PHYSICAL SITES OF MEMORY IN YAA GYASI'S *HOMEGOING* AND OCTAVIA E. BUTLER'S *KINDRED*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis undertakes a close analysis of the role that material objects and places play in the intergenerational transmission of memory in two historical fictions on slavery: *Homegoing* (2016) by Yaa Gyasi, and *Kindred* (1979) by Octavia E. Butler. The first chapter focuses on *Homegoing* and demonstrates how sisters Effia and Esi and their respective retention and loss of inherited stones have an effect on the continuance of ancestral memory and cultural heritage down their family lines. It then looks at their present-day descendants who return to their ancestral home in Ghana, and how this return, specifically to the colonial site of Cape Coast Castle, has an impact on their memory of their ancestral pasts. Chapter two turns to Butler's *Kindred*, and similarly looks at how an inherited family Bible and journal entries written on a slave plantation during protagonist Dana's time travel into the past assist in the remembrance of her ancestral past. It then analyses the specific ways in which Dana's return to the Weylin plantation of the past results in her assimilation into the life of her ancestors, through the embodied remembrance that she experiences during her interactions with the place and its people. Ultimately, this thesis demonstrates that objects and places of familial significance, through a process of mutual interaction, can facilitate the intergenerational transmission of ancestral memory. However, it also shows that a return to place can result in a too-deep immersion into the past, and that, in the case of Dana, it is necessary for her to find a way through which to process this new memory in order for her to understand it and to gain closure.

INTRODUCTION

Given the nature of slavery in America, the majority of enslaved Black people lost their connection not only to their cultural heritage, but to their immediate family. Cultural practices, familial connections, and education were deemed to be dangerous by slave traders, due to the risk of discontent, and were therefore suppressed through the sale of the children of slaves, and the ban on education and cultural practice, such as the use of native language. Francis Ngaboh-Smart notes that slave owners dismantled African identity "not only through whippings, mounted gun patrols, rapes, and other forms of punishment, but also [through] the disavowal of African images, symbols, and rituals" (167). Consequently, a large majority of historical novels written by African American authors take as their focus slavery and the reclamation of African identity and ancestral memory. This thesis will be investigating the specific role that memory plays within two such historical novels: *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi (2016), and *Kindred* by Octavia Butler (1979).

Gyasi's *Homegoing* spans roughly 250 years, beginning with two sisters, Effia and Esi, who grow up separately without knowledge of each other. Both sisters receive a stone from their mother, but although Effia's is passed down through the generations, Esi's is lost in the dungeons of Cape Coast Castle, when she was sold into slavery. Each chapter follows a different descendant, demonstrating the various ways in which the differing fates of the two sisters affect both family lines throughout history, from the eighteenth century to present day (a family tree can be found as an appendix at the bottom of this thesis). Butler's *Kindred* also encompasses multiple time periods; however, unlike Gyasi's story, which moves from past to present, Butler transports her protagonist, Dana, back in time from 1976 Los Angeles to the Weylin slave plantation in the Antebellum South. Here she repeatedly saves Rufus, the son of a slave owner, and, as she learns through her memory of her uncle's inherited Bible, her

ancestor. During her time on the plantation, she writes journals of her experiences, whilst learning more about the unwritten history of her ancestors.

Both Butler and Gyasi deal with the subject of memory as a main theme in their novels, but in differing ways. Where *Kindred* foregrounds the experience of slavery specifically and its effect on present-day descendants, *Homegoing* takes a much broader approach by looking at the institution of slavery and its eventual abolition in both Ghana and America over a period of roughly 250 years. Consequently, the subject of African cultural heritage is a more prominent theme in Gyasi's novel. Both novels describe in horrifying detail the brutality that enslaved Black people were subjected to, and the sheer extent to which they were suppressed by slave owners. The sale of children and ban on education and cultural expression is present in both novels and acts as a barrier to the continuance of ancestral memory and cultural heritage. However, both show how these barriers to memory are transcended through the use of physical sites of memory such as objects (the stones in *Homegoing* and the Bible and journal entries in *Kindred*), and places (Cape Coast Castle in *Homegoing* and the Weylin Plantation in *Kindred*). It is this presence of physical sites of memory and their effect on the intergenerational transmission of memory and cultural heritage within the novels that this thesis will be analysing.

Historical Fiction and the Neo-Slave Narrative

Harry Shaw defines historical fiction broadly as: "works that in some way represent historical milieux" (20). His definition is formed upon Siegfried Kracauer's conception of history as having a nonhomogeneous structure, meaning that "[t]he general does not fully encompass the particulars" (Kracauer 204). Accordingly, Shaw explains that whilst the novel must have a level of probability, this may be in the form of historical fidelity, or simply a consistency regarding its own "internal rules and patterns" (Shaw 21). In other words, a historical novel may either accurately represent a society and its manners as they once existed according to

historical accounts or give the reader a sense that they are entering the past, through its plausibility. Shaw also applies this need for plausibility to characters within historical novels, who, if not conforming to the general manner of their historical period, must be "'probable' members of that milieu" (45). Thus, Shaw's definition foregrounds fictionality as a tool to be used alongside historical fact to construct plausible characters and societies that are convincing representations of the past.

Discussing the benefits of the genre, Ann Rigney (2008) explains how historical fiction makes the past more widely accessible through the use of narrativization to structure events of the past. Additionally, a more empathetic view of history is encouraged through the use of "vivid" ("Dynamics," 347) characters who add an element of relatability to the narrative. Rigney argues that historical fiction also acts as an outlet for "*oppositional* memory," (348) which goes against dominant accounts of the past and centralises the voices of those that were previously silenced or overlooked. She states that:

> In the case of traumatic events, […] the freedoms offered by fictional genres and literary modes of expression may simply provide the only forum available for recalling certain experiences that are difficult to bring into the realm of public remembrance or that are simply too difficult to articulate in any other way. (348)

As a result, not only is historical fiction used to share unrecognised experiences of history, but it also provides a form through which to recount those traumatic experiences that are difficult to express or for which there are few archival traces.

In a similar vein, Ashraf Rushdy (2004) explains how the Black Power Movement in America encouraged Black writers to foreground Black agency and to reclaim ownership of the past of slavery from the historiographic accounts which gave demeaning representations of slaves. The movement gave Black writers "the authority to tell it as we felt it" (qtd in "Neo-Slave," 89). This alongside the Civil Rights Movement provoked a boom in the

production of contemporary narratives of slavery, influenced by the previous genre of the slave narrative. Rushdy notes the many "experimental" (90) forms developed at this time, and identifies three distinct genres within this new body of African American fiction: the third-person historical novel, which follows the transition between slavery and emancipation; the pseudo-autobiographical neo-slave narrative, which uses a first-person perspective to foreground the slave experience, and the novel of remembered generations, which looks at the continuing traumatic legacy of slavery that is often caused by family secrets hidden in the past.

Rushdy emphasises that these genres are not mutually exclusive, and that sub-genres such as the family saga "fall somewhere amongst these three major forms" (95). Gyasi's *Homegoing* can be classified as belonging to this particular subgenre because of its depiction of the journey towards emancipation alongside the traumatic legacy of slavery which haunts all generations throughout the novel. Butler's *Kindred,* on the other hand, takes features from all three genres—something which stems from the use of time travel, which allows for the first-hand experience of slavery by a late-nineteenth century woman who has knowledge of the history of slavery but not of her own ancestors' involvement.

Physical Sites of Intergenerational Memory Transmission

In *Memory and Material Culture* (2007), Andrew Jones investigates the role that the material world plays in the construction and transmission of memory. He argues that the act of remembrance is not a "dispassionate transaction between the external world and the mind" (26), but a result of the interactions that people have with the material world. He rejects the concept of external symbolic storage, in which memory is externalised and stored within objects, as this reduces material objects to a passive role in the act of remembrance. Rather, he states that "both people *and* objects are engaged in the process of remembering. This is not to say that objects *experience, contain* or *store* memory; it is simply that objects provide the

ground for humans to experience memory" (22). In order to understand this relationship between people and the material world, Jones refers to the work of Charles Sanders Peirce, whose semiotic theory introduces the concept of the "index" (Jones 80), a sign which refers to its object through a direct connection constructed through abductive reasoning (defined as "a process which involves inference from a given case to a hypothesised general rule" (24)). Jones states that "material objects can be read as indexes, or indices, of past events" (18). In understanding material objects as indexes of the past, it becomes clear that remembrance is a process caused by the complex interaction between the brain, the body, and the material world.

In her study of the material legacy of Walter Scott (2015), Ann Rigney notes that: "the power of objects to provoke a longing to know more is ultimately dependent on the power of words to release their potential meaning" ("Things," 23). This links to the work of Jones, in that it underscores the mutual interaction that occurs between an object and a person in the process of memory transfer. Additionally, Rigney emphasises the importance of seemingly insignificant objects in the transmission of memory: "[i]t is often literally in the trash heaps – the middens – that valuable information can be found about the lives of people from long ago" (13). Those "un-archived" objects are normally the ones considered too "dangerous," or too every-day to be considered of much worth to society but can ultimately turn out to be valuable resources of memory, prompting an interest in those narratives overlooked in dominant discourses on the past.

In *The Generation of Postmemory*, Marianne Hirsch investigates the ways in which the memory of traumatic periods of history transfer between generations. Using work by Jan and Aleida Assmann, she looks at what they term "communicative" (Hirsch 32) memory, which refers to embodied memory passed on through intergenerational transfer, and "cultural memory," *trans*generational memory which is communicative memory institutionalised

through cultural artifacts (33). She notes that this approach to memory does not account for traumatic histories such as the Holocaust and for periods of archival erasure, as situations such as these can cause a "rupture" in both embodied and institutionalised memory.

To account for such ruptures, Hirsch's discussion highlights the role that objects play in intergenerational transmission, particularly in relation to what she terms the "return plot" (205), in which characters 'return' to a location of familial significance (whether they have previously been themselves or not), in order to gain closure or regain memory of the past. Hirsch explains how "testimonial objects, lost and again found, structure plots of return: they can embody memory and thus trigger affect shared across generations" (206). Using the example of Ghassan Kanafani's *Return to Haifa* (1969), she, like Rigney, notes the significance of everyday objects in intergenerational memory transmission. Objects such as a door knocker, a railing, and scribbles on the wall provoke a "visceral" (Hirsch 207) reaction in the character of Said S when he returns to his old home, due to the embodied memories that they re-elicit from the past.

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Within the context of the research outlined above, this thesis will be analysing the use of physical sites of memory in two historical novels: *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi and *Kindred* by Octavia E. Butler. The aim of this analysis is not only to understand the role that physical sites of memory play in intergenerational memory transmission, but also how the historical novel reveals the struggles felt by descendants of those who were enslaved to remember and reclaim the cultural heritage that was stolen from their ancestors by the institution of slavery.

CHAPTER ONE: *HOMEGOING* BY YAA GYASI

According to Rushdy's typology (2004), *Homegoing* is a hybrid form of neo-slave narrative, belonging to the subgenre of the family saga. The novel follows fourteen descendants of a

woman named Maame, whose children Effia and Esi, due to her escape from enslavement by Effia's father, grow up separately with no knowledge of each other. Both sisters inherit a stone from their mother. However, whilst Effia marries a slave trader and is able to keep the stone as an heirloom within her family line, Esi loses hers in the dungeons of Cape Coast Castle when she is sold into slavery. The novel follows both family lines as each generation navigates different landmark periods in the struggle for emancipation, stretching from Effia and Esi's experiences with the British colonisation of the Gold Coast in the eighteenth century, to their respective descendants, Marjorie and Marcus, and the persistence of slavery's legacy in the present day. In the novel, the thematization of the loss and/or continuance of ancestral and cultural memory materialises through both the presence and the absence of the stones in each family line, and in the imposing figure of Cape Coast Castle. These two physical sites of memory will be the focus of this chapter.

The Stones

The first two chapters in *Homegoing* show that the two stones are given to each sister when they leave their families behind; Effia for an arranged marriage with a white slave trader, James Collins, and Esi during an attack by another village, which results in her enslavement. Esi's loss of her stone is addressed by Nonki Motahane et al., who note that "the symbolism of [Esi's] loss reflects her forced detachment and that of her descendants from Africa – that is, both the physical space and the 'African' identities it inscribes on its inhabitants" (27). Whilst Effia's line are able to hold onto the memory of their familial and cultural heritage, this is lost in Esi's, symbolically marked by the loss of her mother's stone.

This symbolism is further hinted at in Effia's chapter, where the stone is consistently referred to as a "stone pendant" (Gyasi 16). This implies that, even before her husband turns it into a necklace, Effia's stone has a future as an heirloom, to be carried across the generations, and consequently, a way through which ancestral memory can be maintained

throughout the family line. However, Esi's is simply referred to as a "black stone" (42) and never as a pendant. Thus, the stone is deprived of a future as an heirloom, and therefore a history in the family line. This fate is solidified when, about to be boarded onto the slave ship, Esi is unable to retrieve the stone from where she had hidden it in the faeces that fills the women's prison. In this way, her stone and the ancestral memory and cultural heritage it represents is quite literally buried in what Rigney refers to as "the middens" ("Things" 13) of history. As a stone from Ghanaian soil, and not an heirloom, it must remain in Ghana, only to be reclaimed through a return to ancestral and cultural roots.

The way in which memory is passed down through Effia's line exemplifies Jones's theory that memory is transmitted through a mutual interaction between a person and an object. The stone necklace acts as an 'index' for their family history and cultural heritage. It is through the various interactions with this heirloom that intergenerational memory transmission occurs. For example, the passing of the heirloom from one generation to the next is a physical, embodied representation of intergenerational memory transfer. In this way, not only is the parent handing down the responsibility of preserving the family's cultural and ancestral memory to their child, but they are also passing on the privileged position of intergenerational transmission—something which was stolen from Esi's line. Additionally, the act of putting on the necklace symbolises the weight of this responsibility, but it also shows how, as free Ghanaians, they can proudly wear their cultural identity. Unlike Esi's family line, whose necklace is replaced by manacles, Effia's can leave Ghana freely and keep their cultural heritage: an act undertaken by Marjorie's parents, Yaw and Esther, who move to America before she is born.

Furthermore, as Rigney (2015) explains, it is through the "power of words" ("Things" 23) that an object such as the stone necklace in *Homegoing* can reveal its "potential" as an index of family memory and as an agent of memory transfer. In the novel, Effia's son, Quey,

“learned there was another mother whose name they would never know, that the shimmering black stone Effia always wore about her neck had belonged to this woman, his true grandmother” (Gyasi 54). Effia never met her mother, and therefore, Maame is known by her and her descendants solely through the story of the stone necklace. This use of the stone as a framework through which to remember their family history continues throughout the line, up to Marjorie in the present day, who recounts that: “It had belonged to Old Lady and to Abena before her, and to James, and Quey, and Effia the Beauty before that. It had begun with Maame, the woman who had set a great fire” (267). In this way, the stone prompts each generation to pass on the memory of their ancestry to the next generation.

However, the necklace also acts as a site of painful memory. As Cobbe says, “the joining of a man and woman was also the joining of two families. Ancestors, whole histories, came with the act, but so did sins and curses. The children were an embodiment of that unity, and they bore the brunt of it all” (21). The necklace is a symbol of this unity between Effia and the white slave trader James Collins. Significantly, the necklace is formed of her mother’s stone, and her husband’s string and craftmanship. As Jones argues, “[an] artwork is an index or sign of the artist’s past agency” (23). The necklace is an index of Effia’s agency, but it also embodies the memory of the union that gave her such agency, and the complicity in slavery that this entailed. Thus, whilst her descendants are able to pass on the necklace and the memory of their family’s past, they must also bear the responsibility of remembering their family’s complicity in the slave trade.

This struggle is demonstrated by Effia’s grandson, James, who moves away from his family through guilt about their involvement in the slave trade. In an act which symbolically marks his attempt to suppress the memory of this painful family history, James buries the necklace outside his new home. However, as Lisa Ze Winters (2018) explains, the novel reveals “the perils of forgetting the past” (341). His attempt to bury his ancestral past results

in a curse which causes his crops to fail, and his daughter Abena's infertility. Unlike Esi's stone, as an established heirloom, the necklace (and James' ancestral memory) cannot be buried—a fact acknowledged by James when he digs up the necklace and once more takes up his responsibility of intergenerational transmission by passing it on to Abena.

Ultimately, the case of the two stones exemplifies how objects of familial significance can act as physical sites of intergenerational memory transfer. Without the stone, Esi's descendants lose all memory of their ancestral and cultural heritage, whilst Effia's line is able to keep such memory—including that which is painful—within her family line to the present day.

Cape Coast Castle

The two final chapters of *Homegoing*, straddling the millennium, are what Hirsch describes as a "return narrative" (224) in which Marcus and Marjorie (unaware of their ancestral connection) embark upon a return to their ancestral home. The two chapters show the effect that slavery continues to have on Ghanaians and African Americans up to the present day. For Marjorie, her grandmother's stories of the past haunt her present and result in her developing a fear of fire; a symbol which represents the breaking up of Maame's family, and the destruction caused by slavery, in which Effia's family is complicit. Marjorie fears that, like her grandmother, she "would be chosen by the ancestors to hear their family's stories" (Gyasi 274), revealing the persistence of the painful memories that have haunted her family for generations. Marjorie is also unable to read her father's book, *The Ruin of a Nation Begins in the Homes of Its People* (270). Named after an Asante proverb which describes the complicity of the native people in the slave trade, the novel embodies the very aspect of her ancestral past that has tormented her family for generations. To learn of her ancestral past through the stories of her ancestors and her father is to bear the weight of the memory of her family's complicity in the slave trade.

Marcus's fear of water is something he recognises as common in the descendants of enslaved Africans. However, he explains that "[i]t's because everywhere I look, I see blue, and I have no idea where it begins" (296). This is reflective of a wider struggle, which surfaces when doing research for his dissertation. This research, becoming increasingly entangled with his family history, kindles a desire to know more about his ancestors. In an interview, Gyasi is quoted as saying: "one of the huge tragedies of slavery is just the fact that family lines got completely cut off. […] most African-Americans don't know exactly where on the continent that they came from, so they can't tie that [*sic*] themselves back to an ethnic group, a country" ("Slavery Scars"). As Esi's descendant, this is something Marcus struggles with: "[h]e had only heard tell of his great-grandpa H […] But what had they called his father or his father before him? What of the mothers? They had been products of their time, and walking in Birmingham now, Marcus was an accumulation of these times" (Gyasi 296). Like with the ocean, Marcus yearns to know more, to know where his family began, and consequently to know more about himself and his own identity.

By 'returning' to Cape Coast Castle, Marcus recovers the memory of his ancestral past, and Marjorie confronts the painful aspect of hers. Although Cape Coast Castle is a site of collective memory, it is of particular significance to Marcus and Marjorie, whose families are intimately connected to the building. Their connection to the castle is made most prominent through the information provided by their tour guide which, despite being general facts, accurately describes the details of their ancestor's experiences within the Castle, which the reader has learned about earlier on in the novel. Given their ancestral history, it seems paradoxical that a return to Cape Coast Castle is the very thing Marcus and Marjorie need to come to terms with their family's past. However, as Hirsch notes, "[r]eturn journeys *can* have the *effect* of […] a reconnection of severed parts" (211-12). In travelling to the country of his ancestors, Marcus embarks upon a 'homegoing,' the novels namesake. Simon Stow explains

that a ‘homegoing’ is an African American funereal tradition which is constructed upon the belief that “death meant a return to the homeland” (683). In being the first in his lineage to embark on a homegoing *alive*, with Marjorie, Marcus marks the beginnings of cultural and ancestral reparation within both lines of his family. By touring the halls and dungeons of the Castle together as free people, Marcus and Marjorie embody everything that their ancestors were not and could not be.

As with the transferral of memory that occurs during the interaction between people and objects, Jones’ theory can also be applied to the interactions that Marcus and Marjorie have with Cape Coast Castle. These interactions result in the embodied memory of their ancestral past, a concept explained by Hirsch:

> [E]mbodied journeys of return, corporeal encounters with place, do have the capacity to create sparks of connection that activate remembrance and thus reactivate the trauma of loss […] they may not release full accounts of the past, but they can bring back its gestures and its affects. (212)

When touring the women’s dungeon under the castle, Marcus is overwhelmed by a feeling of sickness and a need to “be somewhere else, anywhere else” (Gyasi 299). This “visceral” (Hirsch 207) reaction is a result of the remembrance activated by his being in the very place where his ancestor was imprisoned. As an index of his ancestor’s suffering, the dungeon evokes feelings of sickness which prompt Marcus to force his way out of the “*Door of No Return,*” (Gyasi 299) and consequently to re-embody the journey that Esi took when she was forced out of the dungeon to be taken to America. As the name of the door suggests, in exiting this way, both Marcus and Marjorie leave their past behind them for good. As Marjorie’s grandmother tells her, “[o]ur family began here, in Cape Coast” (267). Finally, Marcus understands where the ocean begins: on the coast of his ancestral home in Ghana. In gaining a heightened understanding of his ancestral origins, he manages to overcome his fear

of the ocean, alongside Marjorie who, after finally confronting the painful memory of her family's past by entering the Castle in which their complicity began, gains control over her fear of fire.

This chapter has demonstrated how physical sites of memory—namely, the inherited stones and Cape Coast Castle—play an integral role in the intergenerational transmission of memory. Whilst Esi's line lose all memory of their ancestral past and cultural heritage due to the loss of the stone, Effia's line are able to pass their family's memory on and keep it alive up to the present day through the possession of the stone necklace heirloom. The 'homegoing' undertaken by Marcus and Marjorie in the present day shows how intergenerational memory can be transmitted through an interaction with places of familial significance. Their time in Cape Coast Castle ultimately provides a sense of closure regarding their respective ancestral pasts, as a result of the embodied memory that their return elicits.

CHAPTER TWO: OCTAVIA BUTLER'S *KINDRED*

Butler's neo-slave narrative *Kindred* follows an African American woman named Dana, who is repeatedly thrown back in time to the Antebellum South to save the life of a white child named Rufus Weylin. Over a period of a few days in her own time, but many years in the past, Dana watches as Rufus grows up and slowly takes over his father's role as head of the Weylin plantation. It is through her knowledge of an annotated Bible, owned by her uncle and passed down through the generations in her family, that she learns that Rufus and a free Black girl named Alice are her ancestors, parents to Hagar, the original owner of the inherited Bible. In order to ensure her existence in the present, Dana persists in rescuing Rufus despite witnessing his steady moral corruption and growth into a cruel slave owner just like his father, all the while dealing with the harsh realities of life as an enslaved Black woman during the early nineteenth century.

In Ayòbámi Adébáyò's foreword to Butler's novel, she notes that "[i]n order to provide for her daughter, Butler's widowed mother worked as a maid, enduring racial discrimination at the hands of her white employers in 1950's California" (xi). Given this biographical context, we can assume that Butler's novel, whilst fictional, is at least partially informed by her own experiences as an African American woman living in America during the Civil Rights Movement—a time during which the legacy of slavery was at the forefront of American consciousness. Despite the novel's lack of reference to pre-slavery cultural heritage or ancestral roots, the fantastical element of time travel instead allows for an extensive thematization of the ancestral memory of slavery itself, and its consequent effects on future generations. This chapter will be focusing specifically on the ways in which the annotated Bible, journal entries that Dana wrote while in the past, and the Weylin plantation, act as physical sites of intergenerational memory transmission.

The Bible and the Journal Entries

When explaining how an object may transfer memory, Jones (2007) gives the example of a shell, which evidences past exchanges through its gradual change in colour based on the number of handlers. Similarly, the physical characteristics of the Bible—originally owned by Hagar, the child of Rufus and Alice (a Black woman whom Rufus enslaved)—can tell Dana much about her family's history. The Bible is an 'index' of past memory which evidences its past 'exchanges' through the annotations and family records added by later generations and the inevitable wear that comes with such exchanges.

Jones's look at the concept of the index is centred mostly on the causal associations of artworks with the agency of their artists. In his words: "the 'memory' of the agency of the artist embodied in artworks is a version of the artist transubstantiated in the form of paint, canvas, or whatever medium. The artwork is an index or sign of the artist's past agency" (23). In the context of *Kindred*, Dana's family Bible is an index or sign of Hagar's past agency,

and the agency of all her descendants who added their own annotations. This agency is particularly significant in the context of the transition towards post-abolition America which Hagar lived through, as it marks the new agency that she could exercise. She is the first in her family line, alongside her brother Joe, who has the ability to read and write, and it is this ability alongside her new agency which she channels into her Bible. In other words, memory is not only transferred through the content of Hagar's words, but also through the very fact of their being written. As Hirsch notes about a recipe book written by women interned in the Terezín concentration camp, the object "testifies to the women's desire to preserve something of their past world" (178), something which well describes the intention displayed in Hagar's Bible, the first record of her family's past. It is because of Dana's interactions with this Bible that she gains knowledge of her family's past and is able use it to make sense of her surroundings on the Weylin plantation.

Besides the Bible, there are other significant physical sites of memory within the novel; notably, Dana's journal entries. As paradoxical as her situation renders this subject, the journal entries that Dana writes are as much records of the past as Hagar's annotated Bible. Written during one of her experiences in the Antebellum South and recounting events that occurred on the plantation, Dana effectively writes her own history, thereby providing evidence of her family's past where it was not there before. Additionally, she gives the slaves on the plantation the skills needed in order to develop a literacy that was uncommon among enslaved Africans and African Americans. In so doing, Dana assists in the future history-writing of her ancestors—as demonstrated by the records they would later write in the Bible. Regarding the physical features, it is significant that the entries were written with Dana's twentieth-century pen and Rufus' nineteenth-century paper, as this symbolises the rewriting of the past that Dana undertakes, giving voice to those marginalised people who were not given a place in most dominant accounts of the past.

Using the quote: “Sometimes I wrote things because I couldn't say them, couldn't sort out my feelings about them, couldn't keep them bottled up inside me. It was a kind of writing I always destroyed afterward. It was for no one else” (Butler 252), Rushdy (1993) argues that writing, due to its solitary nature, does not provide a suitable medium through which Dana can express her experiences (“Relation” 141, 148). However, her confession is not unique—the need to think in isolation, whether this be through contemplation or through writing, is a relatively universal one, and does not indicate that writing is an insufficient medium through which to channel memories and experiences. For example, Dana’s journals, written in shorthand “to be able to say what I felt, even in writing, without worrying that I might get myself or someone else into trouble” (Butler 255), are equally written in isolation. However, unlike the example that Rushdy provides, this isolation is due to Dana’s intention to keep these journals for a future purpose, something which would not be possible if someone were to read them.

The future purpose is revealed during one of her returns back to present day when Dana notes that: “I was looking over some journal pages I had managed to bring home in my bag, wondering whether I could weave them into a story” (273). This contrasts with a previous episode in which she “made about six attempts” (125) to write down her experiences before giving up and throwing them all away. Jones explains that memory transfer occurs during the mutual interaction between a person and the material world (25-26). This indicates that Dana’s interactions with the journals as a physical site of memory open up her ability to make written sense of her experiences: something which she previously did not have. As Rigney argues, it is an object’s ability to stimulate the use of language which reveals its potential for the transferral of memory (Things,” 23). Dana’s interactions with the journals both encourage and make it possible for her to tell a story about her memories and experiences of her ancestral past.

This close reading of Butler's novel reveals how both the Bible and Dana's journal entries act as physical sites of memory, through a mutual interaction that occurs between Dana herself and the material objects of the past. It is through such an interaction that Dana is able regain the memory of her ancestral past, and consequently the ability to express it through writing.

The Weylin Plantation

Dana's journey to the Weylin plantation of the early nineteenth century, although of a more fantastical nature in its time-travel, is a return much like that of Marcus and Marjorie in *Homegoing.* It is a return not to somewhere she has been, but to a place (and time) in which her ancestors once resided. That Dana is transported to the Weylin plantation specifically is significant, as the plantation is the furthest back that her family's memory of their origin goes, thanks to the limited records kept in the Bible. This memory acts as a catalyst for the return to her ancestral past: as Rushdy states, "[Butler's] achievement is to make memory transformative to the degree of literally translating the remembering subject into the past," ("Relation," 136) which shows that "memory is the most important means of transportation" (137). This indicates that, like Marcus in *Homegoing*, it is her desire to know more about her ancestral origins which results in her return.

During her first few 'returns' to the past, Dana is confronted repeatedly with the realisation that the knowledge she has of the Antebellum South is limited to the information deemed important within dominant accounts of the past. This lack of knowledge about the life and culture of the slaves originally places Dana in the position of an outsider or "observer" (Butler 98). For example, upon her first entry into the cookhouse, Dana observes that:

> There were […] utensils off to one side hanging from hooks on the wall. I stared at them and realized that I didn't know the proper names of any of them. Even things as commonplace as that. I was in a different world. (74)

This alienation sets her apart from the time and place of her return, as well as the people on the plantation for whom these objects are every-day. However, over time these unfamiliar utensils and modes of cooking become more familiar as Sarah, the cook, takes Dana under her wing. Sarah acts as the medium for intergenerational memory transmission by teaching Dana to cook with the tools of the past, thereby assisting in her assimilation. As Hirsch explains, "[o]rdinary objects mediate the memory of returnees through the particular embodied practices that they reelicit" (208). In learning to cook the way her ancestors did, with the utensils they used, Dana literally re-embodies the everyday, mundane actions of the past that were lost before they could reach her in the twentieth century.

However, this immersion becomes increasingly dangerous as she grows used to life on the plantation. Hirsch states that "[r]eturn to place literally loosens the defensive walls against the sorrow of loss" (207). Dana's first returns to the Weylin plantation break down her "defensive walls," (Hirsch 207) and expose her to the harsh realities of her family's past and the gaping holes in her ancestral memory. This break is shown in her "visceral" (Hirsch 207) response to the transition between the world of her ancestors and her own, in which she experiences dizziness, nausea, and blurred/darkening vision. However, her time-travels back to 1976 (caused when she fears for her life) become increasingly difficult as she becomes more accustomed to the danger of life on the plantation. As David LaCroix (2007) explains, whilst Dana's first whipping causes her return home, the second does not, due to the internalisation of whipping as a punishment (115). This reveals how her assimilation has become dangerous, something which Dana begins to realise when she finds herself referring to the plantation as her "Home" (Butler 137). Her interactions with the life and material

world of her ancestors on the Weylin plantation have resulted in the gradual transmission of embodied memory, numbing her to the sorrows of the past and risking her entrapment within a world to which she does not belong.

This immersion ultimately results in a different form of alienation, when Dana returns to the site of the Weylin plantation in 1976 to find that the buildings are no longer there. In order to orient herself within a place that has become alien once more, Dana uses her memory of the plantation in the past as a framework through which to view her surroundings: a cornfield has replaced the plantation; the Georgian colonial houses are like the Weylin house; there is now a bridge where there was once a steamship; the courthouse and the Church remain, but surrounded by a Texaco, a Burger King and a Holiday Inn. Jones explains how "[p]recisely because of the familiarity and apparently unchanging nature of places, change in place offers a stark way of experiencing the passing of time and evoking memory of the past" (60). While it is not possible to return to the plantation, its memory remains in Dana's perception of how the surrounding area has or has not changed.

Unlike Cape Coast Castle, the Weylin plantation holds no historical significance for the wider population. The only external records to be found on its past are a few newspaper articles discovered on site which reveal that the building was consumed by a fire just after Dana left. The articles, although sources of information on the past, are unsatisfying to Dana because they are emblematic of the dominant view of the past, at odds with her total immersion into the life on plantation. However, the memory transmitted to Dana through her previous returns to the plantation allow her to put faces to the names of slaves listed for sale in the newspaper. Her recognition of these names reveals how her interactions with the plantation during her previous returns allow her to overcome this master narrative in order to remember the people who were once important aspects of her ancestors' lives.

The case of the Weylin plantation reveals how a site of memory can become "a place of no return" (Hirsch 212). For Dana, it is necessary that the house become a place that is impossible to return to in the present, as its physical absence serves as a partial barrier against "slavery's slow violation of the black sense of self" (LaCroix 114) which she experienced as a result of her interactions within the Weylin plantation during her previous returns. Its absence forces her to find a new medium outside of embodied experience through which she can express the sense of loss gained from her return. This is noted by Rushdy who suggests that "[f]or them to understand their recent experience of loss and their present condition as historicized beings, both [Dana and her husband] require a return to the past in the form of a narrative" ("Relation," 137). By telling stories about her time at the Weylin plantation, Dana can rebuild her sense of self from the memories and gain some form of closure, without running the risk of becoming entirely absorbed by the past.

In reading Butler's *Kindred* through the lens of Hirsch, Rigney and Jones's work on memory, it becomes clear that the Bible, journal entries, and the Weylin plantation itself all act in different ways as sites of intergenerational memory transmission. Whilst the Bible allows for some remembrance of Dana's lineage, this alongside the journals she writes equip her with a greater understanding of her heritage, and the means to express it. The analysis of Dana's return to the plantation also revealed the crucial role that the body plays as a site of memory. Her time on the Weylin plantation and her interactions prompted a re-embodiment of the past in a way that caused a dangerous immersion into her ancestral past. However, in returning to its site in the present day, Dana is able to understand that, whilst her experiences on the plantation and her interactions with the Bible and journals have allowed her to gain a better understanding of her past, it is not something to which she can become too attached—mentally or physically—without losing her "black sense of self" (LaCroix 114).

CONCLUSION

This thesis has provided a close analysis of the function that physical sites of memory play in the development and transmission of intergenerational memory in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* and Octavia Butler's *Kindred*. Both novels demonstrate the importance of places, and objects such as heirlooms and journals in the transmission of ancestral memory, particularly in cases where actors throughout history have contributed towards the prevention of such remembrance, for example through the selective omission of certain voices from historical accounts. In addition, this analysis has revealed the crucial role that the body plays as a site of memory in intergenerational transmission.

Jones' argument that memory is transmitted through the mutual interaction between an object and a person is exemplified by the actions taken with the heirlooms in both novels. Both the stone necklace and the Bible in *Homegoing* and *Kindred* respectively, are 'indexes' of the agency of their original owners. The act of passing on these heirlooms demonstrates a remembrance of such agency and its continuation throughout the generations. However, for Esi's family line, due to the suppression of agency, there is no heirloom to be passed down, and consequently no memory to be transmitted—there is no index through which to remember this ancestral past.

Additionally, both *Homegoing* and *Kindred* demonstrate how the use of language is fundamental to the continuance of ancestral memory when referring to objects of the past. As Rigney explains, the significance of certain objects is "dependent on the power of words to release their potential meaning" ("Things" 23). For example, as an index of Effia's family past, the stone necklace mediates the intergenerational transmission of memory by prompting the memory of ancestors through the language of inheritance. In *Kindred*, the journals written during Dana's time on the Weylin plantation of the past provide a framework through which Dana is able to express her experiences and memory of her ancestral past in writing;

something she could not do without. This in turn gives the Bible and its records further significance through her ability to recount her experiences and memories of her familial past. Ultimately, both novels show how mutual interaction between objects and the language they evoke in the owner assist in the intergenerational transmission of memory.

In her work on the return narrative, Hirsch explains how a return to a place of familial significance can "release latent, repressed, or dissociated memories" (12) and re-elicit the "gestures" and "affects" of the past. This is demonstrated by Marcus, whose entry into the women's dungeon in which his ancestor was imprisoned results in a "visceral" (Hirsch 207) reaction which forces him to re-enact her exit through the "door of no return" (Butler 299). Both Marcus and Marjorie (who finally confronts the painful memories of her past) leave the dungeons free, unlike the enslaved Ghanaians of the past. For Dana, her return to and interactions with the Weylin Plantation result in a re-enactment that causes her to become assimilated into the past. Her assimilation rendered it necessary for the plantation to become inaccessible in the present, as it forces Dana to realise that she cannot know everything about her family's past and encourages her to find another way through which to gain closure: writing. The two novels thus demonstrate how places of ancestral significance, when 'returned' to, assist in the intergenerational transmission of memory. This analysis also reveals the crucial role that the body plays in such a transmission, due to the embodied remembrance that Cape Coast Castle and the Weylin plantation elicit in the returnees as a result of their interactions. However, as Hirsch notes, "Home" (212) is not always somewhere you can return for total closure—something which is particularly visible in Dana's experiences in the Weylin plantation of the past.

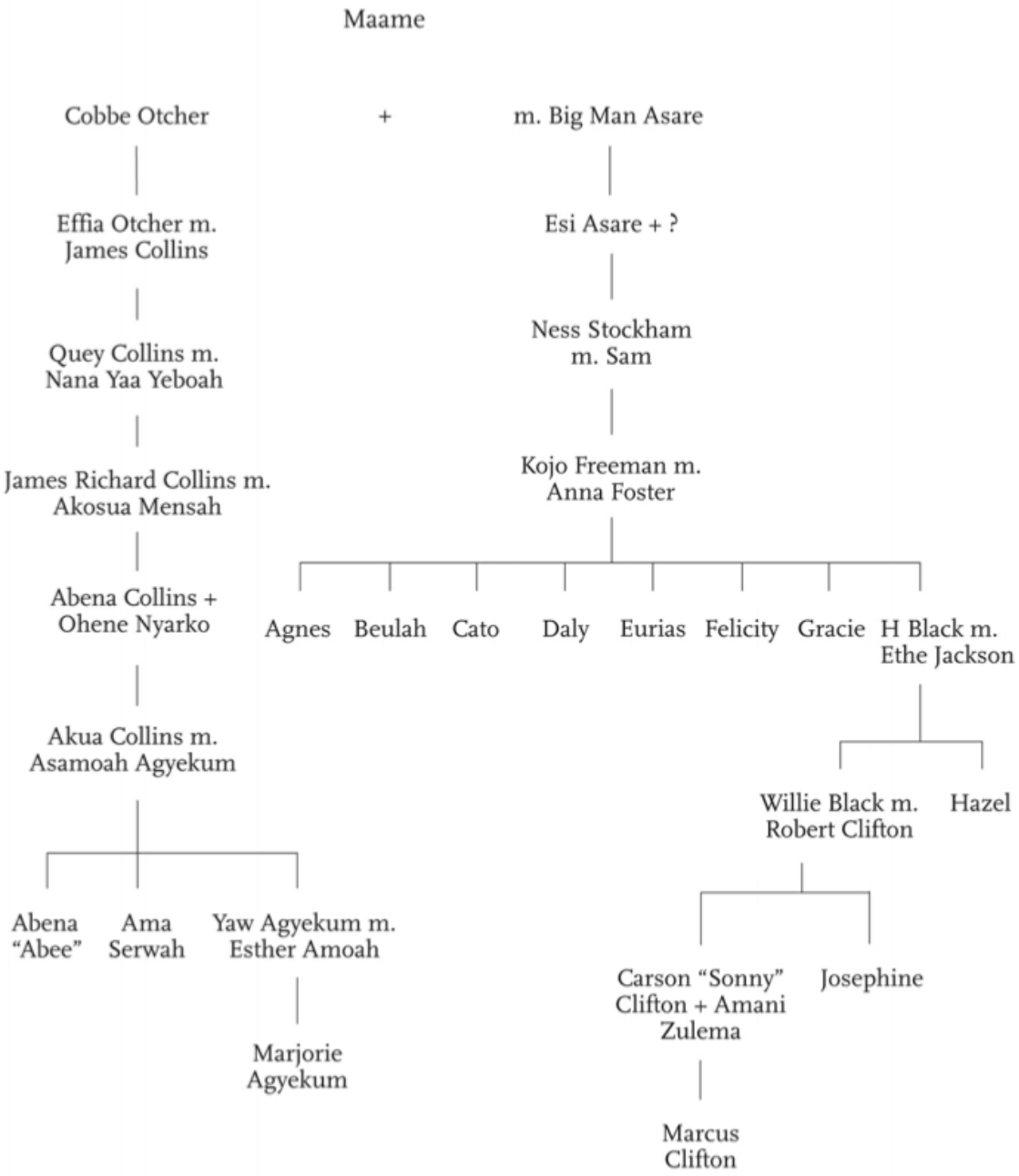
Whilst this thesis has attempted to provide a broad investigation of different sites of memory within these two novels, there are still further directions in which this research could be taken to develop a greater understanding of how physical sites of memory play a role in

intergenerational memory transmission. For example, it would be interesting to investigate further the importance of the body as a site of memory within the two novels. In particular, how do scars and other bodily wounds—equally physical sites of memory, if more temporary than the ones spoken of in this thesis—provide an outlet for the transmission of memory? Much research has been undertaken regarding Dana's loss of her arm after her experiences on the plantation. However, it would be invaluable to investigate how other wounds such as the scar on her face from Tom Weylin's boot, the whip scars, and the remnants of her slit wrists act as sites of memory for Dana. With fire being a prominent symbol of destruction within *Homegoing* it would be interesting to look at how burn scars within the novel transmit memories of the past. It would also be productive to include further historical fictions on slavery and its afterlife, for example, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). The family house in particular acts as a physical site of memory within this novel, due to its heavy presence of remembered trauma for Sethe and consequently, her daughter, Denver. Additionally, Sethe's scars are a prominent image within the novel, which could be interesting to investigate alongside *Kindred* and *Homegoing*.

Overall, this thesis has shown, through the examples of *Homegoing* and *Kindred*, that memory is tied to material objects and places from the past. Esi was forced to leave behind her stone, and with it all memory of her family's cultural heritage due to the "rupture" (Hirsch 33) that the slave trade caused in their ability to recount and pass on memory of their heritage. This is not the case for Effia's line, who were able to retain a large amount of ancestral memory due to their passing on of the stone necklace heirloom. Dana acts as a middle-ground here, as, whilst she does have access to her journals and the family Bible, these only provide her with the memory of her enslaved ancestors, and nothing about her cultural roots. It is not possible for Dana or Marcus to know as much about their cultural heritage as Marjorie, but they are able to gain some insight into the memory of their ancestral

pasts, through embodied experience and re-enactment during their returns to the Weylin Plantation (past and present) and Cape Coast Castle, respectively. Therefore, it is clear that physical sites of memory such as objects and places of familial significance, as well as the body itself, play an important role in intergenerational memory transmission. Whilst this does not always have a positive effect on the characters (for example, Dana's immersion), it does allow for a level of closure regarding their ancestral pasts, and a greater understanding of its memory.

APPENDIX:



Source: Gyasi, Yaa. *Homegoing*. E-book ed., Viking, 2016, p. x. Digital, accessed 4 Apr. 2021.

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