

## **I. Introduction: Memory as a Source of Identity**

This research takes Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* to explore the relationship between memory and identity. Jones's explores the subjective dimensions of memory and consequences on the lives of four generations of Corregidora women; namely Ursa, her mother, grandmother and great grandmother. The Corregidora past is associated with the history of slavery and sexual exploitation imposed on the great grandma and grandma by a White Portuguese. The great grandma decided that this should be remembered by her off-springs, and narrates it to her siblings. In this way, the story of sexual exploitation on the great grandma and grandma is passed over the generations. The continuation of the past memory has been the source of identity to the Corregidora women.

The idea of present research is to associate the notion of memory with identity. In doing so, the researcher will discuss and analyze the works of Roger Luckhurst, Geoffrey Hartman and Martin Heidegger and its essence to the present novel, *Corregidora*. The idea of trauma is associated with memory because if an individual tends to forget things and events, there cannot be pain. The essence of pain and sufferings has its root in the psychic knowledge of the past which is associated with present.

Jones's *Corregidora* forms identity of memory because this has become one of the means of claiming the existence of Corregidora. There are several ways of claiming one's own existence, like social status, family nomenclature, economy, government post and services, geography and culture are some of the ways of an individual's identity. However, the Corregidoras have associated their presence with the memory of sufferings and exploitation being imposed on their great grandma and grandma. Ursa, the latest in the hierarchy of Corregidora women, has also been narrated the horrible past by her grandma and mother, which has become the notion of her identity. The mental level of

association with the history of the Corregidora past has become a ritual like identity inherited from the past.

The Corregidora women are haunted by the traumatizing burden of history and memory. They have a past saturated with stories of injustice. In the course, they do not realize that they are perpetuating the logic, spirit and politics of oppression by passing legacies and haunting tales to their offspring. Ursa has associated self with the past as her identity. This unusual way of identifying self with the bitter memories of the past is traumatic to Ursa. However, this will ensure that the history is continued in the form of pain inscribed in the body. It will ensure the continuity by bearing children who would leave evidence through the transmission of the ancestral legacy.

Corregidora women have been living a repressive version of history. These women are forced to adhere to a prescribed life story that submerges them in victimization and conditions their hearts, minds, consciousness and perceptions. After internalizing the stories of great-grand so intensely that they become this ancestor during the process of narration, they pass her instructions to their descendents through storytelling. As such, for Bruce Simon in “Traumatic Repetition in Gayl Jones’s *Corregidora*” is a narrative of traumatic consciousness, as:

However, passing instructions in a prescriptive spirit contradicts the ethics of storytelling and narration since both rely on the establishment of a dialogic/interactive relationship between teller and listener, catalyzing processes of transformation of one’s consciousness and paving the way for the one to the other for the realization of the importance of autonomy and responsibility. (102)

The narrative of the history is traumatic in itself. However, one cannot deny that this has helped to form a mental level of solace to the women in the Corregidora. Ursa, the latest

in the line of *Corregidora* is initially not comfortable with this fact; however, by the end of the novel she seems convince to the family tradition and wants this trend to be continued.

Jones's *Corregidora* examines the history of life and people from the aspects of mental torture that has taken place to them in the past. This relationship with past is as if a ritual that the *Corregidora* women cannot forget. This aspect forms the present day mannerism of the Ursa. There are critical interventions, the inter-subjective dimensions of storytelling and memory in the novel. This helps to the formation of the employment of hybrid versions of history and identity. This process contributes to the transformation of the gendered and racialized body into a site of inscription of multi-vocal counter-narratives that work against the ancestral perpetuation of the oppressor's logic.

Memory of a fugitive slave community catalyzes processes of message through which Jones's protagonist, Ursa *Corregidora*, differently conceives and reconstructs familial legacy, personal history and sexuality. Empowered by such a reconciliatory move, Ursa is able to reclaim the ethics and dialogism of storytelling and reconfigure sites of hybridization, bringing together the sexual and the historical, the individual and the collective, the Afro-Brazilian past and the African-American present.

In words of Lynne Tirrell in "Storytelling and Moral Agency," the sexual exploitation is one of the means of creating identity to the *Corregidora* women. He narrates:

Oblivious to the ethics of transmission and obsessed by Great Gram's visions of the ultimate act of testifying against *Corregidora*, the Portuguese slave owner, the *Corregidora* women become so powerfully immersed in histories of domination and suffering that they are incapable of critically perceiving the past and integrating it into their life story. (37)

The memory of the great grandma being a sexual slave to a Portuguese man and her daughter, the grandma of Ursa also being the Portuguese master's sexual slave has paralyzed generations of Corrigedora women.

It is this issue of historical exploitation that the females have taken as the source of memory and, found identity in the same. Showing the connection between trauma, violence and political community in "Introduction: Trauma, Violence and Political Community," Edkins Jenny points out how traumas such as wars or persecutions are inscribed and rein scribed into everyday narratives. She further states, ". . . takes place in practices of remembrance, demoralization and witnessing. It also takes place in political action. All these practices are the site of struggle" (15). So, these sites of memory where the past atrocities keep coming are the notion of struggle. From this sense of struggle there arises the sense of alienation, frustration, and so which ultimately give rise to the sense of recognition, let it be fair or unfair.

The idea of separation and identification of self with the past events is something that people could hardly negate of. In this regards, Edkins puts forwards her idea about trauma and posits, "Memory is not straightforward, especially in case of traumatic memory" (16). Jenny further argues that some forms of remembering can be seen as ways of forgetting: ways of recovering from trauma by putting its lessons to one side, refusing to acknowledge that anything has changed, restoring the pretence. So, after traumatic events, there is struggle over memory. It is the memory that is the inborn of trauma, as Jenny points out:

As far as memory is concerned, how we remember a war, for example, and the way in which we acknowledge and describe what we call trauma can be very much influenced by dominant views, that is, by the state [...], can be contested and challenged. Forms of statehood in contemporary

society, as forms of political community, are themselves produced and reproduced through social practice, including practices of trauma and memory. (11)

This definition notion on traumatic memory clarifies that memory is not straightforward, especially traumatic memory. So forms of state hold in contemporary society are produced and reproduced themselves through social practices, including practices of trauma and memory.

In this way, the essence of the trauma is precisely that it is too horrible to be remembered; to be integrated in to our symbolic universe. They cannot forget, and some are haunted by nightmares and flashbacks to scene of unimaginable horror. The fundamental contribution of identity lies in the idea that one's distinctiveness is constituted neither by nature nor by culture. This is formed by the means of some idea planted in an individual's mind. This idea for the Corregidora women comes from the fact that they are the incestuous product of a white slave master – a Portuguese slave trader. As such, for these women to exist is precisely to constitute such an identity. It is in light of this idea that key existential notions such as facticity, transcendence, alienation and authenticity must be taken into consideration because these factors form an identity. These identification methods have its impact in the psychological notion of Ursa, and her ancestors. Nevertheless, it has been one of the facets of the present world where people find solace in association of self with one's past.

Moreover, because of the monolithic and authoritative character of Great Gram's tale, Ursa becomes unable to healthily reconstruct herself through what Annette Baier characterizes as a mechanism of psychological self-recreation. Baier argues that simple consciousness is not a sufficient catalyst for personhood. The construction necessitates a more reflective and reflexive consciousness of oneself and the world for Baier involves:

A consciousness of stimuli relevant to what in fact is self-maintenance in that world requires a sense of temporality, which allows one to perceive the self as having a past, present and future. Moreover, it asks for a responsible awareness of one's ancestry and legacy. Through this process, the individual, social, and historical aspects of one's sense of self are authorized to interact and shape one another. (88)

Unfortunately, Ursa is deprived of this ability to recreate herself and transform the ancestral tale to reap the practical benefits of telling and retelling the oral story. For Baier, the notion of being able to translate the happenings into words and language and to recreate them is the happening reality of the time.

So, the association of language and memory becomes the source of trauma. In the analysis of the relation between traumatic memory and history, expanding Freud's ideas, Caruth and Felman have added some more. Trauma's meaning in Western medicine extends from a surgeon's description of a wound to the head in the early nineteenth century to a much more complex and puzzling narrative about a wound to the psyche toward the century's end. This transformation has about it a compelling social character: trauma becomes attached to psychic injury when train accident victims complain of lingering mental and physical disorders despite the fact that they emerge from accident scenes "unharmed". Giving a general definition of trauma in her essay "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History," Caruth says:

Trauma describes an overwhelming experiences of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. The experience of the soldier faced with sudden and massive death around him, for example, who suffers this sight in a numbed state,

only to relieve it later on in repeated nightmares, is a central and recurring image of trauma in our century. (181)

The trauma theory has aroused a vivid interest among the cultural and literary theorists. The reason behind why trauma theory has begun to drag the attention of theorists pushes us to look at popular culture and mass media obsessed by repetitions of violent disaster.

As such, trauma has become popular and inevitable because of its preoccupation with family dysfunctions, child abuse, incest, spousal abuse in the media, most strikingly on the talk show circuit. There appears to be the sense both that family is the only hope for curing all social ills and that the family is damaged beyond hope.

The Corregidora's wanting to break their interest in family breakdown and violence comes the interest of enigmatic figure of the survivor, the one who has faced the catastrophe and can tell us what it is like. The surviving memory is a kind of living 'black box,' a source of final knowledge of authority. Over the past fifteen years there has been an enormous growth in the interest in eyewitness accounts and testimonies of all kinds: by victims of child abuse, holocaust survivor, survivor of near death experiences. The case of Corregidora is of the incest relationship that grew in the past and has its root in the present. This has been associated with the family tradition passing from the great grandma to present Ursa.

The grandma who experienced the atrocities of the Corregidora past, presents Ursa with a different perspective on the oral and familial tale. She passes her family legacy in the form of narration and wants Ursa to learn to live with it. Gram's insight into the art of storytelling and her comments about the reflexivity of this art open to Ursa a world of possibilities and create new spaces. These spaces are partially shaped by the realization of the unreliability of memory and its slippery nature; in fact, as Gram maintains, there are many regenerative and healthy aspects that can result from the

flexibility of memory. Gram's perception of the family legacy is different from her mother's; she does not obsessively and hauntingly stress the necessity of leaving evidence.

In her discourse, Jones underlines the fact that the process of leaving evidence presents a number of dangers affecting the minds of the people who are involved in this process, as Ursa narrates:

They burned all the documents, Ursa, but they did not burn what they put in their minds; they would have, if it were possible. We got to burn out what they put in our minds, like you burn out a wound. Except we got to keep what we need to bear witness. That scar that's left to bear witness. We got to keep it as visible as our blood. (72)

In this passage, Gram warns Ursa against the residues that might colonize the minds of the slaves and their descendents. These residues, "what they put in our minds," are related to distorted notions of self-worth, respect and identity. They mark the lives of the slaves and their descendents because they perpetuate the psychological wounds and the politics of oppression characteristic of the era of slavery. Through her reflections on the past, Gram incites Ursa to rework the tales she has heard and the silenced stories of herself not only by testifying but also by learning the strategies of survival, based on blocking some of the effects of the past so that they would not control the totality of her life.

Ursa thus realizes that she must refuse to be transformed into a site of artificial memory. Indeed, as Pierre Nora maintains, "lieux de memoire" "originate [d] with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory" (289); consequently, in order to preserve the mnemonic traces, people constructed sites of memory, including museums, festivals, etc. These lieu are inhabited by a crystallized, fixed and stable form of memory. In a parallel



way, Ursa's body and soul are facing the literal and figurative threat of becoming a museum for the perpetuation of a past that Great Gram thinks is dying. Rather than reconstruct the past by starting from the trace as historians do, Ursa has to discard some of the horrible details of the past without losing sight of the importance of preserving the memory related to the traumatic events recounted to her.

At first, it seems hard to understand how one can say much about identity as such. Traditionally, philosophers have connected the concept of existence with that of essence that helps to create and address meaning of living in this futile life. As such, if the essence of living is designation and association with remote past, it helps to surrender to the sufferings. And, the fact is one cannot escape the traumatic sufferings but has to surrender to it. The only way to escape the bitter past is to realize it with that of the present. The Corregidora women have accepted this fact and are public in accepting this fact.

In her quest for self-refashioning, Ursa revisits, and works through, the controversial implications of the trans-generational tales that dominated her childhood, in order to determine the limitations that she should impose upon the invasive slave past and its haunting details. As the novel progress, such versions mark the lives of Ursa and her family, leaving their mark on their perception of self. Throughout this process, she acquires a deeper insight into the importance and perils of remembering ancestral narratives. The family history Ursa is told and retold not only revolves around the experiences of Great Gram and Gram, it is also informed by the perspective of various narrators who inherit the generational tales.

This generational tales are the source of identity to the Corregidora women. It objectifies the person and treats its open-ended practical horizons as in a certain sense closed; like the former, however, it seeks to understand the choices from the inside, to

grasp the identity of the individual as a matter of the first-person meaning that haunts him, rather than as a function of inert psychic mechanisms with which the individual has no acquaintance.

For Martin Heidegger, to exist is to be historical. Hence, the notion of memory and identity are associated with each other. However, this does not mean that one simply finds oneself at a particular moment in history, conceived as a linear series of events and continues to be its victim. Rather, it means that selfhood has a peculiar temporal structure that is the origin of that history which subsequently comes to be narrated in terms of a series of events. In words of Heidegger, the past has its root to present:

The idea of having ones existence in the sense of trauma is not a good idea; however, this is something one cannot deny. Existential temporality is not a sequence of instants but instead a unified structure in which the future that recollects the past that is, what no longer needs to be done, the completed so as to give meaning to the present that is, the things that take on significance in light of what currently needs doing. This concept again has its philosophy in traumatic sufferings.

Leading theorists of trauma Dominick LaCarpa and Geoffrey Hartman base his concept of trauma on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis speak and argue about the need for 'acting-out' or 'working-through' of the trauma for leading li fe as healthy citizens. The Corregidoras have acted out their sufferings in the form of narratives and tale that has passed from generation to generations. Freud, in "Mourning and Melancholy," describes two opposite forces that act simultaneously to convert traumatic experience in all form of writing:

The literary form gets its strength from the struggle between the urge to cry out from the burning core of traumatic experience, on the one hand, and the drive to rationally construct the core of the trauma as a symbolic

representation molded in language, thus keeping it at a safe distance from that of urge to cry. (8)

In other words, all forms of writing on traumatic experiences is based on two forms of remembering trauma- the first result in the process of working-through, the other is based on denial and results in 'acting-out.' Both concepts come from Freud and have been developed in such a way that it could be used in historical studies.

To act, therefore, is to historicize and constitute something like a narrative unity, with beginning, middle, and end that does not so much take place in time as provides the condition for linear time. This narrative, traumatic or pleasing, both have its presence in the conscience of the bearer. The great-grandma initiated this fact into the life of the Corregidora women following the bloodline, and hence memory has given birth to identity. So, Ursa has acted out to restore her sense of history in the form of memory that continues to haunt her, to the day. Despite the fact that this is nothing of sort of sweet memory, Ursa continues to take her great grandma's story replicate in her present life, as well.

Dominick LaCapra in *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory and Trauma* talks about related goals of trauma as to intervene in and clarify some of the recent public controversies. Regarding holocaust and representation of memory, LaCarpa clarifies:

To elaborate a theory of historical trauma and its transmission is to create an identity on historical set up. The trauma theory and its cultural transmission is extraordinarily lucid and insightful having its root in history of memory. A traumatic historical event tends to be repressed and then to return in forms of compulsive repetition. (574)

The notion of trauma has its root in the past. It is the past events that shape the present of an individual in the process of joining the past to the present. The Corregidoras have a

bitter past – a holocaust of memory; however, this is the sense that has given them a sense of recognition, knowingly or unknowingly.

As such, based on the above mentioned ideas, the present research takes on the notion of inheritance of memory. As such, the first chapter entitled “Memory as a Source of Identity,” analyzes the relationship of memory and identity based on various literatures. Similarly, the second chapter, “Narrativizing Memory to Form Identity in *Corregidora*” takes into various aspects of identity being narrated through memory in *Corregidora*. Finally, the last chapter “Blurring of History as Identity” concludes the research.

## II. Narrativizing Memory to Form Identity in *Corregidora*

Memory is one of the sources of identification of an individual. Every individual has a separate way of recognition of an individual. The four-generation of *Corregidora* women have an unusual way of identification associated with memory. They are the inborn of a White Portuguese who fathered the great grandma and grandma of Ursa and hence, she and her mother have come into existence. These *Corregidora* women are associated with the unalterable fact of their birth and continuation of their clan. This fact is associated with the present understanding of the formation of identity of the *Corregidora* women.

Jones's *Corregidora* is the depiction of the historicity of Ursa's experiences. The novel presents complex versions of the past and problematizes its relationship to personal memory as well as to the homogenizing dominant narratives. In this context, the ways in which the young boy and Ursa perceive and use the story of Palmares provide an example of how historical spaces of resistance must be configured by the contemporary African-American people through the resurrection, re-appropriation and hybridization of certain aspects of their historical legacy.

The notion of memory reaches as far as the Palmares and the dreams of the Afro-Brazilian slave on the *Corregidora* plantation. Jones focuses on the need to fashion a clearer vision related to the interconnectedness of stories of struggle against oppression in Brazil and the United States. She also provides, through the depiction of the processes of hybridization and emplotment initiated by Ursa, an example of the healthy use of the oppressive and redemptive potential residing in the ancestral stories.

The plot of the novel develops in two side by side narration. The italicized lines and paragraph in the novel depicts the past events imposed on the *Corregidora* women. The past event has been as if like a mythology which comes to the mind and body of

Ursa and she, let it has its impact in her. In addition, it is mythologized because of the temporal gap separating the storytellers from the people who have had a direct experience of the events. As Ursa puts it:

My great-grandma told my grandma the part she lived through that my grandma did not live through and my grandma told my mama what they both lived through and my mama told me what they all lived through and we were suppose to pass it down like that from generation to generation so we'd never forget. (9)

When Ursa tries to tell the stories of her family, she discovers that they have acquired a legendary character and have become prescribed, losing the intimacy that generational narrative must preserve to enrich and nurture personal history. Ursa is fully aware of the importance of her familial legacy; she attempts to probe its repercussions on her life and its significance for her sense of continuity. However, she refuses to become prisoner of that history or to receive instructions prescribing her feelings about the past.

The answer to the pain and pleasure involved in the ancestral secret shows how great grandma, a slave woman, resisted within the limits of her own capabilities. She tried to seize agency and for a brief moment assert her subjectivity. As she rethinks the historical secret, Ursa establishes a parallelism between Great Gram's controversial act of resistance to objectification by *Corregidora* and the type of control she possesses during the act of fellatio on Mutt. Starting from this kind of parallelism, Ursa configures hybrid spaces linking the sexual and the historical, the personal and the collective, the Brazilian past and the American present.

Such configurations contribute to the creation of alternative forms of self-inscription into the ancestral stories. Moreover, as she works with and through her great grandmother's experience, Ursa engages in processes of redefinition of the role that

sexuality and desire play in the shaping of acts of resistance. She also probes the means of generating a heteroglossal “daughterly language of desire” out of these processes of resistance (Dubey 250).

Before exploring such phenomena, one needs to examine the definition and significance of resistance within the context of the patriarchal system of slavery. In his discussion of the consequences of the slaves’ objectification and their reaction to the “paternalism” inherent in the system of slavery in the South, Eugene Genovese maintains that slaves showed, at the same time, “accommodation and resistance to slavery.” Accommodation was a means of “adaptation,” allowing the slaves to accept “what could not be helped without falling prey to the pressures of dehumanization, emasculation, and self-hatred.” On the other hand, resistance was exhibited under two forms. The first form was based on “prepolitical non-revolutionary self-assertion,” a type of daily resistance involving infanticide, lying, murder, stealing and arson. The second form of resistance included “political responses” such as flight and collective violence to counter the savagery of the system (Roll 597-98, 591; qtd. in Rushdy 281). Resistance, in this respect, must be perceived not only as a group of actions informed by specific principles but also as a set of possibilities originating from, and related to, particular historical and social conditions. The careful analysis of historical acts of resistance must be informed by the context that necessitated these types of actions and the conditions making them possible, producing fear and anxiety in the oppressors’ lives by threatening certain spaces, sites and domains significant to their survival.

For the female victims of New World patriarchal slavery, the main domain of resistance to oppression resided in sexuality. In Brazil, the bodies of slave women were exploited in multiple ways; slave masters had sexual intercourse with many female slaves, using their bodies for sexual pleasure and for the increase of the number of

workers on the plantation. Moreover, unlike slave owners in the United States, Brazilian slave masters obliged slave women to work as prostitutes, thus securing an additional source of income (Russell Wood 37). Because of this specific historical background related to the Brazilian system of slavery, it is arguable that resistance would mostly be related to the domain of sexuality, which constitutes the main site of oppression. The resistance of the slave women, who suffered from their transformation into sexual and economic commodities, is best described by Darlene Clark Hinge's statement: "the slave woman's resistance to sexual and therefore to economic exploitation posed a potentially severe threat to paternalism itself, for implicit in such action was the slave woman's refusal to accept her designated responsibilities within the slave system as legitimate" (7; qtd. in Rushdy 281).

*Corregidora* presents crucial instances of resistance by slave women, giving Ursa deeper insight into her position vis-a-vis the family secret. In the final scene, this protagonist repeats with some difference Great Gram's act of resistance, and she feels that, for a certain period of time, she "became" her great grandmother. As she puts it, "It was like I didn't know how much was me and Mutt and how much was Great Gram and *Corregidora*" (184). Significantly, this scene is also a site of metissage of a number of sexual, historical, individual and collective narratives of resistance to the oppressive conditions of slavery. As Ursa tries to solve the family "puzzle," she conjures up the stories revolving around the different, plural and ambivalent means used to counter the humiliations of slavery.

When she feels that she has become a continuation of her great grandmother, and after she discovers the answer to the *Corregidora* secret, Ursa has to make a difficult choice about the type of "action" she must perform on Mutt. In her struggle for meaning, the past and the present confront each other. As Deborah Horvitz succinctly puts it,



“Aware of the fact that she can sexually control a man through sadomasochism, Ursa identifies herself as a *Corregidora* woman; at the same time, her choice not to exploit that power is her declaration of independence from her ‘mothers’” (257).

Indeed, Ursa is extremely conscious of the power she has over her former husband, as is shown through her repetition of the statement “I could kill you”; however, she is also acutely aware of the dangers accompanying the existence of such a power (184). If Ursa chooses to emasculate Mutt as her means of achieving control, she would be reenacting a historical scene of emasculation by a slave woman who had to pay a tremendous price for her act. Great Gram had told Ursa about a slave woman “over on the next plantation” who resisted her master’s attempt at raping her by cutting off “his thing with a razor she had hid under the pillow” (66). Her master bled to death and she was punished by the police who “cut off her husband’s penis and stuffed it in her mouth, and then they hanged her. They let him bleed to death. They made her watch and then they hanged her” (67). As Great Gram explains to Ursa, choosing resistance over accommodation might result not only in personal suffering but also in extreme pain for one’s family.

The story Great Gram tells Ursa points to sexuality as a site of multiple forms of oppression, including the one practiced by the power of the white state. The state not only allowed slave owners to abuse slave women, but it also presented a castrated and emasculated black man in spectacle in order to punish the acts of resistance of his wife. As Great Gram puts it, “What happened over on that other plantation” was a “warning, cause they might want your pussy, but if you do anything to get back at them, it’ll be your life they be wonting, and then they make even that some kind of a sex show” (125).

Sexuality also constitutes a site of oppression because of the control that the slave owners have over the bodies and sexual desires of the slaves. For example, *Corregidora*

had forbidden all types of sexual interaction between black men and black women, using his power to frustrate their desire and their aspirations for emotional fulfillment. This type of oppression secured close and vigilant control of the black bodies.

Because of its direct and indirect connections with the commodification of desire and with economic policing, sexuality for the slaves does not belong only to the personal domain; it is rather a space of resistance, defying the regulations imposed by the institution of slavery. Seeing the punishment reserved for open acts of resistance, which present a greater danger to their initiators than to their supposed targets, the slaves owned by *Corregidora* draw their own conclusions from the event that happened on the other plantation. Moreover, they strive to find other types of resistance to their oppressive conditions. The acts of resistance by the *Corregidora* slaves, as it is implied in the final scene, take two main forms. The first one, mainly physical, is illustrated by Great Gram's act of biting *Corregidora*'s penis. The second form of resistance is represented by the dreams of nurturing communal and social relations transcending slavery and resisting its dehumanizing objectification. Such a type of resistance is best represented by *Palmares*, a society formed by fugitive slaves in Brazil.

In the final scene, as Ursa performs fellatio on Mutt, she is rethinking two different scenes from her past. In fact, the author signals that Ursa has in mind the "hate and love" scene because she remembers the exact words that Gram used to talk about Great Gram's act: "What is it a woman can do to a man that make him hate her so bad he wont to kill her one minute and keep thinking about her and can't get her out of his mind the next?" (173). Ursa conjures up another scene in which "she [Mama] had started talking like Great Gram," which is also the moment Ursa heard the story of the slave woman on the neighboring plantation and the tale related to *Palmares*" (184).

Palmares is mentioned in the story referring to a young slave boy who runs away from the *Corregidora* plantation after he tells great grandma about his ultimate hope of “running away and joining up with them renegade slaves up in Palmares” (126). The reference to Palmares is of a crucial importance since this community is a symbol of collective slave resistance in Brazil. In fact, Palmares is the most famous and successful Brazilian quilombo or maroon society, whose story goes back to around 1605, with forty African slaves who ran away from Porto Calvo and started a community in Palmares.

The population of Palmares resisted various attacks between 1672 and 1697, the year of its destruction. In this community, the fugitive slaves enjoyed a stable social and cultural life inspired by the Angolan-Congolese social, political and economic systems. Indeed, as Stuart B. Schwartz notes, there are many structural commonalities between the Brazilian quilombo and the institution carrying the same name in Angola (KiMbundu Kilombo) (122-36). Modeled after an African political system which protected the diversity and freedom of its subjects, Palmares defended its autonomy against a number of attacks by armed forces from Holland and Portugal (Anderson 547-48; Dubey 250). This Quilombo and its last leader, Zumbi embody “the strongest resistance to the slave-based colonial regime, and, consequently, the struggle for economic and political justice” (Anderson 545).

The past Ursa has been handed down by Great Gram is limiting and imprisoning because it is exclusively inspired by dictated feelings: Great Gram not only passes on stories to Ursa, she also tells her how to feel about these stories reflecting the ancestral experiences on the Brazilian plantation. Having completely integrated the coercive language used by Great Gram in her account of the brutal rapes she had been subjected to in Brazil, Ursa is obsessed by the insistence on continuity conveyed through the discourse of her ancestor, which is impersonal and full of repetitive refrains.

In these refrains, *Corregidora* is a central to memory connecting to a number of coercive situations that are narrativized. Ursa is instructed to tell and transmit to future generations. This protagonist feels fated to literally and figuratively reproduce the details of the ancestral story since she was forced to believe totally in its truthfulness and never question its veracity. In fact, when five-year-old Ursa asks her great grandmother after hearing the story, “You telling the truth, Great Gram?” her maternal ancestor reacts violently by slapping her and saying:

When I’m telling you something don’t you ever ask if I’m lying. Because they didn’t want to leave no evidence of what they done--so it couldn’t be held against them. And I’m leaving evidence. And you got to leave evidence too. And your children got to leave evidence. And when it come time to hold up the evidence, we got to have evidence to hold up. That’s why they burned all the papers, so there wouldn’t be no evidence to hold up against them. (14)

In this passage, great-ma specifically refers to the burning of slave trade documents, which was ordered at the beginning of the 1890s by the minister of finances in Brazil. Unconsciously acting as an oppressor and asking for unqualified acceptance of her story – a source to recognize her internal sufferings.

Ursa’s great grandmother teaches her a harsh lesson about the consequences of doubting the veracity of the *Corregidora* legacy. The little girl’s question about the authenticity of the ancestral narrative is countered by physical punishment and a continuous stress on her own and her children’s duty to leave evidence. Great Gram’s story, characterized by “absolute truth-telling claims,” reproduces the spirit of oppression as it “replicates the masterful and repressive gestures of the dominant tradition it tries to supplant” (Dubey 253). Consequently, five-year-old Ursa learns that her questions

belong to a forbidden realm; they allow her great grandmother to reproduce violence on her body. As a result, early in her life, this protagonist is presented with a distorted view of communication as a form of re-enactment of *Corregidora*'s abusive assaults. She is also taught that she must "make generations" who would "leave evidence" and keep the family tale alive; in other words, Ursa is ordered to transform her body into a "site of history's inscription" (Horvitz 248).

This protagonist, however, is able to notice the loss of the emotional quality of Great Gram's stories. Ursa recalls that as a young girl, she heard her great grandmother recount stories as though she were transported by the words conveying the depth of the sexual and psychological abuse *Corregidora* had forced her to go through: "It was as if the words were helping her, as if the words repeated again and again could be a substitute for memory, were somehow more than the memory. As if it were only the words that kept her anger" (11). Great Gram's use of the "words" defies the ethics of storytelling in which traditions are "never separate from the people, the human implications"; as Jones says, this multidimensional art is "about all ... [of one's] connections as a human being" ("Gayl Jones: An Interview" 693). The memories Ursa has of her great grandmother's tales of slavery do not leave room for ambivalence as a "human implication" because Great Gram forced this protagonist never to question the mnemonic projections of the ancestral story. Her tales presented "absolute" versions of the past, characterized by evil and intense victimization. With its polarization of past and present and its lack of ambivalence and paradoxes, the ancestral narrative does not leave any space for Ursa to explore her personal story. Having been transformed into a rigid, monolithic entity, the intergenerational tale reinforces the obsessive potential of the ghosts of the past. As a myth characterized by resistance to mutations and interactive exchanges, the memory of Ursa's maternal ancestors has been frozen in space and time,

in a state of stasis and stagnation. Moreover, the legend told and retold by Great Gram is absorbed by Ursa, who repeats it without realizing its implications on her life story.

Unconsciously, she fixes this narrative and distances it from her sense of self instead of using it as a tool of revision and reclamation. Ursa is thus held prisoner by the colonizing power of her great grandmother's imitation of the dominant language described by bell hooks as a territory that limits and defines.

As Lynne Tirrell maintains, when people recount a story, they articulate their thoughts about a number of events and characters, presenting their personal perspective and a set of judgments. Those who listen to a story, however; "confront a perspective, a character, and a set of judgments" (116). The notion of "confrontation" acquires a deeper significance in the context of the intergenerational heritage/ narration whose repercussions shape the historical and social perspectives of the listener. Confrontation also constitutes a site of convergence of sympathy and resistance to stories, and it involves interplay between the subjectivities of the teller's and the listener's experiences. Because of her belief in the immutability of stories of the past, Great Gram has given Ursa the material to be transmitted without developing her sense of respect for the "confrontational" and dialogic essence characterizing the process of storytelling and transmission.

Ursa perceives her family history as a monolithic construct; her understanding of this history, framed by her great grandmother's formulaic discourse and alienated from Ursa's sense of identity, paves the way for the composition of a historic narrative based on an authoritative form of discourse. This type of discourse does not allow for what Edward M. Bruner describes as dialogic narration, which is involved in the project of shaping historical meanings and spaces of memory in a collective enterprise based on continual processes of reformation of the past ideas. Confined by her great

grandmother's narrative, Ursa is thus doomed to reproduce, through formulaic repetition, the family legend and sufferings in the form of repetition of the past.

Consequently, this protagonist must find a way of controlling the power of past events/stories by reducing their presence to what Gram calls "a scar," which would allow her to alleviate the haunting by the past without subjecting it to full amnesia. Ursa should thus place this familial history under the sign of the other, a process by which "history tends as a whole to make the past remote from the present. It can even expressly attempt to produce an effect of strangeness in contrast to the desire to make the unfamiliar familiar" (Ricoeur 15). Through this enterprise, Ursa would feel that, to a certain extent, the past has been transformed into a strange and different land, which would enable her to effect what Ricoeur calls a spiritual decentering or distancing from the inherited past.

Gram is able to suggest to Ursa an alternative way of perceiving memory and its relationship to the self because she has deep insight into the dynamics of remembering and the flexible character of memory. Moreover, this ancestral figure knows that memory is slippery and mutable; it involves processes of construction and reconstruction that result in the grafting of narratives of pain and suffering on the body and soul of the listener. Consequently, as Gram tells Ursa, sometimes the borderlines separating one's memory from that of the previous generations are transformed and blurred. For instance, although it is logically impossible that Gram remembers the period of abolition and the various events that accompanied it because she was very young, she acknowledges that "sometime it seem like I do [remember them] too" (78). This emotional reconstruction of the memory of an event that Gram never witnessed might be due to the powerful impact of the stories Great Gram told her daughter about abolition, making her feel that she has experienced them.

As such, the great grandma not only reveals to Ursa the fragility of reconstructed memories and oral narratives, she also explains to her the dependence of memories on feelings, which are themselves unstable and transformable. As she maintains, it is “hard to always remember what you were feeling when you ain’t feeling it exactly that way no more” (79). In this passage Gram is specifically telling Ursa about her feelings towards *Corregidora*, whose image was altered by the details of Great Gram’s stories.

Although the feeling of identity is associated with the idea of having one’s experience in past, people tend to associate it with the present. This is an interesting fact associated with Ursa and her relationship with her lovers. She is the one with fragile life as she is still coping with her past. The experiences that produced such memories are extremely painful and devastating, as great grandma maintains, the feelings and the memories of feelings are subject to change and transformation.

The message of great grandma about the past are different than the narratives because they are characterized by a greater awareness of the nature of memory, the transformative character of experiences and the fluidity of emotions. Great grandma’s stories restricted Ursa’s psychological development because they were informed by an absolute certainty concerning the power of words to evoke an exact and precise memory; moreover, their message presented this memory as the exclusive tool allowing one to leave evidence.

By contrast to the tales of past secret, the tales told and transformed by grandma carry a liberating potential because they stress not only the importance of testifying but also the necessity of freeing the mind from the residues of oppression. Gram’s stories are flexible because of their openness to the possibility of change; they defy the rigidity of the legendary tales to stress the infinite capabilities resulting from processes of reshaping



narratives. Because of this reconstructive potential, Gram's discourse combines past and present as it reveals different sites of meaning.

The *Corregidora* legend circulates through its transmission from one generation to the other; its damaging effects reside in the dangers represented by empty/ formulaic repetition. Specifically, Ursa must learn how to rearrange her life into the legendary ancestral stories by refiguring and reliving them through her own feelings instead of accepting the rigidity of their inherited structure. In other words, Ursa must find the echo of her own experiences in the familial tales. Learning to hear other people's voices and her own voice is essential to the process of reclamation Ursa must initiate.

The echo of the past events in the life of Ursa is associated with her psyche. She is unable to find her status in lack of the family secrets. This is something which shaped Ursa's way of life and her mentality. This has become like a fact and determining factor in maintaining relationship with her boyfriends. She is a singer, yet, the fact remains she sings blues – a way to disseminate her internal feelings. This has been an effective way to showcase her notion for search of an identity. By singing, she is exposing the cruelties being exposed on her ancestors.

In the novel, the situation of Mama reflects the destructive repercussions that the ancestral tales have on inter-subjective relations. In fact, Mama weaves a coherent account of her private memory which she never revealed to her daughter. Ultimately, she tells Ursa the full story of her marriage to Martin. However, she is not capable of producing a coherent narrative of the *Corregidora* past. She either presents Ursa with fragments of the story, sounding:

As if she were speaking in pieces, instead of telling one long thing or loses her own self during the process of narration. Mama kept talking until it wasn't her that was talking, but Great Gram.... she wasn't Mama

now, she was Great Gram talking. The memory of all the *Corregidora* women has become her memory too, as strong with her as her own private memory, or almost as strong. (123-4)

The tale told and retold to Mama is so overwhelming that the latest in the trend of this cycle, Ursa takes it as a fact associated with her. The fact of fragility of life in today's time is Ursa's attachment to the past memories. Thus, the fact remains that the resounding happening of her past continues to haunt Ursa's present. Nevertheless, she has found a way to tackle it, in association with the notion of identity being given to her by the recurring sense of family secret.

The case of Mama, whose mind appropriates the fragmented memory associated with the narratives of slavery, provides Ursa with an example illustrating the destructive effects. These facts of past are intensely relived by the subject that it haunts her psyche and affects her personal identity. Through this process, Mama becomes her grandmother; however, since the relationship between her private memory and the memory of all the *Corregidora* women are not configured in a healthy way. Mama is unable to filter the *Corregidora* memory and her grandmother's suffering through her personal, intimate understanding of the ancestral narrative and the significance of her own tale. Mama's voice lacks self-definition, and Ursa learns from her example the importance of striving to find her voice and to recover self.

In fact, the absence of a reclamatory element from Mama's narrative reflects her inability to trust her personal voice enough to use it and produce her own version, through the process of emplotment, of the ancestral story. One of the major challenges for Ursa is to adequately associate using hybridization of ancestral and personal memories so as to give them a different sequence and form.

In short, the notion of hybrid memory is the operation that draws a configuration out of a simple succession. In the context of the *Corregidora* past, Ursa must strive to initiate processes of hybridization bringing together the memories of her ancestral and personal struggles and allowing her to configure “an intelligible whole” that braids the events of her ancestral history with her personal memory. Such a configuration necessitates the adoption of “logiques metisses” (Lionnet, Postcolonial 1) that require participation in, and modification of, the dominant stories to help one bear witness and identify, in Toni Morrison’s words, “those things in the past that are useful and those things that are not” (121).

Gram’s lessons about memory give Ursa the basis for challenging the formulaic narrative that imprisons her; as a result, she starts perceiving memory as a construct that can work under the sign of the same to bring the past into the present. Moreover, this protagonist learns to perceive history as reenactment of the past, which does not consist in reliving but in rethinking this past. By rethinking the past, Ursa realizes that her relationship with Mutt involved mutual abuse, and she starts to see the damages resulting from the process of filtering this relationship exclusively through the lens of her great grandmother’s stories.

From example, Ursa learns of her mother the ancestral legend can become cannibalistic, devouring its transmitter and audience when it does not reflect the intimacy of a personal connection to the tale. Ursa thus realizes that she must find a way of incorporating these ancestral lessons into her life story in order to bear witness to the atrocities of the *Corregidora* tale and at the same time protect the integrity of her voice, self and historical location.

A number of critics maintain that Ursa finds her voice by singing the blues that help her distance herself from the haunting past and participate in a process of translation

of memory, which allows her to inscribe voice and history in the context of the African-American artistic tradition. Consequently, she is not only the victim but also, by virtue of the performance itself, the ultimate power. The blues are thus perceived as Ursa's way of transforming the legendary history of the *Corregidora* victims into a cultural form of art. Through this process of metissage, Ursa puts together her suffering and that of the *Corregidora* women to produce a song branded with the new world and interpreted in an African American vernacular voice.

It is true that the blues constitute a form of artistic self-expression catalyzing Ursa's psychological healing. However, in addition to this form of artistic creation, Ursa uses other means to hybridize the sexual and the historical, the personal and the collective, thus establishing a different relationship with the intergenerational stories. She challenges their fixation and homogenization, which condemn one to formulaic repetition. What Neil MacGregor argues about heritage is also true of Ursa's ancestral legacy; as he puts it, inheriting is a process, and people must realize they are heirs to the past, heirs to the collections they own, free to decide for themselves what they are going to do with the past, what it means for them now and what it may mean for them in the future.

Ursa is able to effect this process of metissage, making the legacies of the past her own and achieving a better understanding of the reasons behind Mama's incoherent account of the *Corregidora* story as well as her own obsession by the ancestral tale after rethinking, in light of her present experiences, the question that none of her ancestors would answer. This question is related to a secret that great grandma was unwilling to tell, which resulted in the creation of an empty space in the accounts of later generations. Such a gap led to the formation of a phantom, originating from the unconscious suspicion that there are some elements of a story that have been left unsaid by a family

member. Consequently, this phantom, created because of the gap that the concealment of some part of a loved one's life produced in us, marks the *Corregidora* family history. Its trans-generational consequences of silence are transferred from the parent's unconscious into the child's, resulting in a haunting effect on the following generations.

In other words, the silence of the *Corregidora* has passed from the generations and has helped in formation of an identity. This notion of silent memory is hurting, disturbing but no let out is there and hence, the only way has become acceptance. It has deep repercussions on several generations and affects the fate of an entire family lineage. The *Corregidora* by birth are the inescapable slave to the past memories. This they cannot avoid, and the only way has become to accept it.

Such repercussions deeply mark the lives of the *Corregidora* women. Indeed, in her childhood, Ursa was told that great grandma did "something that made him [*Corregidora*] want to kill her," and because of her fear, she ran away and abandoned her daughter in the plantation (79). However, none of the other family members knows the nature of what Great Gram did to *Corregidora*. As Gram affirms, Great Gram "never would tell me what she did. Up till today she still won't tell [me] what it was she did" (172). Gram never heard any explanation from *Corregidora* either.

The gap resulting from the secret of what Great Gram did to *Corregidora* obsesses her descendents; in the novel, the question about this gap is formulated in the following way: "What is it a woman can do to a man that make him hate her so bad he want to kill her one minute and keep thinking about her and can't get her out of his mind the next?" (173). The answer to this question would provide a crucial insight into the lives of the *Corregidora* women. In fact, Great Gram left the plantation directly after her enigmatic act, and Gram was afterwards oppressed, abused and raped by *Corregidora*, resulting in the birth of Ursa's mother. In a paradoxical way, Great Gram's act of leaving

the plantation contributed to the coming of the next offspring who could bear witness and carry the burden of leaving evidence to denounce *Corregidora*'s abuse. The secret act, which obsesses Great Gram's descendents, seems also to carry the key to the understanding of the relationship between desire, pain, hatred and love.

In the final part of the novel, Ursa finds an answer to the family secret by bringing together personal and ancestral experiences; through this hybrid act, she initiates a process of historical recovery that shapes, and is shaped by, notions of desire and choice. Critical opinions about the ambivalent relationship between Ursa and her former husband and the issue of their reconciliation are divergent. For instance, Madhu Dubey states that this reunion fails to "resolve the complications of either Ursa's own sexual history or the broader history of American slavery" (252).

However, it is arguable, as Jones maintains that the open-ended conclusion of *Corregidora* implies a kind of redemption. The solution Ursa finds for the family secret initiates this kind of redemption since it helps her fight the obsessive haunting by the past and opens up hybrid personal and historical spaces in the ancestral narrative, which makes her acquire a different vision of her historical emplacement. As discussed earlier, the only way to overcome trauma is to be associated with it. The source of trauma is suffering, as:

At the end of the novel, Mutt tells Ursa after 22 years of absence that he would like her to come back to him. He then tells her the story of his great grandfather: because of unsettled debts, the American courts took his wife away from him. Mutt's great grandfather lost his sanity and ate "onions so people wouldn't come around him," and after that, "peppermint so they would" (183-84). After his separation from Ursa, Mutt attempted to repeat his great grandfather's act, but, as he tells his former wife, "[I]t didn't do nothing but make me sick" (184).

By recounting this story to Ursa, Mutt reveals to her that although he respects his ancestral past, he cannot replicate its events in his own life or use an old strategy to solve a contemporary problem. The message of his story is that the past must always be remembered but not so intensely as to be relived in an obsessive manner.

Not unlike Mutt, Ursa repeats with a subtle nuance of difference her great grandmother's act as she engages in sexual intercourse with her former husband. Her re-enactment brings the past into the present, and it involves, not unlike the historian's, a rethinking which already contains the critical moment that forces [one] to take the detour by way of the historical imagination. Ursa's process of remembering reflects her ability to revisit the past and rethink it without falling into an obsessive, formulaic repetition of its events.

During an act of fellatio on Mutt, she expresses her certitude that the secret "had to be something sexual that Great Gram did to *Corregidora*" (184). She concludes that her great grandmother had bitten *Corregidora*'s penis as she was performing fellatio on him, which resulted in the creation of a whole gamut of feelings in the slave owner's heart. After this eroticization of pain, *Corregidora*'s emotions wavered between extreme love and hatred as well as pleasure and pain.

Echoing her great grandmother's experience, Ursa's sexual encounter with Mutt acts as a catalyst enhancing hybrid remembering and allowing her to rethink the past by making it interact with the present. Through this metissage of past and present, she reclaims the dynamic and interactive dimensions of storytelling, which, as Jones maintains, "make[s] movements between kinds of language and kinds of reality--dreams and memory also being kinds of reality" ("Gayl Jones: An Interview" 698). In this process of re-enactment, Ursa redefines her position vis-a-vis the *Corregidora*

intergenerational tale and rereads the history of her present, body and relations through the experiences of her ancestors.

Moreover, by bringing together the sexual and personal with the historical and collective, she discovers new, plural and heteroglossal sites of resistance that transform the meaning of the historical trace and the significance of the relationship between the *Corregidora* women and men. Ursa also recognizes that *Corregidora*'s act was not worse than what "Mutt had done to me, than what we had done to each other, than what Mama had done to Daddy, or what he had done to her in return" (184). By adopting this perspective, Ursa does not blame the oppressed. She rather implies that even in stories of extreme victimhood, women had some limited possibilities of shaping spaces of resistance from which they could fight their objectification.

Inspired by an African economic model, Palmares rejected the Portuguese economic and social systems. The history of Palmares, whose population exceeded twenty thousand inhabitants is a history of an African nation in Brazil and the history of a courageous people who maintained their African traditions, revolting against a landed Portuguese aristocracy for almost a century. These rustic black republics reveal the dream of a social order founded on fraternal equality, and for this reason are incorporated into the revolutionary tradition of the Brazilian people. Because of its prosperity and autonomy, Palmares constituted a symbol of success whose stability and example, as Governor Ferna de Sousa noted, inspired many slaves to break the chains of captivity and offered them an alternative dream of freedom. After its destruction, Palmares became a legend, and its memory was preserved in Brazilian folklore and in the oral traditions of the people of the state of Alagoas.

The struggle of Ursa to settle with her past is the is a hybrid source of individual and collective empowerment that Americans of African descent can turn to in their



search for spiritual regeneration and historical models of resistance. For the young slave boy on the *Corregidora* plantation, the dream of Palmares is that of a place where these black men had started their own town, escaped and banded together and of a space in which mutual love uniting black men and black women is possible and respected. The young boy wants to “have him a woman, and then come back and get his woman and take her up there” (126). The way this boy perceives Palmares is not informed by a sense of historical discontinuity; in fact, when Great Gram tries to explain to him that Palmares was “way back two hundred years ago,” his answer is that “Palmares was now” (126; emphasis mine).

For Ursa, the example of the young boy, who conjures up the symbolism of Palmares to inscribe this place in his dreams for a better future, illustrates how the hybridization of memory and history can become a source of empowerment and resistance. The boy’s reconstructive imagination, working to transform and hybridize the present by reconceiving it in light of examples of historical resistance, goes against the linear, Western perception of time and history. In fact, the structure of the boy’s answer, “Palmares was now,” points to the necessity of braiding a resistant past with an oppressive present, achieved through the defiance of Western binary logic and grammar.

This form of Western impossibility, expressed in the dominant language, evokes the African power of *nommo*, or the word to create a different reality. In this process of *metissage*, visually articulated through the juxtaposition of the past (was) and the present (now), the boy subversively uses the creative power of memory to express an African perception of time and space in the dominant language of the oppressors.

An autonomous African republic founded on Brazilian soil, Palmares embodied a philosophy of *metissage* since, after assimilating a dominant value, slavery, it modified its implications by linking it to the concepts of community and free will. In fact, while on

the Brazilian plantations slaves were doomed to an eternal life of bondage and commodification, Palmares had a systematic strategy to perpetuate freedom; its inhabitants (the Palmarinos), who did not flee plantations of their own accord, were considered slaves even in Palmares. They could earn their freedom only by stealing another slave from a plantation.

Since Palmares offered to its citizens the possibility of freeing themselves by freeing another person, an authentic sense of collectivity and community was created. Consequently, Palmares used an aspect from the oppressors' culture (slavery), absorbing it only to reconfigure an alternative form of resistance marked by valuing individual initiative over institutional commodification. Existing and prospering on Brazilian soil, this maroon society thus created its own form of transfer of past histories to the present.

Using the memory of this model of metissage, Ursa reconstructs her present by rethinking the configurations of the historical past. Such a reconstruction is done after this protagonist considers her choices: to make Mutt live a "moment of pleasure and excruciating pain at the same time, a moment of broken skin but not sexlessness, a moment just before sexlessness, a moment that stops just before sexlessness, a moment that stops before it breaks the skin" (184).

In this respect, it offered a famous example of how slaves can become agents of transformation and hybridization through the reworking, Africanization, and subversion of dominant values and narratives. These choices are presented in a number of gradations ranging from emasculation to delicate nibbling. Ursa's decision not to "break the skin" of her former husband's penis is informed by the example of mutual love in Palmares, evoked through the memory of the young boy's words. This decision is also different from what both the woman on the plantation and Great Gram opted for. In fact, Ursa does not emasculate Mutt as the woman on the plantation did to the slave owner nor does

she break the skin of Mutt's penis as Great Gram did *Corregidora's*. Rather, she stops before breaking the skin, choosing a more constructive version of the past that allows her to re-enact differently the slave women's tales of resistance.

By opting for a different course of action, Ursa not only avoids blindly repeating the histories of castration and emasculation, she also uses the notion of "free will" to effect a subversive hybridization of the Palmares story with her own ambivalent, uncertain present. Not unlike the slaves who freed themselves by stealing other slaves from a plantation, thus giving them the opportunity of earning their freedom, Ursa, who was a slave to her past, chooses to gain her freedom by stealing her former husband away from the oppressive homelands of the personal and ancestral pasts marked by slavery, injustices, trauma and miscommunication.

Specifically, Ursa steals her husband when she chooses to stop before breaking the skin of his penis while performing fellatio on him. Through this act, she brings together the promise of Palmares and her fragmented present as she rereads her life story through the eyes and words of the young boy on the plantation. Significantly, Ursa makes this conscious decision after she goes over all the other possibilities or gradations of pain. Braiding past resistance with present suffering, Ursa uses the memory of the nurturing relationships in an African republic founded on colonial soil to provide her with the bases for liberation through its models of healthier forms of interaction between men and women. She, thus, emplots the memory of Palmares and the Afro-Brazilian heritage of struggle to resist the oppressive circumstances of her African-American present.

Through this act, Ursa also reclaims what Dubey calls "the lover's language" that her ancestors were unable to use in their narrative because they wanted to maintain the "ideological coherence of their story" (255). their insistence on portraying pure and

unambivalent hatred vis-a-vis *Corregidora* silenced the controversial voice of desire and presented a monolithic perspective, obscuring the contradictory feelings of love and hatred towards their oppressor. In contrast to the lover's language, the maternal language of the *Corregidora* women refused to acknowledge the complexities of its struggle with the paradoxical nature of sexual desire; it also imposed its limitations on the expression of the daughter's desire.

In the final scene of the novel, Ursa also reconfigures past and self by transforming the absence of a womb from a signifier of lack into a source of empowerment and a means of expression of desire. As she performs fellatio on Mutt, this protagonist reclaims a different form of feminine sexual power that goes against the various lessons linking sexuality and reproduction passed to her by her ancestors. It is true that, as Dubey suggests, Ursa "discovers a potentially destructive feminine power situated at the very edges of heterosexuality" (258).

However, Ursa is able, through the memory of Palmares and its specific configuration of male-female relationships, to re-create such power and inscribe it into a greater context of historical resistance and reclamation of non-reproductive sites of desire. To use Ricoeur's words, as she "brings together diverse and heterogeneous story [and history] elements" (Time 65) through the metissage of the sexual and the historical as well as the individual and the collective, Ursa rereads past events in a new light. Consequently, she "draws a [hybrid] configuration out of a simple succession of past and present events" (Time 65).

It is worth noting that the changes in the perception of slavery from the 40s to the late 60s help Ursa reread the intergenerational story using a new focus informed by resistance. In 1947, when Ursa visits the tales recounted by the great grandma, she experiences them as oppressive forces and she perceives slaves as helpless victims.

However, when she rethinks the same tales in 1969, she discovers the stories of slaves who were actively involved in communities of resistance, which provides her with a different perspective on the present. Consequently, she understands that memories of slavery are flexible, and not unlike storytelling, they are interactive and open to revisions. Ursa's choice to stress resistance also reflects the influence of the Black Power Movement on the perception of notions of history, community and empowerment in slavery. In *Corregidora*, Jones, thus, probes how the story of slavery affected, and was conditioned by, the project of black cultural reconstruction in the form of narrativizing the past memories.

### **III. Conclusion: Traumatic Memory as Identity**

The present research is an exploration of narrations of past sufferings to present in an odyssey to search self. This search has its root in a secret past of Ursa Corregidora's great grandma. However, this secret past is presently associated with the idea of her identity. The idea of memory and identity are hence, inter-related in the novel through narration. The Corregidora women have in fact feared that the sufferings imposed on them might be lost, so they are passing it over to generations, so history prevails through memory.

The idea of preserving one's history through memory is one of the ways to continue with the past legacy. This legacy is continued in the form of holocaust memories of incest rape in Corregidoras. There are four generations of children born from this bitter reality of sexual subjugation in the Corregidoras. This is something; Ursa is learning to live with. Ursa's conscience cannot deny the fact that her existence has been rooted with the rapist White Portuguese Master and she has been an inborn of this cycle.

An individual can hardly forget his/her past. This past is narrated in various forms differentiating from an individual to individual. Nevertheless, the idea of one's association remains with him/her throughout the life. One cannot deny the fact of blood relationship, however, bitter it might be. Ursa, a stage singer is reminded of the incest relationship imposed on her great grandma and grandma, and hence she is one of the offspring of the same root. The notion of root is associated in memory. And, hence, it is memory that remains in an individual and helps to create a notion of identity in the form of narrating the past sufferings to the present generation.

Identity is something of sort of recognition and individualization of a person. This takes place in the form of culture, custom and tradition. However, the Corregidora

are the inborn of a White Portuguese slave master and he impregnated the great grandma of Ursa. Then, when grandma was born, she also became victim to sexual instincts of the Portuguese master. Hence, the identity of Corregidora is the incestuous relationship that has existed in the family trend. This bitter reality has been narrated to Ursa by her mother, since childhood.

The notion of an individual identity in *Corregidora* might be strange – to associate with incestuous past. However, one of the ways of letting the new generation know of the atrocities being practiced on the ancestors also sets the momentum of identification of an individual. The Ursa, the latest of the Corregidora clan is one of the women who want history to be continued through the narration.

As such, Ursa is a singer of Blues in a bar. This is to express her feelings of sufferings imposed and experienced by her mothers in the past. This might be strange; however, is an effective way to narrate history. The memory of the sufferings will continue to associate the present with the past. An individual will not be able to forget the past atrocities, as narration will help to flourish history.

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