply one’s own,” rather the implication of trauma may be transmitted (*Unclaimed* 24). LaCapra accepts the possibility of such transmission of trauma regarding events of incredible dimensions. Rather they may be affected by it. He stresses the point that, “It may also be impossible for those born later ever to transcend this event fully and to put it in the past, simply as a past” (152). Since trauma is contagious and passed down, he adds that “it may be possible...to enable and try to bring about processes of working through that are not simply therapeutic for the individual but have political and ethical implications” (LaCapra 152). Slavery as one such event of incredible dimension and has political and ethical implications.

Avenues of Recovery from Trauma

Writing about deeply traumatic or troublesome issues such as slavery or the holocaust is a dealing that is at once gruesome and demanding. However, such writing can be rewarding in that it can act as ‘acting through’ and sometimes it is necessitated

by one's responsibility towards history and aids to form an identity. In "Beloved and Shoah": Witnessing The Unspeakable", Laurie Vickroy quotes Laplanche and Pontalis, to state the concept of working through. They define working through as, "a sort of physical work which allows the subject to accept certain repressed elements and to free himself from the grip of mechanisms of repetition" (488). Once the trauma is worked through, the compulsive repetition vanishes. Similarly, Claude Lanzmann emphasizes the process of working through "with partial recreation of the original traumatic contexts ..." (qtd. in "Beloved and Shoah" 128). This recreation makes palpable what is otherwise absent. It facilitates the demonstration of the impact of the dead on survivors and ignites the reemergence of traumatic memory while dealing with traumatic events.

Narrating the experience of slavery is narrating the experience of trauma that begs for the representation of the unrepresentable. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub emphasize oral or written testimonies in order to 'work through' historical traumas. In *Testimony*, Laub suggests that the survivor's compulsion to bear witness, to tell the tale, functions both as a means to reveal the truth and, more importantly, as a means of combating the survivor's internal sense of fragmentation and giving inner form to his experience. The witnesses talk to somebody-somebody they have been waiting for a long time. (70-1) Laub further identifies this "bonding, the intimate and total presence of the other," as "*an addressable other*," who helps enhance the survivor and induce his free expression (68). The only way for trauma survivors to heal their psychological wounds, if healing happens at all, is the presence of a fully engaging and empathetic listener whose job is to help the survivors integrate and make sense of their disorienting and unbearable experiences. To the survivor, telling the tale of his experience becomes tantamount to survival itself.

There are models that focus on the need to verbalize the experience of suffering for the recovery of trauma. Freud and Breuer advocate 'talking cure,' and Carl Jung asserts that the healing process begins when the traumatized person is able to transform traumatic events into a chronological narrative. Suzette A. Henke has defined the term *scriptotherapy* as "the process of writing out and writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic re-enactment" ("Introduction" xii-xiii). Thus, one of the main aims of "traumatic life writing would be to articulate some unbearable emotional crisis that has become unspeakable for the writer, so that what cannot be spoken may be written" ("Introduction" xviii). Drawing from his reading of the trauma novels, Balaev suggests that "the talking cure does not always provide a remedy for the traumatized protagonist by demonstrating that healing is achieved through various behaviors not tied to language, such as direct contact with the natural world"(164). Balaev's departure points towards the significance of moving beyond the resort to language as means of recovery from trauma.

LaCapra concedes the possibility of transference of trauma. He proposes two broad ways of coming to terms with it. He stresses the model of acting out and working through trauma, not as binary opposites, but with some distinctions. He emphasizes that these features derive from transference and "prevail in trauma and post-traumatic acting out in which one is haunted or possessed by the past and performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes" (21). In acting out, distinction between self and other and demarcation between present and past can become problematic, and the traumatized victim (experientially or empathically victimized) reenacts the traumatized event as if it is happening now and here. These features mark trauma that has not been 'worked through'. LaCapra defines working through as:

an articulatory practice: to the extent one works through trauma (as well as transferential relations in general), one is able to distinguish between past and present and to recall in memory that something happened to one (or one's people) back then while realizing that one is living here and now with openings to the future. (22)

The realization that one is living here and now does not mean the negation of one's past, rather it "requires going back to problems, working over them, and perhaps transforming the understanding of them" (148). Working through does not ascertain achieving "a state of closure or full ego identity" for victims or those who empathically relate to them, it may "counteract the force of acting out and the repetition compulsion" (22). In addition, he prefers a method of empathizing called 'empathic unsettlement' where a secondary witness listens with empathy to a victim's traumatic witness while recognizing the difference of his or her position as a witness. Though LaCapra favors working through as a viable process of dealing with trauma, nonetheless he delimits it saying that, "In any case certain wounds, both personal and historical, cannot simply heal without leaving scars or residues in the present" (144). The presence of the scars does not imply that trauma is residue insofar as the victim does not fall prey to repetition compulsion of the traumatic event.

For the trauma survivor, telling the story of his trauma or what he learned from that experience is "a personally reconstitutive act and expresses the hope that it will also be a socially reconstitutive act- changing the order of things as they are and working to prevent the enactment of similar horrors in the future" (Tal, "Speaking" 230). Writing therefore becomes a retrospective effort to give meaning and advocate change in status quo in confrontation with the dominant culture or precisely, the perpetrators culture that attempts to overlook or repress the event and memory of

trauma. In *The Worlds of Hurt*, Kali Tal expresses this struggle for the interpretation of trauma in the following words:

If survivors retain control over the interpretation of their trauma, they can sometimes force a shift in the social and political structure. If the dominant culture manages to appropriate the trauma and can codify it in its own terms, the status quo will remain unchanged. (7)

The ability to interpret traumatic event is both an attempt to recover from trauma and as in the case of slavery, an opposition to the ideology of slavery itself. Subjective interpretation by the victim or survivor of trauma then becomes a method of analysis of traumatic event.

Michelle Balaev advocates for alternative approaches such as ‘place theory’ for analysis of trauma in literature. She warns against a discursive dependence upon a single psychological theory of trauma that tends to produce “a homogenous interpretation of the diverse representations in the trauma novel and the interplay that occurs between language, experience, memory, and place” (149). Through memory and through the entrance, physical or vicarious, into the very site of trauma, one can come to a comprehensive understanding of the past. This inquisition helps surface the truth, bring about both change in consciousness and understanding of self in relation to the past and traumatic experience:

The traumatized protagonist’s inquiry into previous “truths” of the self or formulations of identity produces a change in consciousness, however painful this might be, that takes the protagonist on a transformative journey, one that does not necessarily provide relief from suffering or redemption. (164)

In this light, the past becomes primarily an ally to understanding one’s present with reference to the experiences of the past. Furthermore, she adds that response to

traumatic events often cause the protagonist to turn inward and struggle with the past. This inward glance is paired with a growing awareness to the external world outside the individual mind:

...trauma is both a personal and cultural experience linked to place because the reorientation of the self is paired with a re-evaluation one's relation to society, thus expanding the identification between self and world. Moreover, the significance of place ...offers new to examine the complex social relations that influence the experience and narration of loss. Descriptions of the geographic location of trauma and recovery, as well place of traumatic recall or dissociation, bring attention to the wider influences the individual processes of memory and the composition and reformulation of self. (165)

Place, therefore, becomes central to representations of trauma. Not only does it become an aspect of identification but also it acts as the site that holds the social relations and conditions in which the traumatic events take place. After the traumatic experience, it provides “opportunity to test the boundaries of the self against an external medium in order to experience what is self and non-self and to differentiate between contemporary reality and traumatic past” (161). This calls for the identification of the self in the present positioning in order to recover from the trauma of the past.

Writing Trauma

Writing provides lens to understand how events, places and subjects are constructed and also how people (re)write history of significant traumatic events from marginalized positions. It leads to recognizing their own place in history, reflecting on their own subjectivity as victim and witness of such events. Dominick LaCapra advocates that the “objective reconstruction of the past and dialogic exchange with

it... wherein knowledge not only involving the process of information but also affect, empathy and the questions or questions of value” be incorporated (35). The reconstruction through narrative may “involve truth claims, either in terms of “correspondence” to lived structures or in terms of references that may retrospectively be seen to inform processes and activities in ways that may not have been entirely conscious to participants” (13). He identifies the problems or issue regarding truth claims in narrativization of traumatic events “not only on the level of statements referring to events but on structural levels such as the narrative plots, interpretations, and explanations” because such events are “highly “cathected” or invested with affect and considerations of value”(18-9). We can easily infer that the allusion to truth claims is one of the central features of slave narrative, neo-slave narrative or narrative of witness and testimony, and that the retrospective reference or understanding echoes delayed comprehension due to traumatic experience.

Furthermore, he distinguishes writing trauma from writing about trauma. He presents the distinction between them in the following terms:

Writing about trauma is an aspect of historiography related to the project of reconstructing the pasts as objectively as possible... Writing trauma is a metaphor in that writing indicates some distance from trauma (even when the experience of writing is itself intimately bound up with trauma), and there is no such thing as writing trauma itself if only because trauma, at times related to particular events, cannot be localized in terms of a discrete, dated experience. (186)

Writing trauma, as in the case of autobiographical narratives of victims, then becomes an act of narration through conscious reflection or memory of one’s experience. In historiographical writings, it demands “a participatory or emulative relation” to the

undertaken object of study (187). LaCapra expands the notion of writing trauma to the act of recovery:

Writing trauma involves process of acting out, working over, and to some extent working through in analyzing and giving voice to the past- processes of coming to terms with traumatic experiences, limit events, and their symptomatic effects that achieve articulation in different combination and hybridized forms. (186)

Writers and theorists since long have been intervening in a theoretical debate about identity in the African Diaspora through representations of slavery. However, it is generally agreed upon that collective memories of slavery can become the basis, or at least as a significant dimension, of African American identity. "The author who situates traumatic experience in relation to a particular place indicates that trauma is understood as a culturally specific event, in which its meaning remains contingent on factors such as a historically specific moment, or socially ascribed attributes of identity, such as race or gender" ("Trends" 160). The imperative in dealing with the issues of slavery, then, should be overcoming trauma originating in the very experience of slavery or otherwise transmitted intergenerationally. It implies both liberation from the traumatizing situation of one's being and the subsequent attempt at reconfiguration of identity in the aftermath of such events. Leaving aside the contestation about repressed memory, forgetting or appropriation of a traumatic event allows us to delve directly into the understanding that trauma is neither a drama of the past nor a drama of survival but, importantly, involves a traumatized survivor. The survivor may exhibit "the inability to move beyond indelible images of death, guilt about having survives while others died, psychic numbing, lack of trust in the world, and struggle for meaning" (Suleiman 280). These themes can be powerful impetus for

responsibility. The act of taking responsibility implies that the survivor create meaning out of the event through testimony, narrativization and other means, and engage in a dialogic relation that can prevent further victimization of other vulnerable individuals or group. It, then, becomes not far-fetched to infer that the very act of taking responsibility enables one to project future actions and open a path to recovery.

The characterization of the protagonists in both narratives illustrates not only the psychological injuries suffered by victims of trauma of slavery but also the need for them to give meaning to their suffering in order to recover from trauma. Both narratives undertaken for the purpose of this study depict the disorientation and despair, personal dislocation, and conflict of consciousness in their protagonists in the wake of traumatizing experience of slavery. This experience damages their faith in the assumptions they held in the past about themselves and the world and propels them to find new, more realistic ground they can relate to in order to give meaning to their experience during and after the traumatic event of enslavement. As survivors of the event of slavery, they confer meaning to their experience by giving testimony of their suffering. Meaningful recovery demands that the survivor escape the debilitating repetition and the isolation of his own consciousness and reestablish a connection between his pre-and post-traumatic worlds. A proper recovery begins when the past is reclaimed “in order to recreate the flow of life and restore a sense of continuity” (Herman 176). The sense of continuity restores when the survivor realizes his present position post- traumatic event. The reconstruction of the past thus helps to contextualize the meaning of trauma. Then, the survivor overcomes the overwhelming experience of trauma and transforms it into a coherent, communicable narrative.

Chapter III

Twelve Years a Slave: A Narrative of Desire for Freedom and Reclamation of Identity

This chapter offers a framework to understand the expression of an individual traumatic experience of slavery, dislocation and identity formation with special emphasis on memory and location. Positioning the protagonist Solomon Northup's sensibilities as representative of collective sensibilities and actions as coming from a particular location within society, I proceed to map this narrative both as testimony of a victim who recovers by and through articulation, that is writing trauma, and as implicating a distinctive social memory, consciousness, practice, and place within the social structure. Northup converts his traumatic experience of loss into a meaningful narrative- 'an articulatory practice' that mourns the loss as well as remembers it with the realization that he is past the traumatic experience.' Unlike Dana, the protagonist of *Kindred*- the other narrative undertaken for this study- who manages to bring home some journals in her bag, "wondering whether I could weave them into a story" (244), Northup relies upon his memory to recount his experience as a meaningful narrative. His narrative is not only a description of his experience as a displaced subject but also a testament of a meaningful recovery that reestablishes a connection between his pre- and post-traumatic worlds. Writing from the post-emancipation position, Northup displays his sense of reconciliation with the traumas of the past by effectively framing the narrative of his life before and during enslavement and post- emancipation. His narrative is a communication with the reading public and a documented memory for posterity. Emphasizing the traumatic empirical experience of slavery and dislocation, this analysis also navigates Northup's identity and moves towards pointing how Northup achieves recovery and sense of proper belonging.

Trauma of Displacement

In March 1841, Solomon Northup, a free black man, is “designedly lured away from home and family and liberty” (34). Against the backdrop of a calm and content life in Saratoga, Northup’s journey away from his home marks the beginning of a traumatic experience and a forced relocation. Tricked by two white slave traders to travel with them from New York to Washington D. C., the journey becomes a journey from freedom to slavery for Northup. In Washington, a free man before dinner, drugged to unconsciousness during dinner, he wakes up as a prisoner in William’s Slave pen- “a slave pen within the vey shadow of the Capitol!” (43):

Waking from such a painful trance, it was some time before I could collect my thoughts. Where was I? What was the meaning of these chains? ... There was a blank of some indefinite period, preceding my awakening in that lonely place, the events of which the utmost stretch of my memory was unable to recall. (38)

The question “where was I” is a question not only of not knowing one’s location, for Northup it becomes a matter of forced relocation. His awakening in that lonely and unknown place and his memory inscribed by painful trance, blankness and timelessness enforces “a process of displacement and disjunction” from his life in New York (*The Location of Culture* 8). “...Burch bought here- Freeman sold there!” (315) remarks Benjamin O. Shekels during prosecution. The reference “here” of Washington is ironic for Northup: it already is a dislocation for Northup, a removal from his home and the “there” is further dislocation for him- a place of entry into slavery proper. Benjamin’s further testimony that “...they came from Georgia, but he did not remember the county” (314) and “... I don’t know what name was given him,

but think it was not Solomon” (314-5) refers to how Solomon's identity is blurred before being supplanted by a false superimposed identity.

The inference we can make here is how Solomon's presence is negated; though he is the one who holds the true account of his identity, Benjamin fabricates the kidnap into a regular slave trade, "The boy said he had no objection, that in fact he would like to south" (314). Throughout his narrative nowhere do we find Northup preferring to be in the south, rather being in the South for him is a dislocation. It is in the North that he belongs and so is filled with longings for it throughout his bondage. He narrates the contradiction of his life situation before and during bondage:

Having all my life breathed the free air of the North, and conscious that I possessed the same feelings and affections that find a place in the white man's breast; conscious, moreover, of an intelligence equal to that of some men, at least, with a fairer skin, I was too ignorant, perhaps too independent, to conceive how any one could be content to live in the abject condition of a slave. (26)

The loss of his freedom is a profound loss. Here, he narrativizes what Balaev refers to as characteristics of trauma narratives- the conveyance of “profound loss” (“Trends” 150). The incident in William’s slave pen is an original event of trauma for Northup that marks the beginning of a traumatic journey. As he is carried further into the Deep South, his sense of displacement grows more intense. He narrates:

It was but a short time I closed my eyes that night. Thought was busy in my brain. Could it be possible that I was thousands of miles from home- that I had been driven through the streets like a dumb beast- that I had been chained and beaten without mercy- that I was even then herded with a drove of slaves, a slave myself? (77)

Not only is Northup distanced away from his home but also conjoined with the displacement is the loss of his original identity. His narrative refers both to his forced displacement and to the trauma arising out of his dislocation. He asks, "Were the events of the last few weeks realities indeed? - or was I passing only through the dismal phases of a long, protracted dream? It was no illusion" (77). His words are symptomatic of trauma as the events elude assimilation as it happens. It hard for him to comprehend the experiences, and therefore the question arises as to whether his experiences over the last few weeks were realities or protracted dream. It inflicts a wound "upon the mind" and this infliction hampers his mind's "experience of time, self and the world" (*Unclaimed* 16-7). It is only through subsequent reflection that he comes to apprehend the event of his enslavement: it was no illusion. The corporeality of his situation strikes back and he narrates, "I was handcuffed. Around my ankles also were a pair of heavy fetters...I had not only been robbed of liberty, but that my money and free papers were also gone!" (38). This moment of restraint creates a dichotomy between his freedom and enslavement. The loss of free papers - "the evidence of freedom" (33) - that speaks for his freedom and the physical immobility he is subjected to by being chained is corollary to his loss of freedom, both physically and legally. However, psychologically, Northup still identifies himself as a free man from New York as he says, "There must have been some misapprehension- some unfortunate mistake. It could not be that a free citizen from New York, who had wronged no man, nor violated any law, should be dealt with thus inhumanly" (39). One the one hand, this moment indicates Northup's inquisitive state where he attempts to derive the meaning of his experience and conceptualize the self and the space he is cast into. One the other hand, this can be interpreted as Northup's lack of knowledge of his positioning in the realm of slavery.

Northup's narrative at this point demonstrates how a traumatic event "disrupts attachments between self and others by challenging fundamental assumptions about moral laws and social relationships that are themselves connected to specific environments" ("Trends" 150). Northup represents this disruption by invoking the physical environment of the South as the locus of his personal and cultural trauma compared to that of his native North that upholds his moral assumptions.

Northup is an outsider to slavery; he is not born and raised in slavery, rather he is thrust into slavery by misfortune. He is yet to learn the ways of the slavery when his confrontation with Tibeat occurs. He still has residual sense of justice when he debates whether he deserves whipping: "I felt, moreover, that I had been faithful- that I was guilty of no wrong whatever, and deserved commendation rather than punishment" (110). He has not yet learned the necessity of submission, of accepting being wronged, of the social order created by slavery: "I had made up my mind fully not to be whipped, let the result be life or death (110). Very soon, it turns out to be a wrong choice when his rage subsides and the sense of precarious situation creeps in:

As I stood there, feelings of unutterable agony overwhelmed me. I was conscious that I had subjected myself to unimaginable punishment. The reaction that followed my extreme ebullition of anger produced the most painful sensations of regret. An unfriended, helpless slave- what could I *do*, what could I *say*, to justify, in the remotest manner, the heinous act I had committed, of resenting a white man's contumely and abuse. (113)

This realization marks "contradictions and traumatic ambivalence" between Northup's subjectivity and the politics of slavery- he cannot "transcend" the system into which he has been thrust (Bhabha 19). His momentary transcendence of the laws of slavery when with "veins like fire," blood that was "up" and "frenzy of my

madness” he confronts, out powers, and strikes him is brought back to the reality of his bonded circumstance that he stands in agony subdued anticipating punishment. This aligns with Balaev’s notion that, “...the traumatized protagonist may experience a doubling or self-estrangement...traumatic experience disrupts the previous framework of reality and the protagonist must reorganize the self in relation to this new view of reality” (162). Gone are the safety and comfort of his home. Gone is his agency and a new reality sinks in Northup. His new reality is “Living in the most uneasy state of apprehension and fear” (131). Northup is unable to find a tangible location of his being in the South and thus, out of longing for his roots, narrates:

It was a very pleasant morning. The fields along the river were covered with verdure, far in advance of what I had been accustomed at that season of the year. The sun shone out warmly; the birds were singing in the trees. The happy birds- I envied them. I wished for wings like them, that I might cleave the air to where my birdlings waited vainly for their father’s coming, in the cooler region of the north. (57-8)

The invocation of the North depicts his longing for the home and also provides a momentary refuge through imagination from his displaced situation. Slavery estranges Northup and invokes a feeling of intense dislocation. He feels utterly alienated in the alien socio-cultural milieu that he feels desolate as he narrates:

But in all the crowd that thronged the wharf, there was no one who knew or cared for me. Not one. No familiar voice greeted my ears, nor was there a single face that I had ever seen. Soon Arthur would rejoin his family, and have the satisfaction of seeing his wrongs avenged: my family, alas, should I ever see them more? There was a feeling of utter desolation in my heart, filling it with a despairing and regretful sense, that I had not gone down with Robert to

the bottom of the sea. (75)

Displacement brings about a feeling of meaninglessness in living in the displaced subject. Such is the predicament of the displaced subject that they suffer from dilemma of whether to continue living a wretched life or to embrace death. Further down the narrative, once again he is confronted by the dilemma of living and dying:

I became very sick. For three days I was entirely blind...expected to die.

Though there was little in the prospect before me worth living for, the near approach of death appalled me. I thought I could have been resigned to yield my life in the bosom of my family, but to expire in the midst of strangers, under such circumstances, was a bitter reflection. (83)

In traumatizing times of despair, Northup is struck by such feeling, yet somehow the hope of ultimate freedom keeps him intact. Though he sees no meaning in living the life of bondage and suffering, even more he finds dying in a foreign land more meaningless.

Northup touches upon the experience of his fellow slaves in such a way that each slave's story while bringing into awareness the specificity of individual trauma also connects it to the larger cultural practices of a specific time. Many of the black characters he mentions in his narratives are also displaced characters. He narrates the predicament of Robert who had been born free like him and transported into slavery in the South (61-2). The shared trauma of enslavement and dislocation helps form a community. During his captivity, Northup identifies himself with other black slaves through shared perspectives and worldview. He narrates, "Arthur said, and I agreed with him, that death was far less terrible than the living prospect that was before us. For a long time we talked of our children, our past lives, and of the probabilities of escape" (69). Similarly, he narrates about another dislocated character Uncle Abram

who “loved to wander back, in imagination, to the place where he was born, and to recount the scenes of his youth during those stirring times when the nation was in arms (187).” His identification and bonding with other slaves provides momentary relief from the trauma as he shares his traumatic experience. He enumerates the names of his companions: “...for eight years the following were my companions...viz: Abram, Wiley, Phebe, Bob, Henry, Edward, and Patsey” (185). Northup was aware of the dislocation that enslavement brought upon him. He exhibits a sense of awareness about the precarious situation of other slaves as he remembers his companions, “These were my companions and fellow-slaves...They, if living, are yet toiling on the banks of Bayou Boeuf, never destined to breathe, as I now do, the blessed air of liberty” (190). This reflection is important for at once it states that Northup is aware of his reality- of the past and present and that he is not the only one upon whom the trauma of enslavement befell. This awareness allows and hints at the possibility of recovery from trauma of dislocation that will be dealt in detail in the final sub-topic of this chapter.

Narrative of Trauma: Tracing Place and Identity

Northup focuses on the location of trauma and its differentiation with his roots serves to highlight the trauma as induced by his positioning into that particular space where slavery exists as a historical reality. In conformity with Michelle Balaev’s interpretation, Northup situates his traumatic experience “in relation to a particular place indicates that trauma is understood as a culturally specific event, in which its meaning remains contingent on factors such as a historically specific moment, or socially ascribed attributes of identity, such as race or gender” (“Trends” 160). In Northup’s narrative, South as a specific place with its slave holding practice and Northup’s own blackness are factors that are evidently visible for his bondage. His

narrative portrays slavery as a characteristic feature of the south. Commenting on slavery as a culturally specific event of the eighteenth century, Foucault attributes “a sort of daguerreotype of power” that can be seen working in a slave society (“Abnormal” 51). He adds, “The essential function of power is to seal off the process of production and to make a certain social class profit from it, in an absolutely identical renewal of the relations of power” (“Abnormal” 51). Northup incorporates this interpretation of power that he observes as exerted upon the life of slaves in the following words:

They do not fail to observe the difference between their own condition and the meanest white man’s, and to realize the injustice of the laws which place it in his power not only to appropriate the profits of their industry, but to subject them to unmerited and unprovoked punishment, without remedy, or the right to resist or to remonstrate. (260)

This model of power, as Northup narrates, is functional as the historical reality of slave society. Foucault adds that such power was exerted through “violence that some (always the same) exercise over others (who are always the same)” (“Abnormal” 50-1). The eighteenth century established, in Foucault’s term, the “discipline of normalization,” or the system of “discipline-normalization”. This power tending to discipline the slaves was exerted by various white masters whom Northup encounters throughout his bondage. The degree to which the violence is exerted differs according to the individual proclivity and characteristics of the whites. Burch violently robs Northup of his identity; Tibbeats desires to annihilate him physically; Epps is a constant whimsical threatening presence for him. The fact of Northup being black enables his enslavement in that particular historical moment where blacks were not considered free in every state of America.

Northrup's narrative analyzes the cultural practice of slave holding inherent in the South. South then takes on a symbolic meaning for the slaves in his narrative. It shares the features of trauma novels as underscored by Balaev: "The narrative carefully describes the cultural practices that attach particular meanings to locations, which take on symbolic value for the protagonist in the world of the novel" (160). Northrup, lending voice to Patsey's situation, depicts how stark the difference in living condition in the South and the North are for the blacks. The words, "...she knew there was a land of freedom. A thousand times she had heard that somewhere in the distant North there were no slaves-no masters...to dwell where the black man may work for himself- live in his own cabin" (260) aptly summarizes the contrast of living in the North and the South. Coming from Northrup's mouth, these words resemble his life experience. He knows from his life experience that the land of freedom exists, and this depiction contrasting his free life in the north and his bonded life in the south suggests his ability to assimilate and make sense of the cultural practices inherent to specific place. This distinction of place is further highlighted when he narrates how mistaken opinions prevail in some places:

It is a mistaken opinion that prevails in some quarters, that the slave does not understand the term- does not comprehend the idea of freedom. Even on Bayou Boeuf, where I conceive slavery exists in its most abject and cruel form- where it exhibits features altogether unknown in the more northern states- the most ignorant of them generally know full well the meaning. (260)

Northrup emphasizes a sense of place value as he narrates, "Here they find clear water and delightful shades. In fact, these retreats are to the planters of that section of the country what Newport and Saratoga are to the wealthier inhabitants of northern cities" (93). Later in the narrative, he narrates of Bass's arrival as an arrival in "the unhealthy

region of the Red River..." (265). His constant representation of differences between his former place of belonging and his present location functions to portray the dislocation he undergoes due to the enslavement.

Places hold special significance in the life of the persons living in it. Northup's narrative generally presents a positivistic view of place. But Bass undermines this positivistic outlook when he replies to Epps accusation that he would not condemn slaveholding tradition if he belonged to slave holding place saying , "If I was in New-England I would be just what I am here" (268). Bass's conversation with Northup reveals the injustice that has befallen Northup and the idea of dislocation associated with it. His dislocation is reiterated through the words of Bass who comments, "How come you here?" to which Northup replies, "if justice had been done he would never have been there" (270). Northup, at this juncture, has already realized the social space he is cast into and his experiences during bondage have instilled new perceptions of the self and world. It is with this new perception that the reference to 'Middle Passage' becomes starkly painful for him as he narrates:

... the sea-sickness rendered the place or our confinement loathsome and disgusting...had it drowned it would have saved the agony of many hundred lashes, and miserable deaths at last- had the compassionate sea snatched us that day from the clutches of remorseless men. (68)

The transition from the middle passage lands him in the Deep South. In the narrative, the South as a space is laden with a special power relation between the whites and the blacks. Patterson argues that both that slavery was "a perpetual struggle" (207) between master and slave and that it was total power for the master and social death for the slave. According to Patterson, "the condition of slavery did not absolve or erase the prospect of death; it was peculiarly a conditional commutation. The

execution was suspended as long as the slave acquiesced in his powerlessness” (5). In the Tibeat incidence and earlier when Burch threatens him, “If ever I hear you say a word about New-York, or about your freedom, I will be the death of you- I will kill you” (61), we see the prospects of death lingering over Northup. More importantly, it indicates the structure of social relation between a white man and a black man prevalent at the time. This threat compels Northup to abandon his former identity and resort to strategic silence. Silence of Northup can be read as the absence of the ‘Other’ to whom he could address “you” in the hope of being heard, of having agency and moral standing as an individual. His silence is not only a strategic shield from violence but also a traumatic realization of being degraded to a nonperson. The crucial step to this degradation begins when he is robbed of his name:

... Reading from his paper, he called, “Platt.” No one answered. The name was called again and again, but still there was no reply... “Who shipped that nigger?” he again inquired of the captain, pointing to me. “Burch,” replied the captain. “Your name is Platt- you answer my description. Why don’t you come forward?” he demanded of me, in an angry tone. I informed him that was not my name; that I had never been called by it, but that I had no objection to it as I knew of. “Well, I will learn you your name,” said he. On the vessel I had gone by the name “Steward,” and this was the first time I had been designated as Platt- the name forwarded by Burch to his consignee. (76)

The loss of his name is the loss of his free identity. Northup’s navigates how his identity undergoes change in his narrative. His original name that he was known by in his native place is annihilated. He narrates, “I was now known as Platt, the name given me by Burch, and by which I was designated through the whole period of my

servitude” (91). As Patterson asserts, “Because the slave had no socially recognized existence outside of his master, he became a social nonperson” (5), and this nonpersonhood defined the slave “as a nameless ‘genealogical isolate’, stripped of self-protection and of honour, without power except through another” (10). Northup is degraded into a nonperson as he is robbed of his true name and is named after his master: “More than once I heard it said that Platt Ford, now Platt Tibeats- a slave’s name changes with his change of master” (127). This literal degradation of blacks into nonperson is illustrated by Northup in the following words: “the examination of human chattels by purchasers before concluding a bargain” is conducted by the white slave-owners and that, “Unsoundness in a slave, as well as in a horse, detracts materially from his value” (57). For Northup, this brings about what Orlando Patterson in *Slavery and Social Death* calls “social death” and “dishonor”.

Northup’s identity as a free man is jolted when James H. Burch, the slaver, declares that he was a slave, “that he had bought me, and that he was about to send me to New Orleans” (43). Here, the language used by Burch is significant. “Well, my boy, how do you feel now?” asks Burch (43). The term “boy” is used throughout the narrative, denoting the lack of respect between other white males and Northup, a black man and the sanctioned social, racial hierarchy prevalent at the time. This difference in addressing is an act of differentiating identity, of creating a hierarchy in social standing between the whites and the blacks. In Hegelian notion of identity, the social basis of personal identity is described in terms of same and others. The common links of identification within a group are defined by making contrasts with those who are perceived as not the same. Northup, based on the color of his skin, is identified as ‘other’- not white, not free. As Bhabha reiterates, “Cultural and political

identity is constructed through a process of othering” (55), evidently, on part of Northup, this act of naming is a conscious act of othering.

Northup’s insistence of his free status is systematically denied, instead he is verbally ascribed the status of a slave: “he denied that I was free...declared that I came from Georgia...called me a black liar, a runaway from Georgia” (43). The invocation of Georgia is useful here in understanding how identities are interrelated to geographical place. As Lefebvre explains, “space is a social morphology: it is to lived experience what form itself is to the living organism, and just as intimately bound up with function and structure” (94). Drawing from Lefebvre’s critical approach to spatiality we can understand the workings of power in its heterogeneous forms; power relations, whether as subjection, domination, exploitation and whether repressive or productive, are implicitly spatial and are constituted by an ensemble of material, ideal, and everyday social interactions. Belonging to New York, a free state, meant Northup was a free man. Therefore, before ascribing him the status of a slave, he had to be stripped of his identity of a free man that originated from belonging to a free state and this ‘stripping’ was violent:

...Blow after blow was inflicted upon my naked body. ..I was all on fire. My sufferings I can compare to nothing else than the burning agony of hell! ...At last I became silent to his repeated questions. I would make no reply. In fact, I was becoming almost unable to speak. (44-45)

Through violence, Northup is not only denied the right to invoke his status as a free man from New York but also traumatically rendered unable to speak. This inability equates silence and is characteristics of certain trauma novels. Balaev states “...silence is created through temporal and spatial ellipses to portray the disjointed perception or disparate states of consciousness. In this way silence is a rhetorical

strategy, rather than evidence for the epistemological void created by the experience of trauma” (“Trends 162”). In Northup’s narrative, silence functions not only to portray trauma arising out of physical torture but also the black voice that was deprived of truth-value. Silence becomes a rhetorical strategy of survival for Northup. Heeding the words of his fellow-slave Clemens, he strategically resorts to silence and thus also a site of resistance in Northup’s narrative. This silence is not only silence of speech but also silence about his true identity or the aversion of it. When asked “well, boy, where did you come from?” (59), Northup answers “From New-York” (59). This answer astonishes the buyer who further inquires what he had been doing up there to which Northup responds ““I have been up that way a piece” in a manner intended to imply that although I might have been as far as new-york, yet I wished it distinctly understood that I did not belong to that free state, nor to any other” (59). Further, he clarifies to Burch, “...but I did not tell him I belonged there, nor that I was a freeman” (60). Northup realizes that his attempt to invoke his free status would only expose him to “mal-treatment, and diminish the chances of liberation” (57). This episode of coercion into silence and subsequent enslavement is an example of the vulnerability of the black population living in America at the time. This is power politicized that demarcates the position of blacks and whites in the social order. It also exerts itself directly upon the bodies of its subjects and upon the lives that comprise the demos in order to place individuals in those positions. Relating the episode with Eliza, Northup narrates, “Freeman damned her...ordered her to go to her place” (82). Place here signifies her position of a slave and she is reminded to “behave herself and be somebody” (82). Moreover, it is related to and indicates the traumatic condition conjoining “a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence” (*The Location of Culture* 11). The assumption here is that of a social

behavior that a slave has to observe with his/her master. It is a 'white' attaining the power of a master and a black subjugated to his power.

The socio-political and racial reality of being a black man in the Deep South pervades every aspect of a slave's life and denies him any stretch of freedom. Such is the politicized oppression in a discriminating, racialized society that even the most basic, banal activities are controlled. Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture*, states:

...about the politics as the stressed necessity of daily life- politics as a performativity...as the violence of a racialized society falls most enduringly on the details of life: where you can sit, or not; how you can live, or not; what you can learn, or not; who you can love, or not. Between the banal act of freedom and its historic denial rises the silence... (15)

Northup's narrative is aplenty with examples of such violence where the slave owners determine the daily needs of nutrition, work and rest among others. The slaves are provided with scanty food, "All that is allowed them is corn and bacon... Each one receives, as his weekly allowance, three and a half pounds of bacon, and corn enough to make a peck of a meal" (168). Similarly, we can observe white masters controlling the daily routine of slaves: "an hour before day light the horn is blown. Then the slaves arouse, prepare their breakfast, fill a gourd with water... and hurry to the field again" (171). All in all, these instances aligned with the life of the whites as portrayed in the narrative are Northup's mediation on the socio-politics of unequal and asymmetrical worlds that existed between the blacks and the whites.

Narration of Bondage and Emancipation: Narrating as Recovery from Trauma

Writing from a post-emancipation position, Northup creates a narrative out of his vivid memory. This act of narrativization functions to provide meaning to his traumatic experience and situates him in the world order after his freedom. He

recognizes his position after 12 years of bondage and, as a trauma survivor, resorts to telling the story of his trauma with the hope that that it will be a socially reconstitutive act. He begins his narrative thus:

Having been born a freeman, and for more than thirty years enjoyed the blessings of liberty in a free state- and having at the end of that time been kidnapped and sold into Slavery, where I remained , until happily rescued in the month of January, 1853, after a bondage of twelve years- it has been suggested that an account of my life and fortunes would not be uninteresting to the public. (17)

Northup is aware of the undertakings he seeks to accomplish through the act of narrativization. Cali Tal in “Speaking” asserts that “the function of narrative is not just to recount the horrors of the past but to impart to the audience the underpinnings of such traumatizing events so that such events are not repeated” (230). His narrative is a testimony to the traumas he endured in his years of suffering as his narration “...becomes a retrospective effort to give meaning and advocate change in status quo in confrontation with the perpetrators culture that attempts to overlook or repress the event and memory of trauma” (*The World of Hurt* 7). He narrates, “I can speak of Slavery only so far as it came under my own observation- only so far as I have known and experienced it in my own person. My object is, to give a candid and truthful statements of facts: to repeat the story of my life” (17). Northup by reiterating his story as truthful statements of facts makes an appeal to the public to change the perspective regarding slavery. These words highlight that he is able to make meaning out of his experience and that he is able to repeat the story of his life not as a compulsive repetition of his traumas but as working through the trauma he suffered due to his enslavement.

In chapter one of the narrative, Northup explores his life before enslavement: a genealogical account of his ancestry, his marriage and settlement in Saratoga. In temporal linearity, his narrative towards the end of chapter one reaches to a position where a traumatic turn of fate awaits him. He narrates:

But now I had reached a turning point in my existence...Now that I had approached within the shadow of the cloud, into the thick darkness whereof I was soon to disappear, thenceforward to be hidden from the eyes of all my kindred, and shut out from the sweet light of liberty, for many a weary year.
(27)

Further down the narrative, he recalls, “We passed through Ballston, and striking the ridge road, as it is called, if my memory correctly serves me, followed it direct to Albany. We reached that city before dark, and stopped at a hotel southward from the Museum” (30-1). The call to memory or his reliance upon it is directly stated here but his whole narrative is a working of his memory. Read in this light, we can posit that his narrative is borne out of his immediate personal memory. His personal memory when narrativized carries the motif of repeating “the story of his life, without exaggeration, leaving it for others to determine, whether even the pages of fiction present a picture of more cruel wrong or a severer bondage” (17). Moreover, the repetition serves another function which in Cali Tal’s assertion is not just to recount the horrors of the past but to impart to the audience the underpinnings of such traumatizing events so that such events are not repeated (230). In this vein, Northup narrates:

I know not but they were innocent of the great wickedness of which I now believe them guilty. Whether they were accessory to my misfortunes- subtle and inhuman monsters in the shape of men- designedly luring me away from

home and family, and liberty, for the sake of gold- those who read these pages will have the same means of determining as myself. (34)

It is nothing less than a confrontation, “a refusal to bow to outside pressure to revise or repress experience, a decision to embrace conflict rather than conformity” (Tal 7). Northup’s narrative serves not only this purpose but also expresses his trauma as in the statement, “My impression is there were then three persons with me, but it is altogether indefinite and vague, and like the memory of a painful dream” (37). The reference to the memory of a painful dream is traumatic and hampers his mind as a traumatic event would. Nonetheless, he is able to form a coherent narrative via structured memory implying that for him the events of his experience are tractable through memory:

How all her fears were realized...with the burden of maternal sorrow, will be seen as the narrative proceeds...For the present he disappears from the scenes recorded in this narrative, but will appear again before its close, not in the character of a man-whipping, tyrant, but as an arrested, cringing criminal in a court of law, that failed him to do justice. (53,64)

This is one of the many instances in his narrative where he is able to depict the events of his life chronologically. Northup’s *Twelve Years a Slave* is an attempt not only to tell his individual story but also to narrativize the peculiar practice of slavery as in the following words:

It is necessary in this narrative, in order to present a full and truthful statement of all the principal events in the history of my life, and to portray the institution of slavery as I have seen and known it, to speak of well-known places, and of many persons who are yet living. (49-50)

He is able to discern and intimately observe people that come into his life. The

characterization of Ford is an attempt to posit that he holds no grudges against white people; rather he is truthful to his narrative, appealing all good whites to align themselves with good people like Ford rather than Burch, Epps or other malicious whites. He possesses an uncanny understanding of how space acts upon people:

There never was a more kind, noble, candid, Christian man than William Ford. The influences and associations that had always surrounded him, blinded him to the inherent wrong at the bottom of the system of Slavery. He never doubted the moral right of one man holding another in subjection. Looking through the same medium with his fathers before him, he saw things in the same light. Brought up under circumstances and other influences, his notions would undoubtedly have been different. (90)

The portrayal of characters like Ford allows him to critique slavery without implicating the white race as a whole. He narrates, “Were all men such as he, Slavery would be deprived of more than half its bitterness” (90). Though it sounds like an apology for benevolent slavery, it is not so for compared to his physical traumatic experience under other masters, his experience under Ford juxtaposed feels like a relief, like a brief shower in the desert:

That little paradise in the Great Pine Woods was the oasis in the desert, towards which my heart turned lovingly, during many years of bondage. I went forth from it now with regret and sorrow, not so overwhelming, however, as if it had then been given me to know that I should never return to it again. (148)

His episode with Ford is a testament to the concept that specific place evokes specific feelings. He repeatedly invokes the sense of place in his narrative as historically too the Deep South represents a legacy of slavery, violence, injustice, social death to the blacks. Northup is aware of his time and space which enables him to continue with the

hope that one day he will be able to regain his agency, freedom and identity in another time and space.

Reclaiming Identity and Recovery

If identity is like Freudian graveyard of lost loves and former identifications, it is no wonder that Northup is nostalgic about his freedom, and his home. Northup cannot identify himself with the new setting, in his new role and social standing. This difficulty in identification brings about longing for the home and compels him to mourn the loss of freedom. The forced relocation into an alien milieu and violently ascribed identity as a slave shatters his sense of self and invokes social death. The ship that carries him to the Red River is analogous to “The Middle Passage” is not only violent but also marks a journey from freedom to enslavement. This movement is a displacement from home to unhome from freedom to slavery.

Northup touches upon the experience of his fellow slaves in such a way that each slave’s story while bringing into awareness the specificity of individual trauma also connects it to the larger cultural practices of a specific time. He narrates:

Robert- had been born free, “he said he had come south with two men, who had hired him in the city of his residence”. Without free papers, he had been seized at Fredericksburgh, placed in confinement, and beaten until he had learned, as I had, the necessity and the policy of silence. He had been in Goodin’s pen about three weeks. To this man I became much attached. We could sympathize with, and understand each other. It was with tears and a heavy heart, not many days subsequently, that I saw him die and looked for the last time upon his lifeless form! (61-2)

The trauma of enslavement helps form a community. During his captivity, Northup identifies himself with other black slaves through shared perspectives and worldview.

He narrates, “Arthur said, and I agreed with him, that death was far less terrible than the living prospect that was before us. For a long time we talked of our children, our past lives, and of the probabilities of escape” (69). If identity itself is constituted through process of identification, then Northup's identification with fellow slave inmates constitutes his identity. This identification brings about a realization of his present situation; their life acts a mirror in which he sees himself in situ. His identification and bonding with other slaves provides momentary relief from the trauma as he shares his traumatic experience. Further down the narrative, contrary to what he feels now we see a renewed sense of longing for life. In Bessel van der Kolk’s words, if this cannot be taken as a longing for living or life drive, this can be interpreted as “temporal-linguistic gap induced by the experience” (qtd. in “Trends” 153). Alternatively, in Bousoon’s words, it is indicative of the “dissociation...common to the trauma experience” (“Trends” 153) indicating an abnormal type of memory that encodes Northup’s traumatic experience:

I became very sick. For three days I was entirely blind...expected to die. Though there was little in the prospect before me worth living for, the near approach of death appalled me. I thought I could have been resigned to yield my life in the bosom of my family, but to expire in the midst of strangers, under such circumstances, was a bitter reflection. (83)

Through articulation during his bondage, through sharing his experience and identification he finds relief that acts as talking therapy .He is able to create a meaningful experience, which indicates recovery. To recover, the survivor must escape the debilitating repetition and the isolation of his own consciousness and reestablish a connection between his pre- and post-traumatic worlds. For recovery to begin, the past must be reclaimed “in order to ‘recreate the flow’ of life and restore a

sense of continuity” (Herman 176). Such an exploration of the past “provides a context within which the particular meaning of the trauma can be understood” (176). He must escape the pre-speech chaos of his traumatized psyche and form his fragments of thought into a coherent, communicable narrative.

Slavery robs people of their agency. Northup finally regains his agency as he narrates, “I took pains to seek him out, to confront him in a court of law, charging him with the crime of kidnapping; and the only motive that impelled me to this step, was a burning desire to bring him to justice” (319). Similarly, towards the end of the narrative, we find Northup reclaiming his identity as he states, “It was necessary to establish two facts to the satisfaction of the governer: first, that I was a free citizen of New-York; and secondly, that I was wrongfully held in bondage... all the older inhabitants in the vicinity being ready to testify to it” (291). He is finally “restored to happiness and liberty” (321) and that he hopes “henceforward to lead an upright though lowly life, and rest at last in the church yard where my father sleeps” (321). Northup finally lands in the space he belongs to, that is, returns to his roots as a free man- recovered from the trauma of dislocation.

Chapter IV

Kindred: An Account of Revisiting Traumatic History and Coming Back Home

This chapter offers a framework to understand the legacy of traumatic experience of black slavery and the impending crisis of black identity formation with special emphasis on generational memory and the possibility of reconciliation with the racial past. Positing protagonist Dana's black female sensibilities as representative of gendered collective sensibilities of black women I proceed to map this narrative both as testimony of residual memory of victimhood and attempt at overcoming generational trauma by recourse to reconstruction and articulation. Juxtaposing Dana between the contemporary social milieu and historical past, the issues of reconstruction and revisiting the past opens an avenue for creating the possibility of recovery by and through articulation, that is writing and understanding generational trauma, and as implicating a distinctive social and gendered memory, consciousness, practice, and place within the social structure- past and present. The temporal and spatial distance that the protagonist of the narrative traverses is not a hindrance to understanding the cultural trauma that the blacks before emancipation had to endure, rather the anachronism in the experience in the protagonist's life facilitates an inquiry into the generational transmission of trauma and the validity of the postmemory of trauma. Her narrative is not only a description of her experience as a black women in the modern setting but also a testament of the need for a meaningful recovery that undertakes and reestablishes a connection between the traumatic past and its legacy. Butler's *Kindred* is a narrative representation of the intergenerational transmission of trauma and the legacy of slavery in the formation of African-American identity.

Displacement and Generational Trauma

In *Kindred*, Octavia Butler creates a dialectics between two specific historical moments in American history: the period of chattel slavery and the richly symbolic bicentennial year of 1976. In first-person narrative of the experience of enslavement and emancipation, Butler engages the traumatic slavery past and its impact on modern day America. The mysterious travel of twentieth-century black protagonist Edana (Dana) Franklin to antebellum Maryland is a lens through which 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, Dana is mysteriously transported to the antebellum Maryland where she sees a drowning child whom she rescues instinctively. When the boy's father arrives, he threatens her with a shotgun. Suddenly she is transported, wet and muddy back to the present (13-14). Dana narrates, "The trouble began long before June 9, 1976, when I became aware of it, but June 9 is the day I remember... It was also the day I met Rufus- the day he called me to him for the first time" (12). The trouble that began 'long before' is symbolic of the troubles of the slavery past. Her meeting Rufus is a doorway that takes her into both her genealogical and historical past. Although her first brief trip to the past is brief and puzzling, the subsequent trips makes her intimately acquainted with her ancestry and ancestral home. She discovers that Alice Greenwood, a black female slave, and Rufus Welyin, the child she saved and her white master too, are her ancestors. Dana's engagement with the past is a trope that Butler uses to emphasize the idea that black slavery has left a haunting vestige on both the enslaved blacks and their descendants. Maria Rice Bellamy states, "I call this vestige 'trauma's ghost'" (1). According to Bellamy, trauma's ghost affects the descendants of trauma survivors whether they acknowledge it or not. It becomes

imperative then that the contemporary individual engages with the past in order to understand the present.

The sense of dislocation and forced relocation inflicted upon the life of the blacks is embedded in the notion of comfort and security of home. This particular sense is taken for granted until it is snatched away by forced relocation and forces a retrospection bringing about a longing for the home. This characteristic of dislocation is evident throughout Dana's narrative. The travels back and forth between antebellum Maryland and 1976 California is Butler's device for engagement with the past and consequently makes Dana a dislocated character, both culturally and temporal-spatially. Her realization "My squeamishness belonged in another age, but I'd brought it with me..." (42) is a testament to her realization of her dislocation. It is not only her attributes she carries back to the past but also her unfamiliarity with the place of her being and people that she encounters that aggravates her sense of dislocation. She is a misfit to that era. Even a single acquaintance gives her a sense of security: "I took his hand and held it, glad for the familiarity. And yet, I wished he were back at home. In this place, he was probably better protection for me than free papers would have been, but I didn't want him here" (59). This statement of Dana resembles Northup's story for the free papers could not protect him from being enslaved. Moreover, it can be read as, in the words of Paterson, a precarious situation where slavery degrades human into 'nonperson' for whom others have to speak. Kevin, being white, could vouch for Dana whose voice in the nineteenth century lacked truth-value.

The very foreignness of Maryland accentuates the difference between Dana's perceived notion of history and embodied experience. The gulf between the represented version of slavery and the experience of living it is very wide. Though

Dana is an aspiring writer and quite well-read, her experience on the plantation makes her realize that dry anecdotes in a volume of history is a poor substitute for the experience of slavery. She is often reminded of this by others on the Weylin plantation. Rufus warns Dana that sometimes she reminds him of another slave named Luke, who was sold because he “didn’t show much sense” (138). When Dana talks of escaping, the cook Sarah warns: “You got no sense sometimes! Just talk all over your mouth!” (144). Dana is able to assimilate in the plantation only when she takes the time to learn from the other slaves, as she does when she listens to their conversation in the cookhouse: “I liked to listen to them talk sometimes and fight my way through their accents to find out more about how they survived lives of slavery. Without knowing it, they prepared me to survive” (94). Dana is forced to come to terms with the physical environment of the plantation. What she has to realize is, in Lang’s term, “The physical environment is often best understood as a symbol that represents cultural values and perceptions invested in a place” (85).

Dana’s narrative is replete with the notion of home. The repeated use of the word home implies her sense of displacement. Home to her acts as a source of refuge and a place of proper belonging. “He beat me until I tried to make myself go home” (176). Dana, in her first trip to Maryland, feels completely disconnected to the antebellum South but subsequently she experiences an uncomfortable change in her identity in relation to space. That disconnection, that feeling of strangeness she has “after my trip back to Rufus- caught between his home and mine” (115) morphs overtime. Having invested in Weylin plantation, during her third migration to the place, she narrates:

I could not recall feeling relief at seeing the Weylin house, feeling that I had come home. And having to stop and correct myself, remind myself that I was

in an alien, dangerous place. I could recall being surprised that I would come to think of such a place as home. (190)

She has not yet assimilated the cultural values of antebellum Maryland and if she is to survive, experience will have to be her teacher. Easily the most powerful episode that demonstrates this point is when Dana attempts to run away from the plantation. It happens during “The Fight,” Dana’s fourth trip to the Weylin plantation. Her chief concern during this trip is to reunite with Kevin, who had been accidentally left behind on her previous visit. She plans to run away, but stays on at the plantation in the hope that Kevin will soon respond to letters she has sent him via Rufus. Her decision to run away is immediately precipitated by the revelation that Rufus has lied about sending her letters to Kevin, thus hindering their reunion. Despite Dana’s planning and extensive foreknowledge of the dangers she faces, she does not last long on the run. In fact, she has fared much worse than Alice and Isaac:

We’d both 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! What had Weylin said? That educated didn’t mean smart. He had a point. Nothing in my education or knowledge of the future had helped me to escape. (177)

This fact depicts that Dana’s atlas and history books are not enough to save her. Instead, Dana has to submerge in the temporal-spatial environment of slavery both to survive and to come up with an understanding of slavery. Dana’s experience in the plantation gives her a direct sense of what life under slavery was like. More importantly, through Dana, Butler helps the modern reader to understand how that

tradition persisted overtime.

For the continuity of slave tradition, it required that the master's son learn the ways of his father, the cruelty and indifferent attitude towards the slaves. Leniency, morality, empathy was an undesired trait. Through several encounters with Rufus, Dana observes evidently disturbing behavior as he grows up. Dana observes that even as a child Rufus was already familiar with violence and “probably knew more about revenge than [she] did” (25). On her third visit, the adolescent Rufus is already eliciting fear from the slaves, and shows his tendency to turn mean like his father. She is warned by another slave to “watch out” because like his father he could quickly turn mean, “So can the boy now that he’s growing up” (68). Rufus's growing up into the image of his father unfolds in a way that makes Dana realize that she should attempt to influence him and even endure humiliations in order to give him “as many good memories” (83) of her as she can as way to “take out some insurance” and keep Rufus “from growing up into a red-haired version of his father” (81). Dana's hope for intervention is skeptically received by Kevin as he warns that she is “gambling against history” (83). Historical knowledge surmises that it was literally a gamble as the episode of attempted rape unfolds.

In the chapter “The Fight” Rufus tries to rape his childhood friend Alice. Alice’s husband retaliates and Rufus is nearly beaten to death by her slave husband Issac. This forces them to run away only together only to be eventually caught and severely punished. The outcome is that Issac is sold away and Alice, a free woman until that episode, is enslaved on the Weylin Plantation. Thus, Dana becomes a helpless spectator as Rufus not only goes unpunished for attempted rape, but is actually rewarded for it:

Rufus had...gotten possession of the woman without having to bother with her husband. Now, somehow, Alice would have to accept not only the loss of her husband but her own enslavement. Rufus had caused her trouble, and now he had been rewarded for it. It made no sense. (149)

This incident has double significance: one- that Dana is confronted with the historical reality of power-relations and two- Dana must resign herself to the fact that she “had been foolish to hope to influence him” (123). She now has confirmation that she is powerless to avert the prevailing trends of slavery. In fact, her ancestor Hagar is born not because of willed relation between the two, but out of coerced relation. Moreover, his mistreatment of Alice will drive her to suicide. Despite Rufus’s increasingly apparent corruption, Dana continues to assist him. She does this because she does not consider herself as being in the same predicament as Alice. She sees herself as more of an observer than a participant in history, with “nineteen seventy-six shielding and cushioning eighteen nineteen” for her (101). It is ironical in the sense that Dana’s dislocation acts both as her source of trauma and shielding from that event of traumatic itself. Her situatedness in 1819 slavery Maryland is a dislocation, a source of trauma against which her belonging in the 1970s acts as a refuge.

There is reciprocity between Dana and Rufus. She has to save Rufus often and somehow still trust him where her own well-being is concerned. This is the basis of their “unspoken agreement” to trust each other: Rufus holds the key to Dana’s well-being while she is on the Weylin plantation, while Dana is Rufus’s lifeline when he is in danger (238). Through her repeated efforts to save Rufus from himself, Dana shows that she believes in the power of her leverage over him, but she is as wrong about this as she is about being able to influence him to be kinder. Despite Dana’s best efforts and hopes, Rufus eventually betrays her friendship just as he has done

with Alice. He lies to her about sending her letters to Kevin so that the two may be reunited, he punches her out of jealousy and soon after Alice's suicide, tries to rape her. He does these things because he believes that he can gain possession of Dana just as he has with Alice. He even admits as much, telling her "You were one woman...You and her. One woman. Two halves of a whole" (257). As far as Rufus is concerned, affection for an African-American woman and possession of her amount to the same thing. Despite Rufus's cruelties, *Kindred* does not imply an indictment of individuals, but rather the white supremacist chattel system that is the center of life on the Weylin plantation.

Kevin's experience while being trapped in the past offers a further example of the negative effect the human chattel system has even on members of the white community. Kevin is from another time with a different sensibility. Though he does not descend to the level of Rufus's corruption, he is nonetheless adversely affected by his experience in the south. When he and Dana are finally reunited, she notices a nasty scar above one of his eyes and remarks that "This place, this time, had not been any kinder to him than it had been to me" (184). Dana is concerned about the effect that plantation life will have on Kevin. By virtue of his race and gender, she feels that he may be particularly susceptible to corruption. Indeed, she is aware upon their return to 1976 that he has developed "a slight accent...Nothing really noticeable, but he did sound a little like Rufus and Tom Weylin" (190). The fact that his time in the past has not turned him into one of the Weylins characterizes more about Kevin's own era than anything. Despite his race and his early confidence that he could survive there, he is not at all prepared to live in a slave state. It is as Dana had predicted, that if Kevin were to survive on the plantation it would be because he had "managed to tolerate the life there" (77). However, plantation life proves to be too much of an

assault on Kevin's modern sensibilities. After he and Dana are separated he stays on for a short time, but it is not long before he travels north. In fact, he has travelled so much that he can hardly believe he is home when he finally returns to 1976: "I feel like this is just another stopover...like Philadelphia...New York and Boston. Like that farm in Maine...I kept going farther and farther up the east coast...I guess I would have wound up in Canada next" (192). Kevin cannot get far enough away from the world of slavery. The physical distance he creates between himself and the Weylin plantation is symbolic of the attitudinal distance he feels towards the institution of slavery. Like Dana, he is not at home.

Wounding and Recovery

Butler's theme of reconciliation and recovery emerged from her experience of black's resentment against their ancestors and the white's tendency of overlooking the slavery past. The history of slavery, the process of deliberate forgetting and the need for reconciliation becomes Butler's primary engagement in *Kindred*. The metaphor of the "lost arm", "the hurt," "accident", and "blame" and exoneration of Kevin all work to emphasize the need to understand and overcome the past and arrive at racial assimilation and forgiving. This theme is set out on the very first page of the *Kindred* in which Dana recapitulates her experience of slavery in the hospital. For contemporary African American writers like Butler who are removed from direct memory of slavery but obsessed with re-creating the experience of slavery, they require literary interventions that often use fantastic or innovative means to overcome the temporal and psychic distance separating the slave past and the contemporary milieu.

The prologue begins with a notion of loss brought about by slavery "I lost an arm on my last trip home. My left arm. And I lost about a year of my life and much of

the comfort and security I had not valued until it was gone” (9). Her arm is metaphorically the wound of slavery, the cost of revisiting history in an attempt to work through it. LaCapra emphasizes that working through trauma, through certain wounds, personal or historical, “cannot simply heal without leaving scars or residues in the present” (144). Dana’s trauma is inflicted by the history of slavery and the metaphor of the lost arm is the residue.

Losing her arm is a traumatic event, a price that she has to pay in order to fully grasp the working of slavery system. The consensus about a traumatic event, in the words of Judith Herman, is that it overwhelms the ordinary human adaptations to life. She differentiates traumatic events from commonplace misfortunes in that the former “generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death” (33). Dana is exposed to this during the instance of her first whipping:

I never saw where the whip came from, never even saw the first blow coming. But it came- like a hot iron across my back, burning into me through my light shirt, searing my skin...I screamed...I may have been still screaming or just whimpering, I couldn't tell. All I was really aware of was the pain...Suddenly, I realized what was happening and I screamed- I think I screamed....And I passed out. (107)

This traumatic event leaves Dana unable to assimilate or process the event, and responds in the manner how victims of traumatic events respond through various mechanisms such as psychological numbing, or shutting down on normal emotional response.

Dana by her position in a different time and space is not a direct participant in the original event of slavery. In order to carry out her motif of dealing with

generational trauma, Butler has to relocate Dana across time and space into the antebellum South and recreate this notion of trauma through narrative recall of the experience. Dana's first encounter with the antebellum South is a traumatic experience that is "remembered...relived...recalled...It's becoming like something I saw on television or read about- like something I got second hand" (15-17). Butler resorts to what Kali Tal's assertion that, "Accurate representation of trauma can never be achieved without recreating the event since, by its very definition, trauma lies beyond the bounds of 'normal' conception" (15). This notion of trauma and memory demands the necessity to recreate or abreact through narrative recall of the experience. This recall due to trauma may not be wholesome, rather fragmented. Dana narrates, "...the memory was coming back to me in fragments" (28). Traumatic experience affects the sufferer's sense of self and consciousness. This impact, derived from Freudian notion of Trauma, is an inherent characteristic of traumatic experience and memory.

Butler takes on language's inability as a means of describing traumatic experience so that others will fully comprehend them. Therefore, she devises a way in which her protagonists can embody the very experience and apprehend the difference between having the information about it through secondary means like books and movies and the actuality of living it. Dana narrates:

I could literally smell his sweat, hear every ragged breath, every cry...I could see his body jerking, convulsing, straining against the rope as his screaming went on. ...I had seen people beaten on television and in the movies. I had seen too-red blood substitute streaked across their backs 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. (36)

Dana's embodied experience in the past offers her the actuality of slavery. Butler thus transcends the limitation of language by transporting her characters into the past. We hear here the echoes of Elie Wiesel, a trauma survivor himself, who describes the limitations of language as follows: "What can we do to share our visions? Our words can only evoke the incomprehensible. Hunger, thirst, fear, humiliation, waiting, death; for us hold different realities" (Weisel 33). Dana evokes the incomprehensible when she replies to Rufus, "There're worse things than being dead." This is the reality of the victim of slavery. It is far worse than language can apprehend. This is what Dana realizes when she recalls, "I tried to think through the drugs, through the distant pain, but there was no explanation I could give them- none they would believe" (9). The pain of Dana is experiential pain and inflicted upon by someone but there can be no satisfactory explanation or witnessing.

Butler not only leaves her characters hurt and troubled by their exposure to the racial past but also offers up the possibility of reconciliation. Traumatized and split though Dana might be, by the end of the novel we find her recovered and assimilated to her present reality. During much of her stay in the past, she does not have agency; her identity is split between Dana of the modern day and Dana- the slave woman. In order to recover she has to come back home with agency and reconciled with her experience in the past.

Dana and Kevin at the end of the novel come to terms with their present day reality and derive meaning of their experience. We see the process of healing begin when both of them come back to California together. Dana narrates, "We flew to Maryland as soon as my arm was well enough" (262). Because she has been exposed to and in the mean process viscerally hurt by slavery, nonetheless the imagery of 'arm well enough' implies the recovery has begun. Having come back from the antebellum

Maryland, they travel to the present day Maryland hoping to find what their transportation led them to see. All they can find are some traces of it: “But Rufus’s house was gone. As nearly as we could tell, its site was now covered by a broad field of corn. The house was dust, like Rufus” (262). By likening Rufus to dust, she has denigrated Rufus to insignificance. When they ask a farmer if he knew anything about the grave of Rufus, the farmer knew nothing or at least, said nothing. All they find is a clue through a newspaper that notified that Rufus Weylin had been killed when his house caught fire. In fact, for Dana, Rufus is the past, a burden she had to overcome. Despite her best intentions, Dana had to kill Rufus in order to break the shackles of history, to regain her agency and identity. It is only by killing him that she can come back home without having to go back to the troubled past again.

Despite her traumatic experiences, Dana has to reconcile with the past. She understands her place in history and what that history has done to her and, by extension, to her race. But she also fears for Kevin and does not want him to get into trouble. She narrates, “A place like this would endanger him...If he was stranded here for years, some part of this place would rub off on him” (77). She understands history as something past and that specific time and places have had specific influences. It becomes imperative for her to remove the undue burden of history. Both Dana and Kevin understand that knowing it completely is improbable, therefore insignificant compared to the relief of the present. Kevin replies to Dana, “You’ve looked. And you’ve found no records. You’ll probably never know” (264). The impossibility of knowing the history in totality is accepted at the end. They have had enough of the past. Kevin and Dana’s final conversation in the novel makes sense of their experience. Kevin responds, “You probably needed to come for the reason I did. To try to understand. To touch solid evidence that those people existed. To reassure

yourself that you're sane" (264). Now that "the boy is dead", that is, the burden of history has been lifted; they both have of the chance of staying that way- that is the 'sane' way.

Dana attempts to tackle the issue of historical amnesia and speak the unspeakable. She has been able to write her own history, and in so doing write others into history. *Kindred* is material proof that she has regained her agency and with it induced an authority over the antebellum past where she was forced into silence. In Rufus's words, she "speaks like a damn book" (125). Dana's literacy is her strength, her identity. She narrates, "...I couldn't imagine either of us going for five years without writing" (196). Earlier when Kevin is unable to write she reflects of her own condition, "I winced, remembered my own attempts to write when I'd been home last. I had tried and tried and only managed to fill my wastebasket" (194). Now that she is able to write, she can ask Kevin to give himself some time. Writing then becomes a metaphor of becoming storyteller and historian of her own past. In Schiff's word, through writing Dana is finally able to "heal the split self by preemptively rewriting and undoing the traumatic moment" (110). In short, Dana finally decodes her trauma and recovers from the ordeal of the past.

Chapter V: (Re) Writing Slavery as Recovery

Twelve Years a Slave: A Narrative of Claiming and Writing the Self as Recourse to Recovery from Trauma

Northup's motif in his autobiographical slave narrative, *Twelve Years a Slave*, is to truthfully depict the system of slavery to the best of his memory and the trauma it casts upon the lives of the slaves. The impact of slavery is multi-faceted: the enslaved subject's identity is blurred; culture and familial ties negated, and treatment so inhuman that the subject often prefer death to life. As has been studied, Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* vividly explores the trauma, both visceral and psychological, of the writer himself and the inhuman treatment of his characters under slavery. To support the trauma of the protagonist and other characters, the rhetoric of displacement, dislocation, alienation, extreme physical labour and torture, episodes of cruelties and family separations work according to the purpose of Northup.

In the narrative, Northup penetrates into the Deep South, which is tarred by the system of slavery, and comes up portraying its inhuman practices and the pathetic condition of the black people in it. As a result of his forced relocation in the south, Northup is able to bear witness to the atrocities of slavery. The atrocities and trauma he undergoes act as an insight into the horror of the chattel system. It is as if they are the prices he has paid for the access into the horrifying reality of the slavery system. Had he not toiled for 12 years and not had an unbreakable longing for freedom, he would not have been able to portray a vivid picture of slavery. In order to survive there, it is expected that he should create a persona for himself, adopt a strategy and have an unflinching patience. In *Twelve Years a Slave*, it seems that black life in the south has so eroded in value that Northup's longing for freedom almost seems a far-

fetches dream until towards the end of narrative where he is able to reclaim his lost freedom via reclamation to his identity.

Twelve Years a Slave is not only a narrative of a victim who heroically survives the horror of slavery, but also a testament of the possibility of recovery from the trauma of it. Northup converts his traumatic experience of loss into a meaningful narrative as an articulatory practice that mourns the loss as well as remembers it with the realization that he is past the traumatic experience. He displays a sense of reconciliation with the traumatic past, recovers from the traumas of the past by effectively framing the narrative of his life before, during and post- emancipation. To reiterate, the survivor, in order to recover, must escape the debilitating repetition and the isolation of his own consciousness and reestablish a connection between his pre- and post- traumatic worlds. *Twelve Years a Slave* is Northup's exploration of the past in such a way that it provides a context for understanding trauma that originates from the institution of slavery. Northup has escaped the pre-speech chaos of his traumatized psyche and converted his fragments of thoughts into a coherent, communicable narrative. Through this, Northup has succeeded to a large degree in working through trauma by analyzing and giving voice to the past. He has come to terms with the limit event of his enslavement and given articulations to his experience. We as readers of the narrative can surmise that Northup has achieved his motif.

Kindred: Revisiting Slavery as Therapeutic Regeneration in Interracial Relation

Butler sets on to explore the possibility of reconciliation between the blacks and the whites by sharing mutually in their understanding of the past. Making Dana, the black protagonist and Kevin, the white protagonist, revisit the antebellum world and bring them back to the modern setting, Butler navigates American history and

subtly connects individual consciousness with social history. This navigation foregrounds the elements of the past, undistorted than the masked and inadequate versions offered by the popular media. This calls for the readers to meditate on the relationships between personal and political identities and come to a truer understanding of African- American history.

Both Dana and Kevin are affected by their migration to the antebellum south. Even after by being back home, Dana who herself was unhomed and harmed worries if she were to be blamed for the five years that Kevin had lost in the past. For her coming back home personally is a matter of relief. She feels as if their transportation into the past were an exile. Being back and together underscores the notion that the traumatic history is left behind. Though initially they struggle to communicate and come to terms with their experiences, we find their relationship is redefined, strengthened through these experiences. They have worked through their trauma as they become able to derive meaning out of the experience. It was knowing the past viscerally; touching the solid evidences that slavery and slaves existed in the past.

Butler moves us toward a sense of therapeutic regeneration in interracial love by making Dana and Kevin's relationship a healing force. This therapy stems from identification with one's history by coming to terms with the trauma it entailed. Revisiting history for both Dana and Kevin is crucial for a meaningful appreciation of their relationship and its entanglement with history. Only by apprehending the intermingling of their blood and culture can they come to a better understanding of their present. The narrative underlines the fact that the American history is one of racial encounters and crossovers.

Butler's *Kindred* emphasizes the possibility of recovery from the generational trauma of slavery. First, she has Dana relive those traumatic occurrences as if she is

acting out trauma. She relives the trauma of being unhomed, and visceral and psychological trauma that slave culture produces. She even feels those traumatic occurrences during her transportation in the past intrude her present. Ultimately, Dana is able to survive and continue her life with greater understanding of herself and the past. The realization of the distance between her past, present and future creates a critical distance on the problem of slavery. This capacity indicates that, though Dana is not left without scars, she has been able to work through trauma. When Dana comes to terms with her reality and begins to write a critical narrative of her experiences, we can surmise that the act of writing leads to undoing of the traumatic moment. In doing so, she inscribes Black version of slave history and becomes a storyteller of her own heritage. *Kindred*'s success lies in the fact that it abridges the differing version of histories and opens up a possibility of true kinship. The realization is that as a primal or original event of trauma, slavery holds central position in the formation of African American identity and that for racial reconciliation, the trauma of slavery has to be overcome.

The protagonists in both narratives illustrate not only the trauma suffered by victims of slavery but also the need for them to give meaning to their suffering in order to recover from trauma. They find new, more realistic ground they can relate to in order to give meaning to their experience during and after the traumatic event of enslavement. As survivors of the event of slavery, they confer meaning to their experience by resorting to writing as testimony of their suffering and thus reestablish a connection between their pre-and post-traumatic worlds. The recreation of the flow of life and restoration of a sense of continuity implies recovery ultimately achieved.

Works Cited:

- Alexander, Jeffrey C. "Toward." *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, edited by Jeffrey Alexander et al., University of California Press, 2004.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands*. Aunt Lute Books, 1999.
- Aschroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, editors. *Key Concepts in Post Colonial Studies*. Routledge, 1998.
- Assmann, Jan, and John Czaplicka. "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity." *New German Critique*, no. 65, Duke University Press, 1995, pp. 125–33, doi.org/10.2307/488538.
- Balaev, Michelle. "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory." *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2008, pp. 149–66, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44029500>.
- Bellamy, Maria R. *Bridges to Memory: Postmemory in Contemporary Ethnic American Women's Fiction*. Virginia UP, 2015.
- Berlin, Ira. *Generations of Captivity- A History of African-American Slaves*. Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
- . "The World and the Home." *Social Texts*. 1992, pp. 141-153.
- Butler, Octavia E. *Kindred*, Beacon Press, 2003.
- "Black Women and the Science Fiction Genre: Interview with Octavia Butler." Interview by Frances M. Beal. *The Black Scholar*. vol. 17, no. 2, 1986.
- Castillo, Ana. *Massacre of the Dreamers : Essays on Xicanisma*. University Of New Mexico Press, 2014.

- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. John Hopkins University Press, 2016.
- Eyerman, Ron. *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- "The Past in the Present." *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, edited by Jeffrey Alexander et al., University of California Press, 2004.
- Felman, Shoshana, and Dori Laub. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. Taylor & Francis, 1992.
- Foucault, Michel. *Abnormal: Lectures at the College de France*. Translated by Graham Burchell, Picador, 2004.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*. edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. Cambridge UP, 1993, pp. 392-403.
- "Who Needs 'Identity'?" *Questions of Cultural Identity*. edited by Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay. Sage, 1996. pp. 1-17.
- Hampton, Gregory. "Kindred: History, Revision and (Re)memories of Body." *Obsidian III*, vol.6, no. 2, 2006, pp. 105-117. *JSTOR*
www.jstor.org/stable/44511665
- Henke, Suzette A. *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life-Writing*. Palgrave Macmillan, 1998.
- Herman, Judith L. *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. Pandora, 2001.
- Hirsch, Marianne. "Marked by Memory: Feminist Reflections on Trauma and Transmission." *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, Community*. edited by Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw, Illinois University Press, 2002.

--- *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*. Harvard UP, 2012.

Horvitz, Deborah M. *Trauma: Sadism, Memory, and Sexual violence in American's Women's Fiction*. New York State UP, 2000.

Hua, Linh U. "Reproducing Time, Reproducing History: Love and Black Feminist Sentimentality in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*." *African American Review*, vol. 44, no. 3, 2011, pp. 391-407.

JanMohamed, Abdul R. *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse*. Oxford University Press, 1991.

Johnson, Bethany. "Freedom and Slavery in the Voice of the Negro: Historical Memory and African-American Identity, 1904-1907." *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, vol. 84, no. 1, Georgia Historical Society, 2000, pp. 29-71, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40584226>.

Keadle, Elizabeth Ann. "Fragmented Identities: Explorations of the Unhomely in Slave and Neo-Slave Narratives." *ProQuest LLC*, 2016.

LaCapra, Dominick. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

Larson, Pier M. "Reconsidering Trauma, Identity, and the African Diaspora: Enslavement and Historical Memory in Nineteenth-Century Highland Madagascar." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 56, no. 2, Apr. 1999, pp. 335, 10.2307/2674122. Accessed 5 Nov. 2019.

Leary, Joy Degruy. *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome : America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*. Joy Degruy Publications, 2018.

Levecq, Christine. "Power and Repetition: Philosophies of (Literary) History in

- Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred*." *Contemporary Literature* vol.41, no. 3, 2000, pp. 525-53.
- Long, Lisa A. "A Relative Pain: The Rape of History in Octavia Butler's *Kindred* and Phyllis Alesia Perry's *Stigmata*." *College English* 64.4 (2002): 459-83. *JSTOR*.Web.5 Apr. 2018.
- Morrison, Toni. "The Site of Memory." *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, 2d ed., edited by William Zinsser. Houghton Mifflin, 1995, pp.83-102.
- Neary, Janet Eileen. *Fugitive Testimony: Race, Representation, and the Slave Narrative Form*. California UP, 2009.
- Northup, Solomon. *Twelve Years a Slave*. Harpercollins Publisher Ltd, 2013.
- Nuttman-Shwartz, Orit. "From Settlers to Evacuees: Is Forced Relocation a Traumatic Event?" *Group*, vol. 31, no. 4, 2007, pp. 265–79, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41719165>. Accessed 6 Apr. 2019.
- Parham, Marisa. "Saying 'Yes': Textual Traumas in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*." *Callaloo*. vol.42, no. 4, 2009, pp. 1315-1331.
- Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death*. Harvard Up, 1982.
- Pellicer-Ortin, Silvia. "Testimony and the Representation of Trauma in Eva Figes' Journey to Nowhere." *Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo American Studies*. vol. 33, no.1, June 2011, pp. 69-84.
- Powell, Katrina M. "Rhetorics of Displacement: Constructing Identities in Forced Relocations." *College English*, vol. 74, no. 4, National Council of Teachers of English, 2012, pp. 299–324, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23212903>.
- Robertson, Benjamin. "'Some Matching Strangeness': Biology, Politics, and the Embrace of History in Octavia Butler's '*Kindred*.'" *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2010, pp. 362–81. *JSTOR*

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25746439>.

Rodwell, Grant. "Understanding the Past through Historical Fiction." *Whose History?*

University of Adelaide Press, 2013.

Rushdy, Ashraf H. A. *Neo-slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary*

Form. Oxford UP, 1999.

Saraswathi, V. "The Culture-Literature Connection: Changing Implication for

Curricular Design". *Post- Coloniality: Reading Literature*. edited by C. T.

Indra and Meenakshi Shivram. Vikas Publication, 1999, pp. 221-230.

Sarah Eden Schiff. "Recovering (From) the Double: Fiction as Historical Revision in

Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred*." *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American*

Literature, Culture, and Theory, vol. 65, no. 1, 2009, pp. 107–136,

10.1353/arq.0.0032. Accessed 16 Dec. 2020.

Smelser, Neil J. "Psychological." *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, by Jeffrey

Alexander et al., University of California Press, 2004.

Spaulding, A. Timothy. *Re-forming the Past: History, the Fantastic, and the*

Postmodern Slave Narrative. Ohio State UP, 2005.

Steinberg, Marc. "Inverting History in Octavia Butler's Postmodern Slave

Narrative." *African American Review*, vol.38, no. 3, 2004.

Suleiman, Susan Rubin. "Judith Herman and Contemporary Trauma Theory."

Women's Studies Quarterly, vol. 36, no. 1/2, 2008, pp. 276–81,

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/27649762>. Accessed 11 Jan. 2022.

Tal, Kali. *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literature of Trauma*. Cambridge UP, 1996.

Thaggart, Miriam. "12 years a Slave: Jasper's Look." *American Literary History*, vol.

26, no. 2, 2014, pp. 332-338.

Tillet, Salamishah. "I Got No Comfort in This Life: The Increasing Importance of

Patsey in *12 Years a Slave*." *American Literary History*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2014,
pp.353-361

White, Hayden. "The Historical Text as Literary Artefact." *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. John Hopkins UP, 1978, pp. 81-100.

Vickroy, Laurie. "'Beloved' And 'Shoah': Witnessing the Unspeakable." *The Comparitist*, vol.22. May 1998, pp. 123-144.

---*Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*. Charlottesville, University Of Virginia Press, 2002.

Wertsch, James V. *Voices of Collective Remembering*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Wiesel, Elie. "To Believe or not to Believe." *From the Kingdom of Memory*. New York Summit, 1990.