BODIED KNOWLEDGES
(WHERE OUR BLOOD IS BORN):
Maternal Narratives And Articulations of Black Women's Diaspora Identity

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Dedication

To my parents and siblings who have loved and supported me unconditionally:

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Lois A. Crump

Alfonso W. Crump, III

Christopher H. Crump

&

To my grandmothers and other mothers for their spiritual guidance:

Helen Taylor Waters

Jennie Ruth Crump

Belinda Faye Waters

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&

To my ancestors and angels who have watched over me:

I cannot name you individually, but I acknowledge you wholeheartedly.

I am so blessed, my cup runneth over.

Abstract

My dissertation titled *Bodied Knowledges (Where Our Blood Is Born): Maternal Narratives and Articulations of Black Women's Diaspora Identity* is an intervention in black diasporic criticism and black feminism. It highlights black women's diaspora literature, maternal narratives, and interrogations of identity. I employ a black feminist diaspora literary lens to identify, define, trace, and speak to the African Diaspora as it functions in black women's diaspora fiction and informs our understanding of black women's diaspora identity. My study considers three authors and novels by women of, in, and across the African Diaspora. In my thesis, I center Sandra Jackson-Opoku's *The River Where Blood Is Born* as a primary site of analysis of diaspora formation and theorization, and I examine Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon* and Maryse Condé's *Desirada* as comparative textual and theoretical sites. I contend that black women writers, with a certain intentionality, use their novels to articulate a woman-centered generationality located inside and throughout the African Diaspora, doing so in order to theorize both the structure of that diaspora and black women's identity within and as part of it. To address this theory, I focus on motherhood / mothering, a common role associated with women, and name and discuss specific *maternal narratives* as sites through which to delineate and interrogate the intersection of identity and Diaspora. Drawing on specific diaspora frameworks, such as that proposed by Kim Butler in "Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse" and Brent Hayes Edwards in "The Uses of Diaspora", I conduct a close examination of the primary novels, addressing the maternal discourse and the Diaspora construction in each. Moreover, these texts are woman-centered, which, I argue, re-locates diaspora from a traditionally male-centered and male-dominated situated-ness to one that focuses on black women's readings of and experiences within the Diaspora.

Table of Contents

Mirrored Images, Familiar Stories … on Common Ground ~ A Preface

> *What we know […]*
>
> *It has been a lost river […]. It hungers to join the sea, but it has been known to turn back to the place where it is born. And it always emerges from adversity, reinvented. […] it ever endures. […]*
>
> *We cannot be sure where your river begins, but we do know that the beginnings of things are sacred. I believe there are infinite beginnings. A multitude of sources. Geneses upon geneses. Herstory is woven as tightly as a multihued length of* kente *cloth. […]*
>
> *[…] your people have always flowed like the rivers. […] Carving out new courses, forging new languages, absorbing new blood. Ever flowing into the future.*
>
> (Sandra Jackson-Opoku, *The River Where Blood Is Born*, 16)

I joined the University of Minnesota's Feminist Studies Program with a research topic in mind: the search for and construction of identity in black women's fiction and implications for theorizing black women's identity as depicted in and articulated through such fiction. During my tenure in this program, I began to broaden the scope of my project to consider diaspora (specifically, the African Diaspora) and how it relates to black women's identity. In addition, as I learned about this concept of a black or African Diaspora, I became interested in how black women novelists write about, define, and theorize black women's diaspora identity: What issues do the authors address? What concepts do they include in their discussions? Who are their characters? How do they create / write their women characters? What issues or concerns do the main characters face? Do black women writers tend to focus on / center black women and their experiences as black women? If so, what do we learn from these experiences? And how do the authors define and depict diaspora in their novels? How do their works contribute to current or developing discussions and scholarship on diaspora in general and the African Diaspora in particular, as well as to other, intra-related diasporas within

and extending from our understanding of the African Diaspora? How do the writers connect blackness and black women's lives across differences, borders, similarities, cultures, locations, and more? What narrative structures do the writers engage? Then too, how do black women's novels interact with, speak to, or interconnect with one another? How do black women's diaspora narratives fit into a tradition of black women's writing? How do these narratives contribute to efforts to highlight and provide space for black women's voices in general?

During Summer 2003, Dr. Gwendolyn Pough, then professor in the Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies Department at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, introduced me to the novels of Sandra Jackson-Opoku. Immediately upon completing Jackson-Opoku's *The River Where Blood Is Born*, I felt I had found a literary text that spoke to black women's identity and connections through diaspora in a way that I had never imagined yet had hoped to discover. In addition, Jackson-Opoku's treatment of the formation of and interconnections within the African Diaspora seemed to speak to the many questions I had about diaspora itself,[1] some of which I attempt to address in this project. In determining my dissertation topic, the above passage by Jackson-Opoku became key to the way I define, discuss, and theorize the African Diaspora. It speaks to the diversity and complexity of the Diaspora, to the variety of its people, languages, beliefs, practices, and more, suggesting that Diaspora is formed by "Carving out new courses, forging new languages, absorbing new blood" (Jackson-Opoku 16). The author further theorizes that diasporic connections have taken many shapes and directions, been visible at one moment, hidden at another, lost and relocated across time and space; the influence of multiple factors and sources continues to shift the physical appearance

and circumstances of its descendants and its spatial positioning. Nevertheless, Jackson-Opoku argues, "[I]t always emerges from adversity, reinvented. In rain and drought, fat times and famine, it ever endures" (16). And this is the value of diaspora. It is from this point, this delineation that I begin my analysis of a *woman-centered diaspora narrative* in black women's fiction as providing a form of theoretical analysis, or, more specifically, what Pius Adesanmi calls "fictionalized theoretical discourse."

A Personal Note: Learning a Lesson ~

"Genealogies are woven together out of individual and collective memory, encoded in stories, songs, recipes, rituals, and photographs, and writing."
Cheryl A. Wall, *Worrying the Line* 5

However, this is not the extent of what Jackson-Opoku's novels emphasize in terms of black women's lives and the value of generational connections, at least for me personally. In reading Jackson-Opoku, I am reminded of my own diverse heritage and the stories that have been passed down over generations from mothers, grandmothers, and aunts to daughters. Like the "kitchen poets" that Paule Marshall mentions in her work *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, the women in my family congregate around the kitchen or dining table to talk about everything from life, politics and health to family, work, relationships, and cooking. We gather, preparing meals, sharing recipes, planning family meals, and eating, at the same time making and sharing family history. As children, my siblings, cousins, and I passed through this space, looking for edible handouts and listening in on conversations, stopping every so often to take in some "mother wit," to ask questions, and to learn about the members of our family and what their lives were like growing up in the South, living in other places, dealing with racism, sexism, and classism, during the Civil Rights Movement or the Women's Movement,

and such. (The men had their own space, which was usually in the backyard garage where my grandfather worked as a mechanic or gathered on the porch or around the TV. Yes, gendered spaces abounded for us too.)

It was during these moments of "mother's talk" that I learned of my maternal elders' efforts to contribute to their communities.[2] At times, my "mother figures" have been trailblazers: my great-grandmother started the "hot lunch" program at the then only elementary and junior high school for black students in her hometown, my mother was the youngest woman and one of only two black women to enroll in her nursing class, my paternal grandmother served as principal of Wechsler Elementary and Junior High Schools in Meridian, MS, and has a high school award[3] named after her; she also helped to create an Early Childhood Program in the state of Mississippi. I was reminded of the value of education (so many in my family have been teachers in some capacity and to people of all ages), faith (which also includes service to the community and to the church – often the one associated with the other), and morality. My "mother-women"[4] have been and are talented, creative women: singers, musicians, actresses, writers, seamstresses, jewelry makers, storytellers, cooks, and artists. Whether sharing their talents with small or grand, formal or informal audiences, these women have demonstrated the ways that creativity allows us opportunities for self-expression, self-discovery, cultural engagement and awareness, and generational connections.[5]

Growing up, we were taught (by our mothers *and* our fathers) to be kindhearted, to help those in need, and to stand up for those who couldn't stand up for themselves. This was all a part of being a decent human being. And all of this was in addition to the everyday wisdoms passed down across generations. As an example, I share a

communication between my mother and myself, but first a bit of context for the revelation. All of my talk about *The River Where Blood Is Born* intrigued my mom, so she decided to read it and the other novels of my dissertation with me. After a while, I began asking her to re-tell me stories and thoughts about our family, so she shared the following:

> The stories as told to me are as the ones in the book for your dissertation. One about planting in the garden is funny as I am the one trying to be the farmer! I must say that as with a good recipe for cooking one needs to know about what is necessary to grow food and at the same time learn about the recipe for life. Good soil with the proper added nutrients and a good source of water are all components that can be applied to the adequate growth of a family. Note, too much fertilizer will burn the new growth; too much water will cause the seed or new plants to rot. As you can see there are great parallels in preparation of a good garden. I find it quite interesting that our family elders took the simple things in nature and used them to "grow the family." As parents we try to do our best. Our parents tried to instill moral and ethical values that had been passed down to them by using sayings or anecdotes. One I remember is about the petticoat, where one never allows the undergarments to be seen. You see these things are private and are reserved only for yourself. Or, if your conduct was not apropos, they would say your "slip is showing."
>
> (Personal email between mother and daughter October 6, 2009)

Here, my mother and I are demonstrating and continuing the experience of "mother as teacher" and as family historian, sharing family stories and life lessons. For example, while the "slip" literally refers to an undergarment, something not for the public's visual consumption, it points to an error in behavior and judgment that is visible to others. This mother-daughter moment is prompted by (as suggested in the first line of my mother's email) Jackson-Opoku's novel and similar to the interactions between her characters of Big Momma and her great-granddaughter Alma or in the letter that Alma's mother Callie Mae writes to Alma about her own early adult years. It echoes the idea that literature provides a means of interpreting and remembering the world around us.[6] It intimates a connection between the representations of the maternal, stories that reflect ancestry, and the construction of identity as well … elements central to my discussion here.

Maryse Condé has stated that, "To seek one's ancestors is to search for oneself. You seek an ancestor because you want to know yourself" (73). Having read such wonderfully descriptive and complex novels that explore elements of the past and their connections to the present and that integrate such considerations of generational connections and memory, I am reminded of being a child and spending significant time during visits to my maternal grandparents' home staring at a black and white photograph of family members decades gone. The image was of at least 8-10 people who were related to me and who favored my siblings and me in certain facial features (or rather, we favored them), but I was, and still am, always reminded of the extensiveness of my familial heritage. Still, I recognize how much I do not know or remember about our family connections or histories and the several family stories I

have yet to hear. Perhaps, as Condé suggests in her statement and Jackson-Opoku in her novel, I seek my ancestors in search of myself, and perhaps I read black women's writings to know more about our experiences in our families, our communities, our societies, and in the Diaspora. Perhaps … so I will continue my search.

Finding a space and making a connection ~

With this dissertation titled *Bodied Knowledges (Where Our Blood Is Born): Maternal Narratives and Articulations of Black Women's Diaspora Identity*, my intention is not necessarily to retrace or re-theorize the construction of the African Diaspora in the historical sense. Several contemporary texts, like Stephanie E. Smallwood's *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*, Ronald Segal's *The Black Diaspora: Five Centuries of Experience Outside Africa*, Michael L. Conniff and Thomas J. Davis's *Africans in the Americas: A History of the Black Diaspora*, and James T. Campbell's *Middle Passages: African American Journeys to Africa, 1787–2005*, among others, provide substantial socio-historical discussions and analyses on the subject. Instead, this project examines the ways that diaspora authors Sandra Jackson-Opoku, Dionne Brand, and Maryse Condé articulate black women's diaspora identity by writing about and theorizing the African Diaspora. One of the key characteristics of black women's theoretical engagements with diaspora through fiction has been their interrogation of identity within the African Diaspora, carried out through specific reconstructions of the Diaspora via what I call a woman-centered diaspora narrative. This practice is the focus of my examination. Specifically, this work centers on Jackson-Opoku's *The River Where Blood Is Born* and draws comparisons to the diaspora narrative in Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the*

Moon and in Maryse Condé's *Desirada*. Such a framework can prove valuable in considering the negotiation of identity among black women and the significance of context to that identity.

Intentionally, I position these black women's novels as an interjection into and extension of analyses of diaspora and identity within and across the African Diaspora. Furthermore, by comparatively reading these diaspora narratives, I aim to move toward a de-centering of the U.S. focus and a de-masculinizing of the perspectives that encompasses much of the African Diaspora scholarship and to emphasize the commonalities of this context, which I use to define and explain the significance of a *diaspora narrative* in black women's writing. By focusing on *maternal narratives*, I consider the concept of diaspora beyond just frameworks that privilege "travel/migration and Middle Passage/common origin" (Campt and Thomas 2). As Tina Campt and Deborah A. Thomas indicate, such limited perspectives "often deploy notions of origin and authenticity that impede a deeper appreciation of the more complex dynamics that undergird diaspora. Moreover, such frameworks can privilege the mobility of masculine subjects as the primary agents of diasporic formation, and perpetuate a more general masculinism in the conceptualization of diasporic community" (2). Potentially, the substantial attention to "travel/migration and Middle Passage / common origin" in Jackson-Opoku's novel, especially, could be seen along similar limiting lines.

However, I contend that each instance of diaspora in this fiction highlights the multiplicity of the African Diaspora, and it articulates and extends theorizing about black women's identity within the Diaspora. Moreover, these texts are woman-centered,

which (for me and the novelists) re-locates diaspora from a traditionally male-centered and male-dominated position to one that focuses on black women's readings of and experiences within the Diaspora. Thus, looking at differently located black women's representations of *diaspora* redirects, even alters, the meaning of the concept and experience altogether. Jackson-Opoku, Brand, and Condé represent diasporan women who have lived, taught, and written about multiple locations in the Diaspora, from various countries in Africa, throughout the Americas, and in several places in the Caribbean. Too, I position their novels as matrilineal diaspora narratives that speak back to the typical "privileg[ing of] the mobility of masculine subjects as the primary agents of diasporic formation" that Campt and Thomas warn against (2).

These novels – *The River Where Blood Is Born*, *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, and *Desirada* – so differently located yet each addressing and delineating diasporic representations, provide "important contests over the meanings of blackness, race, Africa, and diasporic belonging itself" (Campt and Thomas 3). In terms of re-thinking diaspora through a feminist analytic, Campt and Thomas suggest "a repositioning of Africa that places the continent within global discourses of racialization and identity formation" (3). In their fiction on the subject, contemporary black women writers are taking part in this "repositioning" as they broaden conceptualizations of Diaspora – as seen in Jackson-Opoku's references to the Afterlife and the culturally diverse-yet-related women situated there, or in relation to Brand's depictions of Bola, her heritage and her numerous offspring. As such, the novelists contribute to the growing woman-centered diasporic discourse.

Introduction ~ Positioning the Body As Text: Maternal Narratives in Black Women's Diaspora Fiction

"And this is just one genesis. A seed of many seeds" (Jackson-Opoku 21).

> "Literature is created, listened to, read, and enjoyed not only because it is put into entertaining form but because people discover in its legends, poetry, songs, and stories a way of interpreting the human experience and of finding meaning and values in the struggles of ordinary life. This literary perspective can be applied to the way individuals assess the lives of black women" (Martha K. Cobb 197).[7]

> "Old and new worlds *stamped my face*, a blend of peoples and nations and masters and slaves long forgotten. In the *jumble of my features,* no certain line of origin could be traced. […] I was born in another country, where I also felt like an alien and which in part determined why I had come to Ghana. I had grown weary of being stateless"
> (Saidiya Hartman 4, emphasis mine).[8]

In our several and varying narratives of the African Diaspora, whether fiction or non-fiction, literary or theoretical, the body is integral, necessary to the telling and representing of the black experience, specifically the black woman's experience. The body becomes text, a medium upon and through which lifetimes are written, impressed, recorded, and remembered. The body is imprinted with experiences and expresses / "speaks" them. It holds memories, even when the mind refuses them, as in times of trauma.[9] The body exists across generations, cultural influences, and geographical locations.[10] This sense of body-as-text implicates several meanings: the *physical*, such as in experiences of race / ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality or, for example, of being a raced and/or gendered body that witnesses the individual's experiences of being in a particular intersectional social location; the *verbal,* through voice and the ability to speak for oneself and to tell one's own story; and the *communal*, in the way that a person identifies as part of a larger community or is identified by others as a part of that community.

In this dissertation titled *Bodied Knowledges (Where Our Blood Is Born): Maternal Narratives and Articulations of Black Women's Diaspora Identity*, I link those three contexts through the concept of diaspora and the experience of being in the African Diaspora. Thus, the black body is positioned as a site of experiential knowledge that speaks to and informs of the ways that African descendents are in and are perceived to be in the world as that body is read and interpreted according to extant meanings of race and/or blackness.[11] These ideas are influenced by history, politics, and social and cultural mores. I focus on the body as text to be read, as a text that holds stories and pieces of lived experience, in order to position it as a site through which identity formation takes place. Even more, I center black women's bodies as texts that explicate particular *maternal narratives* that provide insight regarding black women's experiences and identity in the African Diaspora. I read representations of the maternal in black women's fiction, seeking indications of black women's subjectivity – more in terms of how (the techniques used) black women create identity out of colonialism, slavery, and other systems of oppression, for example, rather than the women's reactions to negative, subjugating, and marginalizing circumstances or the impact of oppressions on black women. In other words, while the responses and effects are important and relevant to the discussion, in attending to the *maternal narratives* and related concepts like matrilineage, voice and storytelling, and certain relationships, I explore what black women *do* to respond, the actions they take, like using storytelling to pass along familial history and (re)creating their identities and pasts through the stories they tell (or don't tell).

Diaspora[12] acts as a term, a concept, an ideology, a theory, a literary technique, an identity, a political perspective, a historical event, a memory, a longing, an impression, a feeling, a connection, an expression, a location, a space of inquiry, an area of study, a social movement, an experience. … In its multiplicity and diversity, diaspora speaks to numerous possibilities, understandings, and perspectives for viewing and comprehending the world around us. With the movement of so many people on a global scale contributing constantly to the creation or growth of places and peoples, the development of new cultures and languages, over numerous centuries and locations, diaspora is a steadily evolving entity. Written upon the bodies of its community, it suggests relationships among diverse peoples – past, in progress, and forthcoming. Concentrating on a particular diaspora is complicated because of the many overlaps and intersections.[13] Yet this view of diaspora, specifically the African Diaspora, is central to my analysis of black women's fiction and my positioning of specific novels as diaspora fiction. In this discussion, I eschew too narrow or minimal comparisons that could potentially imply an elision of identities or a suggestion of essentialism within a particular diaspora or across several by taking note of the nuances in the novelists' depictions and descriptions of diaspora. Just as the word "diaspora" itself bespeaks complexity, so black women writers incorporate a similar complicatedness in their writings and depictions of black women's experiences across and throughout the African Diaspora.

One of the significant values of black women's writings involves the fact that it provides different and multifaceted representations of black women's lives. In addition, such writing tends to focus on black women, making them central actors instead of

subsequent or marginal characters. As analyses of black women's writings (in general and on particular topics and themes) reveal, black women novelists frequently use their works to counter or interrogate negative images of black women, to depict women who are often neglected or overlooked in fictional representations of black womanhood, and to critique or provide commentary about historical and current issues and their impact on black women. Taken in an African Diasporic context, this fiction explores similarities and differences among black women across cultures, communities, and countries and our perception of black women as diasporan beings. Diaspora fiction then, as read here, becomes a response to and reconfiguration of the gendered, raced, and sexualized representations of black women's bodies, consequently positioning the black woman's body (imprinted upon, acted on, reacted to, and reacting) as integral to a theoretical discourse on black women's diasporic identity.

Speaking of her own sense of being a diasporan person and of em*body*ing the Diaspora, Saidiya Hartman (as indicated in the second epigraph to this Introduction) suggests that the impact of diaspora – of the historical, social, political, and cultural contexts that created and continue to inform the African Diaspora – is lasting in multiple ways and expressed through the body. It shapes people's perceptions of themselves and the ways they are viewed by others. It impresses upon one a sense of longing and loss, as well as a sense of belonging, of being the culmination both of diverse peoples and of those various circumstances through which diasporan people have been and continue to be formed. Further indicated in Hartman's statement, the concepts and experiences of movement, separation, and blending (generally associated with diaspora and, therefore, the negotiation of identity) can have significant influences

on our understanding of women and their sense of belonging. Literature provides an indispensable means of comprehending and examining the effect of such influences. As Martha Cobb posits in the first epigraph provided above, literature provides "a way of interpreting the human experience and of finding meaning and values in the struggles of [black women's everyday lives]" (197). As such, literature can also be used to give insight regarding people's experiences in a number of contexts, such as the African Diaspora, and it can provide space for black women to articulate the complexity of their lives for those seeking to make connections and those who believe that the study and telling of black women's experiences and stories – especially from the viewpoints and voices of black women themselves – has been neglected.

In *Worrying the Line: Black Women Writers, Lineage, and Literary Tradition*, Cheryl A. Wall points to the broad ways these voices have been negated or dismissed. She states,

> Writing in the 1970s and 1980s, black women confronted an Anglo-American tradition to which they could lay claim – it was the tradition they had studied in school – but one that was not eager to claim them. At the same time, they responded to a black literary tradition with which they were deeply familiar and to which they were explicitly indebted but whose classics ignored or dismissed as insignificant the experiences of black women. Their responses were complicated and various […]. (11)

Since the 90s, recognizing and writing to address this gap in the literature, black women writers have continued to produce critiques of black women's experiences through both critical examinations and via their fiction of and on black women's lives. And this

includes lives within the African Diaspora. As such, they have participated in and continue a prominent practice among black feminist scholars of intervening and participating in both black and feminist (literary) scholarship of reclamation[14] – a process of reclaiming black women's voices and experiences from the margins and centralizing them as sites of knowledge and spaces for contemplating black women's lives.

In doing so, this process attends to the significance of difference among black women, noting such categories as race / ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and location. This is significant because it helps to ground the positioning of black women's diaspora fiction as a part of this scholarship of recovery, as expanding and continuing a literary tradition or practice that, out of necessity, responds to previous omissions of black women's lives as sites of knowledge-making. It signals recognition that mainstream media, popular fiction, and earlier scholarship have often overlooked the voices and experiences of black women.[15] And when included, black women's perspectives and lives are presented in limited ways or told through someone else's constructions, too frequently relating degrading or stereotypical ideas associated with black womanhood.[16] These images become a way of policing black women's bodies, such as their maternity and their sexuality.

Moreover, the highlighting of women and their experiences in African Diaspora fiction positions the black women (characters) themselves as "bodies of knowledge," bodies, as discussed previously, through and upon which the dynamics of difference are written and analyzed and through which the discourse must be read. In this work, I seek to discern and examine how the black woman's body as a site of knowledge informs

readers' understandings of black women's identity, specifically a diasporan consciousness. In reading the narratives of the black woman's body, I contend that attention to gender, race, and sexuality – through a lens of maternity – illustrates black women writers' implicit and explicit challenges to heteronormative notions of the self, motherhood, and family, traditionally feminized spaces, and de-masculinizes the concept of diaspora itself. Notably, although references to "self, motherhood, and family" are typically understood as concepts that reflect particular ideas about being and existence yet lack "the materiality of space,"[17] I suggest that, as this dissertation points to bodied knowledges in which concepts are impressed upon and expressed through the body, such concepts gain a physicality that makes them, for example, tangible, malleable to women's resistance or re-writing. This is demonstrated in Lola's resistance to motherhood (in Jackson-Opoku's novel) or Bola's fluid mothering (in Brand's novel) as the women's bodies and voices demonstrate their comprehension, which I discuss in later chapters.[18]

Because I contend that fiction writing is a form of theorizing and knowledge-making, it is important to note here that I engage an intentional conflation of fiction writing and literary criticism. Critics like Barbara Christian and Arlene R. Keizer have made similar connections.[19] Basically, I suggest that, in analyzing fiction for insight on our society, be it political, historical, social, religious, etc., literary critics automatically assume some aspect of theorizing and critique in fiction writing. Additionally, as with the authors examined in this dissertation, a significant number of novelists write non-fiction scholarship and/or participate in scholarly circles as teachers and critics as well as writing fiction; thus, they come to the fiction with a critical perspective that, I argue,

gets incorporated into their fictional writing as well. Maryse Condé, author of *Desirada*, confirms this as her intention. In an interview with Françoise Pfaff, Condé states, "[I] include[d] myself in the story in order to criticize my own actions and those of people of my generation" (69). Thus, the writing and critiquing are intertwined.

Black women's location within the African Diaspora exemplifies a complexity and multiplicity of identity, based on the fragmented, multicultural, and hybrid nature of the d/Diaspora.[20] Carole Boyce Davies addresses the process of identity formation within a migratory and diasporic context.[21] She contends, "The re-negotiating of identities is [as] fundamental to migration as it is fundamental to Black women's writing in cross-cultural contexts. [T]he convergence of multiple places and cultures […] re-negotiates the terms of Black women's experience [and] in turn negotiates and re-negotiates their identities" ("Introduction" 3). The process of negotiation and re-negotiation of identities, then, emerges as necessary and characteristic of d/Diaspora. Consequently, through an examination of the narrative structure and subject matter of specific black women's writing, diaspora materializes as a distinctive attribute, highlighting what becomes identifiable as diaspora literature, which I discuss at a later point in this chapter.

Defining and redefining the self is important to black women who are resisting and working against a "master" narrative of colonization, whiteness, maleness, and Western-ness in an effort to validate and un-silence the voices and experiences of black women.[22] The navigation of identity is continual and fluid, intricately depicted *in* and *as* diaspora fiction. Hence, the diaspora novel with its migrations (ranging from forced dispersal to voluntary emigrations), gender roles, and characters' adjustments to diverse

circumstances and locations becomes a significant site through which to study diasporan black womanhood. Furthermore, I propose that, in diasporic contexts, a category like "black women" (which points to a both/and socialized, racialized, gendered, and politicized identity) inherently suggests and establishes a position in opposition to notions of essentialism, allowing for the cross-cultural analysis of black women's writing. Yet, most significant and central to this project, I argue that *maternal narratives* – a derivative of women's gendered narratives which I explicate later – depicted in black women's diaspora fiction encompass these concepts and provide a specific lens for exploring black women's identity from a diasporic perspective. This work raises questions such as, How do issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality surface in diasporas? How are they significant to diasporas – understanding them – and diaspora identity? And what does diaspora literature reveal or suggest about black women's lives in the African Diaspora? A specifically gendered role like motherhood (and related characteristics) provides ingress to black women's diaspora fiction for addressing such ideas.

Over the last fifty years, "diaspora" has developed into an important subject of study in academia, becoming "a term of choice to express the links and commonalities among groups of African descent throughout the world" (Edwards 45),[23 or for other dispersed groups]. As the reasons for and conditions of diasporic migrations continue and communities emerge, informing our understandings of diaspora and diasporan connections, histories, experiences, and voices, so too does the necessity of exploring diasporas and their role in identity formation, and so too must our investigations into those evolving states of diaspora.

In her examination of "diaspora" and her attempts to define and create a theoretical approach to diaspora, Kim Butler reflects on the diversity and shifting nature of diaspora, which is visible in her attempts to pinpoint a typology that would allow for comparatively identifying and examining multiple diasporas. In my own interrogation of black women's diaspora fiction and in order to specify a particular understanding of African Diaspora, I draw on Butler's explication of various elements and diaspora categories. Especially, I use her "five dimensions of diasporan research," which I address below in terms of a diasporic theoretical framework, to analyze the flexibility of diaspora in the novels used in this thesis. Because the novels are so diversely located according to location, diaspora movement and construction, and narrative, collectively they demonstrate what I argue is the fluidity of diaspora, the African Diaspora in particular.

Brent Hayes Edwards, Robin Cohen, and, according to Butler, Philip Curtin each grapple with the effort to organize and situate diasporas – in terms of time period, geographical location, and impetus for dispersal. Edwards traces the trajectory of "The Uses of Diasporas," noting the complexity of identifying the African Diaspora and defining it separately from pan-Africanist ideologies. He emphasizes the need to attend carefully to the use and meaning of diaspora. Similar to Butler, Edwards stresses differences between "diaspora" and other terms and concepts like 'exile,' 'expatriation,' 'postcoloniality,' 'migrancy,' 'globality,' and 'transnationality,' among others (45). However, as do I, Butler recognizes that these elements are also inclusive in meanings and formations of diaspora. In her efforts to organize the different kinds of diasporas in ways that can allow for comparative analysis among or across them, she engages these

same and similar concepts as "types of dispersal, suggesting that each creates its own ethos of diaspora—the shared memories and myths around which this unique type of imagined community is built" (200).

Still, I urge caution in the push to delineate a strict distinction between diaspora and different but similar ideas of migration, globalization, and transnationalism. In examinations of the historical and contemporary formations of diaspora, such concepts exist within our understandings and experiences of diaspora. For example, tracing the African Diaspora involves an awareness of the forced migrations of those dispersed in the 15th through 19th centuries through imperialism and enslavement to the Americas and the Caribbean; it includes contemporary migrations within and outside of previously established diaspora locations; and it takes into account additional reasons and conditions under which diasporas formed initially. Overall, these features contribute to the continued construction of diaspora across generations (decades or centuries long) – including contemporary political, economic, health, war, and religious circumstances. Also, diasporan relationships to real or imagined homelands and hostlands and the interrelationships between diasporan peoples influence the ways that we theorize diaspora (Butler 209) and extend our conceptualization of the African Diaspora.

In her discussion about creating diaspora theory, Butler includes an acknowledgement of keeping in mind, not only the reasons for diaspora formation and the kinds of diasporas that are formed, but also attending to the influence of diverse social and identity markers on the experience of diasporization, such as gender, socio-economic status, employment, culture, and age. And I would expand this to include race / ethnicity, sexual identity, and economic class – especially as these influence the

formation of communities within diaspora and the ways that the people within the diaspora experience being diasporan (being in a hostland, for example). Such "dimensions of experience and identity help historicize and contextualize" the diasporan group (203). These considerations are integral to my perception of the diasporizations taking place in the selected black women's fiction.[24] Using the novels as providing this historical context, I then focus on identity formation as articulated through expressions of the maternal with the African Diaspora.

Even as I argue a fluctuating sense of diaspora, one that keeps in mind the "re-generation" of diasporas as later groups, whatever their motivations, contribute to or build on initial diasporizations and as other groups interact with established diasporas, my thesis acknowledges and grows out of a pivotal point of origination of the African Diaspora. As Butler states,

> Certainly, most diasporas experience multiple waves of out-migration of different demographic character and reasons for departing. Nonetheless, one traumatic part of that migration history stands out as a defining moment for the Jewish diaspora. I therefore emphasize the seminal dispersal because it tends to characterize the diaspora, and its collective attitudes towards both homelands and hostlands, despite its ultimate diversity. (204)

This perspective lets me center a particular point of interconnection in African Diaspora formation while acknowledging the diversity, multiplicity, and fluidity of the Diaspora as well. The conditions under which diasporas are formed "make the diasporan group and inform the direction of its development" (Butler 203). Allowing for a comparative

analysis of the three literary representations of the Diaspora highlighted in my study, this perspective informs my centering of a particular point of interconnection in African Diaspora formation while acknowledging the diversity and multiplicity of the Diaspora as well.

This dissertation seeks to contribute to the scholarship, specifically with regard to black women's fictional writings on diaspora. In my study, I conduct close readings of three primary novels and examine their depictions and constructions of diaspora, particularly the African Diaspora. I engage what I define as a black feminist diasporic literary analysis of the *maternal narratives* in Sandra Jackson-Opoku's *The River Where Blood Is Born* (1997), Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon* (1999), and Maryse Condé's *Desirada* (2000).[25] With this analytical framework, I attend to articulations and representations of the central women characters within a diasporic context, which includes discussions of familial and generational connections, constructions of diaspora narratives, and the incorporation of race, gender, class, and sexuality in these discussions of diaspora and diaspora identity. Additionally, I focus on a particular sense of identity – that of mother / motherhood – which allows me to position black women's bodies as texts that demonstrate and speak of and to black women's experiences in the Diaspora.

Ultimately, I make the following four claims: 1) Contemporary black women writers use their diaspora fiction to intervene in discussions about and to theorize the African Diaspora and black women's experiences in this Diaspora. 2) In creating such powerful black woman-centered narratives, black women writers seek to reclaim black women's lives and experiences from the margins and to challenge stereotypical

representations of black womanhood. 3) As a gendered identity most prevalently associated with women, the role of mother / motherhood / mothering provides a valuable lens through which to investigate and articulate the complexities of black women's identity in the Diaspora, and I do this through a discussion of the maternal narratives mentioned previously. 4) As a result of my use of the maternal as a lens for examining diaspora and diaspora identity, I contend that the intersection between diaspora and the maternal, necessarily, urges a re-definition of the maternal within a diasporic context. Although the maternal is typically associated with familial connections – as seen in reference to mother figures and ideas of mothering / motherhood within the novels – the maternal extends beyond the purely familial to indicate a sense of nurturing, community, empowerment, support, guidance, and sharing of narratives and histories, for example, that crosses borders of kinship. Furthermore, the context and concept of diaspora locates the maternal as people, place, or experience, as non-fixed and fluctuating according to the individual's needs. To establish and explicate these assertions, I situate the novels as "fictionalized theoretical discourse"[26] in order to demarcate a method of analysis *and* to locate the novels as providing a substantial aspect of the diasporic literary theorizing analyzed here. In other words, I use these elements to create a method of analysis and as part of the analysis itself.

Theoretical Methodology – Determining Parameters and Literary Analysis –

> "Secretly, I wanted to belong somewhere or, at least, I wanted a convenient explanation of why I felt like a stranger." (Hartman 4)

My interest in black women's diaspora fiction (especially depictions of women's voices and lives in the African Diaspora) began through an initial reading and examination of Sandra Jackson-Opoku's meta-narrative on the African Diaspora, one

that centralizes matrilineage. This encounter provoked a search for other black women authors whose narratives address and reflect / re-imagine black women's experiences in the African Diaspora. Using Jackson-Opoku's novel as a principal text, I then engaged in popular searches through sources like Google and Amazon.com and academic searches through Academic Premier and MLA Bibliography for variations of key terms and phrases such as "African (or Black) Diaspora and black women," "black women's fiction and/or diaspora," "black women writer and fiction and (African or Black) diaspora," and "black or diaspora literature and (African or Black) diaspora and (black) women." My intention was to locate works and authors published around the time of Jackson-Opoku's text, discussed and/or described in relation to (Black or African) D/diaspora (and) literature / fiction.

Butler suggests that, in order to create an analytical framework or a theoretical framework for analyzing diaspora, we must determine a definition, typology, time frame, diasporan homeland and hostland, and interrelationships between diasporan beings. Brent Hayes Edwards makes similar implications in his examination of the use and trajectory of diaspora. Along these lines, I limit the number of primary texts for this study by including fiction that 1) focuses on women's voices and experiences; 2) emphasizes a matrilineage or articulations of woman-centered generational connections as key to the story being told *and* to the connections between the main characters; 3) is identifiable as *diaspora literature*[27] – defined as fiction examined through a critical, diasporic lens and "that engages diasporic discourses of Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas" (Wilentz, "Toward a Diaspora Literature" 401) – preferably with some engagement of all three locations; and more specifically, 4) centers a *diaspora*

narrative, which I explicate below.[28] Overall, these four characteristics allow me to take up a particular definition and treatment of the African Diaspora, to identify relevant texts, and to focus my analysis on select black women's diaspora fiction.[29] Also, it prepares me to examine and consider the theoretical value of black women's fiction in speaking to gendered identity in the diaspora, therefore, continuing my goal of highlighting black women's experiences.

I have chosen novels published around the same time period, and since Jackson-Opoku's novel is the most primary text, I have used her publication date (1997) as the point of reference. The additional primary texts were published around the same time – *At the Full* in 1999 and *Desirada* in 2000. Even more, I want to examine, comparatively, how the authors take up and write about black women's lives in the Diaspora. My goal is to look into how disparately located diasporan women novelists publishing so close to one another construct the African Diaspora and give voice to black women's experiences and identity within / across the diaspora.

The time frame of the novels included in this dissertation ranges between 1997-2000, shifting from the end of the 20th century into the 21st century. Incidentally, during this shift, in 1999, Jerry Rawlings, then president of Ghana, which has been positioned as one of the potential locations of "return"[30] in the dreams or imaginations and realities of numerous African Americans and blacks in the Diaspora, posed the idea of offering dual citizenship to African Diasporans. Soon after, Ghana became the first African country to offer the "right to return" to Diasporans.[31] I point to this moment and the concept of dual citizenship because it highlights key questions about diaspora being raised at the same time that Brand, Condé, and Jackson-Opoku were also addressing

these issues. This is a considerable point, definitely, and for a number of reasons. Issues that resonate between this moment and my research include the viability of "return" for African descendents throughout the Diaspora;[32] the connection between return and ancestral memory and across cultures, geographical locations, and historical and socio-economic circumstances; and the way the notion of citizenship, of dual citizenship, prompts queries about belonging and *not* belonging. All of these are central in diaspora studies in general and in queries regarding diaspora and identity formation specifically.

Finally, in addition to black women authors who are well known in black literature, I sought to engage authors and works beyond the more prominent (in typical U.S. academic spaces) black women I had encountered previously in my studies. Hence, the dissertation focuses on Sandra Jackson-Opoku's *The River Where Blood* as an elaborate illustration of an *African D/diaspora narrative*, and I juxtapose it with the more familiar authors Maryse Condé and Dionne Brand, using Brand's *At the Full* and Condé's *Desirada* to provide comparative examples of discussion.[33] On one hand, the authors' level of engagement with matrilineage, their use of women characters' voices, and the significance of the quest motif and characters' movements across cultural locations guided this decision. On the other hand, such positioning allows me to highlight the importance of Jackson-Opoku's contribution to the growing amount of fiction on the African Diaspora. For instance, her novel *The River Where Blood* explores such diasporic ideas as 1) diaspora formation across centuries, so from historical and contemporary perspectives; 2) generational connections, cross-cultural relations, ancestry and ancestral influences; 3) intersectionality, interlocking systems of oppression, and questions about the continued impact of historical events on present and

future generations; and 4) the quest motif in terms of the search for self and to understand one's heritage; among others. Despite having been first published over ten years ago and specifically addressing and depicting the African Diaspora and providing valuable narratives important to the developing field of diaspora (and African Diaspora) studies, Jackson-Opoku's work has yet to be given the scholarly attention it deserves. Therefore, along the lines of including and emphasizing black women's voices and experiences in regards to literary, feminist, and diaspora scholarship, this dissertation accomplishes that goal significantly in that it is the first extended, critical scholarly analysis of Sandra Jackson-Opoku's fiction, specifically *The River Where Blood*.[34]

Diaspora – Definitions, Literature, & Narratives –

"History opens and closes, Mama. […] I think we forget who we were. […] All the centuries past may be one long sleep. We are either put to sleep or we choose to sleep. Nothing is changing, we are just forgetting" (Dionne Brand, *At the Full and Change of the Moon* 234-35).

In determining the definitional parameters of key terms for this research, I start by turning to diaspora and literary scholars such as Angeletta K.M. Gourdine, Gay Wilentz, and Butler, the first two of whom engage a form of literary analysis in articulating identity and diaspora in black women's fiction, thus providing a model for my own examination of the literature. I provide specific characteristics for identifying black women's diaspora fiction, and I focus on the maternal discourse that encompasses each of the primary novels. This maternal discourse refers to women-centered narratives on issues and associations related to motherhood / mothering and that utilize a matrilineal context for tracing and discussing aspects of the African Diaspora. And rather than locating authors and novels from the three central locations of Africa, North America, and the Caribbean individually, I sought works that, like Jackson-Opoku's

novel, fit the desired criteria of diaspora literature, which includes a broader use or reference to these areas.

For this dissertation, *diaspora* is viewed as simultaneously a space, identity, and concept in fluctuation. It is not static or always particularly situated – though it can refer back to a particular (idea of) place or national or cultural identity. Instead, it transcends boundaries to be located as a sense of spiritual, social, or political connection; a diversity of place; a historical condition (or repercussions from it); and/or an experience of migration (past both/and/or present[35]). This complexity and interconnectedness of diaspora and diasporic relationships is illustrated in the literature chosen for this analysis. Although I approach the novels with my own understanding of diaspora – as shaped by the diaspora scholarship, which helps me to identify the novels as diasporic – I allow the novelists and their works to inform that understanding of diaspora as well. (I discuss this later in the chapter in terms of a woman-centered *diaspora narrative*.[36]) These and other features of diasporan communities are used to distinguish diaspora from other group movements and are important in theorizing diaspora across spatial and temporal distances. Even more specific to this project is the African Diaspora, which Gourdine explains is "an ethnic collective defined as the population of indigenous Africans dispersed through systematic and/or planned movement from the African continent" (2). I focus on the African Diaspora generally in terms of this dispersal via the slave trade and the development of subsequent cultures and locations associated with it. Yet, contemporary diasporic migrations (for instance, dispersals based on economic, political, war-related, etc. circumstances) involving the various locations in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas are important also. This is especially relevant

as the characters make their journeys to and from the African continent and/or "subsequent cultures and locations," reflecting some semblance of real life diasporan movements and thus further extending our perception of the Diaspora.

Next, to construct a critical lens for examining identity within the African Diaspora, I turn to Butler's guidelines for identifying and theorizing diaspora. In her article "Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse," Butler employs William Safran's defining elements[37] of diaspora to determine a means of analyzing and understanding diaspora, identity, and diaspora relationships that will hold for various diasporas. She accommodates / accomplishes this goal by proposing "five dimensions for diasporan research" that inform a theoretical methodology for studying diaspora. These include the following: "1) Reasons for, and conditions of, the dispersal; 2) Relationship with the homeland; 3) Relationships with the hostlands; 4) Interrelationships within communities of the diaspora; 5) Comparative studies of different diasporas" (195). Points of analysis for a theory and methodology of diaspora should be translatable and transferable to and across multiple diasporas – which emphasizes the strength of the analytical methodological tool. Moreover, such practice allows for a cross-cultural analysis of diaspora – or more importantly for this dissertation, supports an interconnected analysis of multi-generational, woman-centered diaspora fictions that encompass diverse locations, periods, and histories. Therefore, in addition to being a space for interrogating identity, I situate diaspora / the African Diaspora as a framework linking the novels, the authors, and the literary characteristics examined in this research. In order to compare the diaspora novels effectively, I begin with a basic, guiding understanding of "diaspora" / "African Diaspora," as conveyed previously. I use those articulations of

d/Diaspora to identify and locate diaspora in the novels employed for this research, specifically as they inform the woman-centered *diaspora narrative* that interweaves the texts (in a kind of web-like depiction of the Diaspora) and positions them as fundamental to this research.

Additionally, this study contributes to the broader exploration of black women's diaspora literature not only by demonstrating the ways that it (the literature) emphasizes and addresses the diasporic perspective, but also by serving as a space where the conceptualizations of diaspora are analyzed and discussed and where the literature is presented as the authors' efforts in, or rather their contributions to, excavating these conceptualizations. In her expanded explanation of "diaspora literature," one of the criteria for identifying the novels applicable for this project, Wilentz states,

> "diaspora" literature […] *transcends national boundaries* and *reflects a cultural lineage beyond even that of familial ancestry*. […] The concept of "diaspora literature" as women's literature calls into question imposed, manmade literary boundaries such as "Nigerian," "American," or even "African" literature in relation to the writings of Black women; a diaspora perspective *opens up relationships and connections* not easily addressed even in continental studies. Without this broader exploration of the works by women of African descent […], many of the signs and meanings of the discourse are lost. (*Binding Cultures* xv, emphasis mine)

This perspective of diaspora texts is evident in Jackson-Opoku's *The River Where Blood Is Born*, Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, and Condé's *Desirada*, all of which speak to the idea of transcending borders and resisting a linear notion of

ancestry through their embedded uses of diaspora – in terms of familial relationships, character movements, and emphasis on black women's lives across generations, for instance. Diaspora operates as a framework for the storytelling that takes place in the novels. By virtue of the meaning and construction of diaspora, the notion of family and ideas about the maternal must be reevaluated, expanded to meet the needs and realities of persons within and across diasporan communities. As such, family and familial roles extend beyond normative definitions and expectations.

Even constructions of the maternal can include a diversity of maternal figures, such as biological and adoptive or surrogate mothers, grandmothers or aunts, older sisters or cousins, other mothers (often older, widowed or barren women of the community who serve as additional caregivers, guides, disciplinarians, storytellers, and living historians), and even men who "mother" their children. The relationships between the mother figures and their "children" span generations, family structures, and geographical locations, and diasporan groups. Condé's novel offers a clear demonstration of this through the various maternal figures for protagonist Marie-Noëlle: she is born to Reynalda, raised until age ten by an "adoptive" / other mother named Ranélise in Guadeloupe, then raised through her teen years by her stepfather Ludovic (who mothers her and her siblings in place of a mother who seems indifferent) and teachers at a boarding school in France; later, she meets her grandmother during a return trip to Guadeloupe and encounters other mothers while living in the United States. Necessarily, a diaspora context positions family or kinship networks to be flexible in terms of what such networks mean for the persons involved and for whom they include (in terms of accepting and/or releasing members) according to the

diasporan group's needs. In addition, a diasporan perspective recognizes that family isn't always a known entity. It can be a consequence of initial diasporic separations such as the division of families and cultural groups during slavery, as with Jackson-Opoku's Ama Krah and Emilene (mother and daughter who lose track of each other until the Afterlife), or continued diasporan circumstances in hostlands, which is visible in Jackson-Opoku's Sarah and Darlene (a daughter and her adoptive mother who forge a relationship through diaspora and retain associations with diasporan communities in the Caribbean, the United States, and Ghana).

The authors and their novels demonstrate the impact of black women's voices in writing and theorizing about diaspora; thus, they highlight the value of viewing black women's literature as "critical cultural fiction,"[38] as critiquing and commenting upon diverse cultures and, among others, the social, gendered, economic, and racial engagements within them. And although Wilentz states that diaspora literature "reflects a cultural lineage beyond even that of familial ancestry," as demonstrated in this study, exploring that familial ancestry to some extent, as well as across diaspora narratives, indicates a way to begin thinking more intersectionally about diaspora and women's experiences on a broader scale.

The use of "matrilineal diaspora" as a *maternal narrative* in this dissertation contributes to the reconstruction of maternity as used in black women's diaspora fiction. I take up Chinosole's definition of the term, using it to express and emphasize relationships among black women. Again, it highlights nurturing and supportive relationships that extend across generations, cultures, and continents, forming diasporan community. These associations are woman-centered and are perceived as empowering

to those involved. Too, the idea of kinship is broadened to include both real and fictive kin; to highlight the value in the knowledge and experiences these women have as (and from) ancestors and daughters; and to allow them to create relationships as they see fit, according to their needs of giving and receiving within a diasporan group. This idea of maternity recognizes and celebrates difference and voice.

In a diasporan context, the *maternal* reflects several meanings of connection between group members, between group and homeland and/or hostland, and within the interrelationships created among or between diasporan groups. Thus, maternal in diaspora becomes representative of the homeland and/or the hostland, implicating a sense and space of belonging traditionally associated with the mother figure.

However, an alternative to this, illustrated in the *maternal narrative* of matrophobia, often a disconnection from the mother or maternal figure provides a needed severance that allows the daughter to construct her identity on her own. Therefore, in place of the nurturing community, diaspora speaks to the idea of separation, which allows the daughter to see herself as a distinct entity from her mother. The maternal, most often associated with the mother, discussed more specifically in the following chapters and in a certain context of diaspora, comes across as someone (or possibly some place) from which one must be separated in order to grow and/or discover one's own identity. Mother, in that case, becomes a definitional opposition – in that the daughter defines (constructs) her own identity against but in relation to her mother. Often, this is done to ensure that the final, created self is one's own, even if, in the end, it still resembles the mother.

In a way, the relationship between the mother and daughter figure exists in

something of a phantom connection – not necessarily visible but felt even in its absence. In Condé's text Marie-Noëlle has this experience, mainly because the secrets that link her mother's life and her own prevent her from knowing her mother and, therefore, knowing herself. Although she wants to be different from her mother, her isolationist behavior seems nevertheless to mark her as her mother's child. Both of Brand's Bolas (the ancestor and her descendent) experience this in relation to their mother figures, Marie Ursule and Dear Mama respectively. Bola as ancestor is separated from her mother at a young age, and that unknowing leaves her, initially, longing for her mother and later adrift in discovering herself. Without the maternal figure, Bola is able to create her own identity, which is heavily influenced by her circumstances of growing up in isolation, yet the absence of her mother stays with her. The descendent Bola, while not wanting the separation from the woman she claims as her mother (actually her grandmother), upon Dear Mama's death, creates her world around the spirit of her mother, whom she believes remains with her – she lives with, talks to, eats with, and shares with the spirit of her mother. Although the example of the descendent Bola is somewhat different, like other characters, she creates her identity and her life in relation to her mother; the separation from Dear Mama – her mother's death and her aunts' attempts to inform her of this loss – creates trauma for her, one that simultaneously increases in that she moves further into her world of unreality yet that diminishes because she is allowed to live in her fantasy world.

Finally, Jackson-Opoku engages a similar idea with her character Alma, who grows up seeking to separate herself from her mother's life, which seems oppressive and limited to Alma. And even as she maintains connections to her mother, Alma has

moved away from her hometown, as if to assure herself that her mother's life will not be her own. In addition, as a child, Alma spends a summer and connects with her maternal great grandmother, an experience that becomes an empowering time for Alma, especially in that she learns so much about her family history and about herself. It is during this time that Alma becomes fascinated with her ancestry and diaspora, an interest that guides significant portions of her life. As she makes her way across the United States, Barbados, England, and West Africa, she is "haunted" by the idea of being part of a diasporan group and locating her origins in Africa. It is her great grandmother's stories (and at times, it seems, her ancestral presence) that spur Alma's interests.

In an example from another diaspora, Amy K. Kaminsky discusses two particular maternal narratives, like the mother-daughter relationship and matrophobia,[39] which are interconnected throughout her discussion of Maria Lugones's work. The kitchen in Argentine culture, as in other cultures such as African American culture, is situated as a site of mother-daughter interaction, specifically in terms of a space where the daughter learns about womanhood from her mother. At the same time, it seems, this mother-daughter relationship becomes a site of matrophobic expression in which the daughter attempts to resist being like her mother, such as in body size and associated with the exchange between mother and daughter that takes place in the kitchen, typically while preparing and eating food. Discussing Lugones's approach to her relationship with her mother, Kaminsky suggests the potential parasitic nature of the mother-daughter relationship in which the mother becomes "'matter' to which she [as daughter] is etymologically tied" (139-40). Similar to several of the daughters in the

narratives I mention here and discuss more thoroughly later in the thesis, the daughter seeks a separation from the mother. "[A]s a woman and potential mother," the daughter is more resistant or hesitant to participate in this parasitic relationship and "seeks another way to know her mother" (Kaminsky 140), through separation and return and/or through a different perspective and means of engagement.

More significantly, the narrative format of diaspora used in this thesis includes what I refer to as a reflective / reflexive historical and/or contemporary context – meaning that the trajectory of the novel functions through recalling particular historical events (like slavery, colonization, wars, integration, and the Civil Rights Movement) and mythical or spiritual beliefs and practices, using them as identifiable backgrounds (instead of main characters or continuing events in the novel) to help the reader locate the story and the characters' lives temporally and spatially. Also, these contextual elements are employed to demonstrate the factors that have influenced diasporic formations among Africa's descendents, both past and present. Not only does the narrative structure mirror or echo context (reflective), but also it reveals the impact of context on the characters, the represented diasporan peoples (reflexive). In delineating black women's diaspora literature here, I pinpoint what I term a *diaspora narrative*.[40] The *diaspora narrative* encompasses the following as its distinct elements. First, the concept of diaspora is pivotal to the narrative framework of the text, marking cultural and ethnic hybridizations, crossings, and negotiations among people of African descent and along generational lines. Second, this *diaspora narrative* depicts, discusses, engages, or creates the diaspora as a central part of the storytelling (the act) and the story told (the narrative) with the rest of the plot expanding around or extending from it.

Third, the format focuses on and traces the women characters' subjectivity, highlighting women's voices and creating an explicitly woman-centered generationality or "matrilineal diaspora."[41] Finally, the *diaspora narrative* points to or reflects upon black cultural, social, political, and/or historical experiences.[42]

As I examine Jackson-Opoku, Brand, and Condé's novels for elements of "diaspora literature," I position them simultaneously as incorporating a woman-centered *diaspora narrative*. I center this *diaspora narrative* as a focal point in black women's diaspora fiction and, consequently, in this dissertation, contending that authors' use of such a structural arrangement and concept points to a notable engagement with the African Diaspora and the lives expressed within it. Even more, I argue that the novels provide more than entertainment; rather, they are theorizations of the African Diaspora, providing a means of understanding the realities and intersectionalities of black women's lives. Situated as "critical cultural fiction," this literature sets up a critical lens that attends to the value of fiction as providing knowledge about diverse cultural groups, therefore speaking to "silenced" or neglected voices and marginalized groups whose perspectives are and have been too often ignored (specifically, as a source of experiential knowledge). Thus, in these novels that centralize the voices of women of African descent – thematically and literally in that they are stories about and the actual texts written / voiced by black women across the diaspora – black women writers re-construct the African Diaspora as a means of exploring and critiquing black women's lived experiences. In doing so, these texts provide a sense of identity and community, what Lean'tin Bracks refers to as "meaning for today's black women who are in their

communities living, loving, growing, changing, and seeking control of their circumstances in empowering ways" (3).

I posit that the authors use particular topics (like constructions of diaspora, migration, and home; gender role development and matrilineages; the quest for self; and *maternal narratives*) to analyze black women's diaspora identity and the multiple factors that inform that identity. The different settings and narrative voices, as well as the authors' approaches to Diaspora brought together within a diasporic perspective, imply connections among black women cross-culturally and point to a sense of diaspora identity among black women. Through critical attention and a close reading of the diaspora fiction, I explore the authors' conceptualizations of Diaspora by centering the novels' contextualized identities via the concept of motherhood / mothering provided in a framework I posit as *maternal narratives*.

Maternal Narratives – Motherhood, Mothering, & Mother Figures

Maternal narratives refer to discourses or experiences that speak to, express, explain, or theorize motherhood and mothering; the narratives reflect the practice, relationships, gender expectations, and critiques of motherhood depicted in the fictional texts. Consequently, an analysis of the function of such narratives, and in the context of the African Diaspora, highlights the fluidity and diversity of black women's diaspora identity. Basically, I suggest that, as a role or concept specifically gendered and associated with women and specifically represented and understood in black diasporic communities, "the maternal" gives us a lens through which to begin analyzing a larger discussion of identity.

In black women's diaspora fiction, *maternal narratives* play an important role in the representation and theorization of black women's identity, as well as in articulations of the African Diaspora itself. For example, the title of Jackson-Opoku's novel *The River Where Blood Is Born* invokes images of maternity, birth and beginnings, kinship, and place. The author prepares readers for a journey to discover the significance and function that *maternal narratives* play in the construction of the African Diaspora. Throughout this text, Jackson-Opoku emphasizes the diversity and intricacy of maternal relationships, using her descriptions both to challenge and critique normative social expectations of gender and paying homage to and reflecting on the meaning of motherhood and mothering among black women in the Diaspora. In similar fashion, other African Diaspora fiction writers like Brand and Condé explore the maternal as articulating the complexity of diasporic identity,[43] such as the indifference Brand's character Bola takes in mothering her children, who are each fathered by a different man who met her personal needs at the time, or Condé's use of multiple other mothers to fill the void left in her protagonist's life by an emotionally and mostly physically absent mother. I analyze these connections.

In addressing this topic, I explicate five recurrent *maternal narratives* that become apparent throughout woman-centered diaspora fiction, especially the texts employed in this research. In the framing of this study, the *maternal narratives* serve as a sub-category of the overall *diaspora narrative* of the novels. Although I perceive *maternal narratives* as abundant, encompassing more possibilities than discussed here, I focus on the following four that I have identified as consistently visible in black women's diaspora fiction. These *maternal narratives* include the following: 1)

matrilineal diaspora[44] – delineated as over-arching, focuses on woman-centered generationality and cultural connections; 2) mother-daughter dyad – also depicted as grandmother-mother-daughter triad and other mother-(adoptive) daughter dyad; this narrative encompasses three sub-categories: the "mother-daughter relationship" (the interactions between a mother figure and her daughter or ward); "motherlessness" (the literal or figurative absence of a mother figure, especially the biological mother, and often in the form of abandonment), and "matrophobia" (the fear of (becoming) the mother or, in this diasporic sense, of repeating the oppressive and marginalizing experiences that the mother has endured); 3) mother's resistance – reflects re-definitions of, challenges to, or modifications in notions of motherhood; and 4) mother's voice or (untold) story – frames and highlights mother-women telling of their experiences *as* women, as mothers, and/or as women resisting (or giving in to) the gendered expectations of motherhood or womanhood.

My labeling or use of terms here draws on concepts indicated in scholarship on motherhood / mothering, and I have either created or borrowed the terms from the literature, as with Chinosole's "matrilineal diaspora" and Adrienne Rich's definition of "matrophobia." However, I have adjusted or expanded the meanings of each to fit the particular representations that I have identified. Also, in structuring the dissertation, each chapter reflects one of the maternal narratives, and I examine that narrative in each of the primary texts and, predominantly, in regards to the primary women characters.

In this consideration of *maternal narratives* in black women's fiction, scholars, either explicitly or implicitly, have addressed the importance of the maternal from a diasporic and literary perspective. In terms of a cross-cultural idea of Diaspora,

Jackson-Opoku, Brand, and Condé's novels provide representations of motherhood and mothering that allow for a rich analysis. Along these lines, Angelita Reyes's *Mothering Across Cultures: Postcolonial Representations* interweaves the personal, historical, and theoretical through discussions of mothering in a cross-cultural context of representation. Susheila Nasta's edited collection titled *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean, and South Asia* explores place, language, and belonging in relation to the tropes of mother, mother-tongue, and motherland in black women's writing.[45] Alice Walker, in her renowned essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," addresses black women's expressions of creativity as a manifestation of the self and mothers as role models for their daughters. Walker and Patricia Hill Collins both address the mother-daughter relationship and explore motherhood in black culture, pointing to the influential nature of mothers as models or first teachers for their daughters.[46] Similarly, Ada Mere, an Igbo sociologist, states that "women are the 'most primarily and constant agents of child socialization'" (qtd. in Wilentz, *Binding Cultures* 11). This is a gendered expectation discussed by each of the authors referenced here, and it highlights the significance of this expectation among diasporan black women and in diasporic ideas about the maternal.

Gay Wilentz examines this and other gendered roles associated with African and African American women of the Diaspora in her literary analysis of cross-cultural connections and influences revealed in black women's fiction. She considers motherhood / mothering in her discussion of the ways in which cultural behaviors are passed along across generations, including the representations of motherhood within African and African American women's fiction, thus supporting my argument that the

maternal narratives provide a valuable lens through which to theorize black women's diasporic identity. Chinosole's "matrilineal diaspora" grounds this argument as well; too, this concept of a woman-centered diaspora narrative speaks to the generational connections and diasporic heritages among women of African descent and the role of such in the implication and formation of Diaspora.

Each of these key texts reflects or contributes, at least in part, to discussions of the *maternal narratives* demarcated for this project. Brought together with those narratives, the analyses point to a broader *maternal discourse* discernible in black women's diaspora fiction. This maternal discourse is useful for pinpointing, analyzing, and discussing the *maternal narratives* associated with(in) depictions of diaspora identity. It involves the language associated with the practice of mothering, including the conversations and interactions between daughters and their mother figures, who can be relatives, guardians, and/or mentors; discussions about motherhood; narratives about generational links; daughters' thoughts and conversations about their mothers / mother figures; and daughters' thoughts and comments about their mothers and about being mothers themselves.

Additionally, the maternal discourse includes conversations about nurturing and caregiving, practices typically associated with women. As Barbara Christian notes, "[T]he role of mother, with all that it implies, is universally imposed upon women as their sole identity, their proper identity, above all others. The primacy of motherhood for women is the one value that societies, whatever their differences, share" ("An Angle of Seeing" 212).[47] Yet, at the same time that Christian recognizes "mother" as a valued, gendered identity, a role universally ascribed to women, she acknowledges that it is

often a limiting role, one that positions women for critique or for being perceived as less than a "complete" woman should they not be able or willing to pursue such an identity. According to her discussion, the role of the "mother figure" tends to supersede any other potential identities for women (especially for those who actually mother). In this view, however, women in maternal roles, typically, hold a place of honor among their families and communities. Reyes, Wilentz, and Collins explore this idea as well, and Collins points to the cross-cultural or diasporic importance of motherhood as one of cultural inheritance. She comments,

> One concept that has been constant throughout the history of African societies is the centrality of motherhood in religions, philosophies, and social institutions. […] [T]he image of the mother is one that is culturally elaborated and valued across diverse West African societies. Continuing the lineage is essential in West African philosophies, and motherhood is similarly valued. ("The Meaning of Motherhood" 45)[48]

A primary theme of this dissertation and the means through which diaspora is examined, Collins positions ancestral legacy and motherhood as interconnected.

Although seeming to suggest a singular entity concerning the ways we think about mothers, the concept and use of "mother" in diaspora narratives is expansive in terms of responsibilities and points of reference. It draws on a heritage of mothering figures that, as mentioned earlier, includes biological and adoptive mothers, grandmothers, godmothers, aunts, older siblings and cousins, and other mothers (often community members who participate in the caring and development of children, family, and the community). The role of mother,[49] as discussed in current scholarship on

motherhood and women's roles in society and as represented in the novels analyzed, is an intricate one. The mother figure and/or the maternal role is, primarily, available to women kin and community, and even in situations where, as Lucille P. Fultz states, "Socialization begins with the nuclear family and is passed from one generation to another through cultural and historical consciousness" (37),[50] the variety of geographical, social, economic, historical, and cultural circumstances presented in each novel influences the idea and function of this figure and role.

Specifically, women are responsible for inculcating children in the practices and beliefs of their familial, cultural, and religious / faith-based traditions. Research on gender and women of the African Diaspora implies commonalities among mother figures and their responsibilities to the family, community, nation, and culture in that women are perceived as the first teachers / educators,[51] as indicated by Mere's comment above. The mother figure, mothering, and motherhood are commonly associated with women, either through their participation in or their opposition to such roles – in other words, defined by or in opposition to a heteronormatively gendered socialization. And based on their own experiences, women as mother figures, attempt to prepare their daughters to interact within a global society. Taking into consideration the too often marginalizing aspects of our world, the socialization must accomplish a key goal: "Black daughters must learn how to survive in interlocking structures of race, class, and gender oppression while rejecting and transcending those very same structures" (Collins, "The Meaning of Motherhood" 54).

Overall, in this context of African Diaspora, mothers are viewed as responsible for the continuation of a people, for nurturing and connecting family. Mothers and

grandmothers are often regarded as the connective tissue of the family, especially in extended families. Principally, they are viewed as providing a model of ancestral legacy for their daughters (kin, imagined kin, current and future generations, literary, and other).[52] Yet, it is the diversity of location and culture, family structure, as well as women's responses to gendered and heteronormative expectations of motherhood (and womanhood) that speak to the intricacy that can and does exist among the mothering practices and therefore to the notion of Diaspora, as demonstrated in the *maternal narratives* and maternal discourse of writers like Jackson-Opoku, Condé, and Brand, among others.[53]

Following the maternal line …

In this black women's diaspora fiction, *maternal narratives* are centrally located. Often, they operate as the guiding or supportive force in a daughter's search for some sense of self or personal identity (as tied to family ancestry). The characteristics examined in these narratives point to connections, reflect heritage on a broad scale, and indicate a discourse of caring and nurturing. Together, they re-position the idea of motherhood / mothering and the mother figure itself in a manner that speaks to the multiplicity and complexity, as well as importance, of *maternal narratives* in articulating black women's experiences in the African Diaspora. This is not to suggest that black women's identity is necessarily centered around or established through notions of motherhood or mothering *only* or *always*; rather, the mother figure and various *maternal narratives* are used in black women's diaspora fiction in ways that address the diversity and formation of the Diaspora itself and that point to the intricacy

of kinships within and across this Diaspora. Hence, I suggest throughout that the notion of (real or fictive) kin connections is central to the idea of diaspora.

Specifically in terms of depictions of and reflections on such kinships, I contend that *maternal narratives* illustrate the concept of diaspora as well as provide a key site of analysis in which gender, diaspora, identity, and generationality intersect with one another. To elaborate, *generationality*[54] refers to the psychological (conscious and unconscious) impact of a traumatic upheaval for one generation on its future generations; therefore, it extends beyond just the immediate generational kinships to include the ways that the actions and experiences of ancestors or persons several generations earlier determine or impact the lives of their descendents exponentially. This includes the impact of colonization, slavery, globalization, war / conflict, and migration, as well as interlocking systems of oppression like racism, classism, and sexism that resonate with groups that have been and continue to be oppressed and marginalized to some extent within our global society.

Therefore, generationality is significant to discussions of diaspora as an interconnecting, cross-cultural concept. Gourdine notes, "In these diaspora places, the present is always linked to the past: race and slavery, Africa and her diaspora" (3). This idea reflects the continuous effect of slavery in the United States today, for instance, and its repercussions as having a particular and profound bearing on the lives of African descendants and how this institutional, racial, cultural, and gendered trauma has had and continues to have a formative influence on the overall experiences of blacks in Africa, the Americas, the Caribbean, and Europe, both historically and currently.[55] An example of such diasporic generational impact is most visible in Brand's *At the Full* as Marie

Ursule, the matriarch (though Collins might question the use of this term in the context of enslavement) of the family line traced throughout the novel, visualizes the future of her matrilineage, which includes the impact of slavery and her own rebellious actions on her family in generations to come. It is this sense of generational interrelatedness juxtaposed the maternal that is important to this study, especially in the ways that it informs my consideration of both the construction and impact of diaspora and the narrative and experiential links between the women characters, the novels, and the Diaspora.

In addition, this maternal discourse can inform our understandings of diaspora and speak to the value of African diaspora literature, positioning it as fiction that, collectively, theorizes a particularly gendered, generational identity and/in the African Diaspora through a woman-centered *diaspora narrative*. Pius Adesanmi uses the term "fictionalized theoretical discourse"[56] to refer to his analysis of Francophone fiction about the historical, cross-historical, and contemporary historical conditions of diasporic migrations and French identity by men of African descent. He defines it as a conceptual means of communicating the idea that literary texts convey a certain impression and/or critique of historical, social, political, or cultural contexts. Akin to Reulecke's idea of *generationality*, Adesanmi's framework[57] uses the fictive narratives, read jointly, to critique the impact of the past on contemporary persons and societies: "The narratives constantly insist at a subtextual level that […] characters are effects, in the present, of the historical event of [the past]" (971), therefore forming that contemporary concept, theory, or perspective – in this case, of diaspora – for understanding historical events and their impact. This idea is reminiscent of Cobb's

discussion of literature as providing a view into "ordinary life" and Gourdine's "critical cultural fiction," which points to fiction as giving insight into the lives of diverse marginalized and oppressed peoples. For this research, I re-work Adesanmi's concept of "fictionalized theoretical discourse" to focus on black women's writings and notions of diaspora and black women's lives within the Diaspora.

I center Jackson-Opoku's *The River Where Blood*, with comparisons to Dionne Brand's *At the Full* and Maryse Condé's *Desirada*,[58] as a site of such "fictionalized theoretical discourse." As a result, this theoretical construct provides the basis for bringing Jackson-Opoku, Brand, and Condé's novels together as both theorizing diaspora in fictional prose and as exemplifying that theory through the individual stories, even more so through the *maternal narratives* used here. Thus, black women's diaspora writing collaboratively establishes a duality in regards to reading diaspora fiction, one in which texts become / are situated as the spaces for analysis (theoretical sites) and one in which the texts articulate the theory itself. In line with this view of the diaspora fiction, I engage the novels extensively in the following analysis. I examine the texts for passages and conversations that seem to provide a particular theoretical perspective on diaspora, especially when that idea is intersected with or expressed through one or more of the *maternal narratives*. In order to interrogate the link between black women's diaspora identity, the *diaspora narrative*, and the maternal diasporic (maternal discourse used here), I draw on the novels as I do other elements of black feminist literary criticism and diaspora theory. I position the novelists in this project in a manner intended to suggest a counter, or at least a response, to predominantly male perspectives on the African Diaspora. Since one of the fundamental goals of analyzing

black women's diaspora literature is to highlight women's voices and experiences within the construction and definition of Diaspora, it is important that a diasporic analysis explores the significance of gender in discussions of Diaspora that (might) already provide a consideration of race / ethnicity, geography and nation, among other markers of identity.

Chapter 1 ~ Matrilineal Diaspora: Ancestry, Generations, and Connections

"And when such forces are unleashed, even an old soul may be lured, lost, or stolen beyond the guidance of her ancestors. When a child is separated from her source, […] blood still spurts from the unhealed wound. Phantom pain haunts the amputated limb. And though she no longer holds her in her arms, a mother's voice may call out to her, even in the silence of her exile." Jackson-Opoku, *The River Where Blood Is Born* 26.

"I would like one single line of ancestry, Mama. One line from you to me and farther back, but a line that I can trace. […] I would like one line full of people who have no reason to forget anything, […] the line would be constant, unchangeable. A line that I can reach for in my brain when I feel off kilter. Something to pull me back. I want […] the certainty that when the moon is in full the sea will rise and for that whole time I will be watching what all of my ancestry have watched for, for all ages." Brand, *At the Full and Change of the Moon* 247

In both of the above passages, the authors speak of a matrilineal connection that not only exists between mother and daughter, but also extends back, across generations and time, to link present to past, descendent daughter to her generational foremothers. As such, they emphasize something of a "mythic motherhood"[59] that transcends typical expectations of maternal influence, and they point to a sense of the maternal that is continual in its presence and affect. In this way, the maternal calls forth the idea of cultural and spiritual associations that are familiar to many across the Diaspora – from the more involved prayers to gods / goddesses to simple beliefs that the spirits of deceased loved ones exist as angels watching over the living. In line with the meaning of diaspora engaged as fluid and transcending boundaries, the authors theorize the potential impact of matrilineage as operating in similar ways. Thus, through an attention to maternal heritage, they query the benefits of being able to know one's history, to trace it from a point of origin to a present existence. As speaking of and from a place of marginalization and repressed or omitted history, the narratives intimate such benefits of ancestral knowledge in looking to the future and in building generations, as

suggested in the Ghanaian concept of *sankofa*,[60] which generally refers to the idea of looking back and knowing one's past in order to move forward.

Jackson-Opoku's novel suggests a blood connection and kinship that links individuals (family) despite separations and indicates that "a mother's voice" or place of ancestral origin can still haunt a child (descendents), meaning that the child can still long for a place of origin or a sense of belonging to a larger diasporic community. And as I express through my discussions of diaspora, that sense of longing and desire to return can manifest in physical, spiritual, psychological, social, and/or activist returns and/or acknowledgements of such a site of origin. Brand's discussion of a "single line of ancestry," which actually echoes Jackson-Opoku's description of the First Wife's matrilineage as one genesis of many,[61] similarly points to the sense of lineage as anchoring one to a traceable and "unchangeable" ancestry. However, as the several narratives in both novels reveal, as a consequence of the Diaspora's dispersal across multiple lands, unrecorded histories, and familial separations and evolutions, very often that "traceable line" is impossible to recover back to a specific point of origin. This is not just due to an initial dispersal, but also because of movements and interactions that have taken place since. Nevertheless, because another effect of diaspora is the process of (re)creation, I contend that the mythic maternal allows diasporan beings to (re)construct that feeling of connectedness in community where it may be unknown as or spanning beyond lineage. Chinosole's "matrilineal diaspora" is an example of this.

Black women's diaspora fiction elucidates an over-arching concept that itself is a *maternal narrative* – that of the "matrilineal diaspora." Chinosole defines this as

> the capacity to survive and aspire, to be contrary and self-affirming *across continents and generations*. It names the strength and beauty we pass on as friends and lovers *from foremothers to mothers and daughters* allowing us to survive radical *cultural changes* and be *empowered through differences*. Matrilineal diaspora defines the *links among black women worldwide* enabling us to experience *distinct but related cultures* while retaining a special sense of *home as the locus of self-definition and power*. (379, emphasis mine)

Significant to this project, matrilineal diaspora underscores cross-cultural, global, and generational connections among women of African descent and stresses these connections as related to a particular point of (real or imagined) association called *home*. This expectation of "links among black women worldwide" suggests a point of origin or ancestral relationship, one that can be both/and physical, psychological, emotional, theoretical, historical, political, socio-cultural, and spiritual. Moreover, matrilineal diaspora emphasizes the idea of a simultaneously inter- and intra-relational sharing that empowers through a sense of acknowledgement and understanding revealed through black women's stories and experiences, told from black women's perspectives, and expressed through a diasporic context.

Consequently, the depiction of diasporic experience is necessarily interpreted through a particular gendered, classed, and raced lens that expands our theorizing of the African Diaspora specifically and diaspora in general. Also important to this matrilineal context, novels of diaspora highlight generational (such as, foremother to mother to daughter) relationships and the way that they encourage and reflect a sense of

empowerment and agency among the black women characters. Even in the face of traumatic events and oppressive situations, the characters work toward a certain expectation of agency, whether they achieve it completely or not. These texts then suggest the potential realities and possibilities for coalition building among black women of the diaspora.

Along these lines, the novels for this project incorporate woman-centered generational narratives; in other words, the narratives focus on and are told through the voice and point-of-view of a diversity of women characters and related across generations. In the context of the African Diaspora, these women's narratives of identity and experience re-envision and re-write, as well as record, the Diaspora (its coming into being and its effect) by tracing the paths of generations of particular families as they move from a sense of home(land), through or across diverse lands and cultures, eventually to forge a path back to a place of origination. Often, the women are drawn to return home, which is revealed via a quest to gain a sense of self through one's heritage, in addition to the heritage itself.

Admittedly and obviously, return isn't so easily negotiated, nor is it necessarily possible for diasporan beings because of a basic consequence of time and change, which makes it difficult to re-place the self. However, the idea of and nostalgia for return to a lost home and a place to which to return spur the characters' quests. They hint at a fulfillment and/or a specific knowledge to be gained, implying that the journey is just as important as the destination. When intersected in this context, these elements (of matrilineage, movement, women's experiential knowledge, and cultural and familial heritage) signal a "matrilineal diaspora." As such, it represents a woman-centered point-

of-view that attends to women's lives and relationships with one another, as well as the significance of generational connections to the African Diaspora.

Within the three novels (*The River Where Blood Is Born*, *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, and *Desirada*) positioned as "critical cultural fiction" and providing a "fictionalized theoretical discourse," the first *maternal narrative* of "matrilineal diaspora" suggests poignant insights into black women's identities from a diasporic viewpoint, yet they are different – in terms of context, meaning location, time frame, maternal relationships, and generational connections – each reflecting varied constructions and ideas about diaspora. In expressing these links and distinctions, I give an overall explanation of each novel, including specific references to how the maternal discourse that aligns the novels sheds light on the contexts of diaspora integrated into each text.

Coming Full Circle in the Diaspora

In *The River Where Blood Is Born*, Jackson-Opoku creates an extensive and complex matrilineage that highlights an inclusive depiction of the African Diaspora, beginning on the continent with a "First Wife," the first ancestor before colonization, and eventually leading to a contemporary diaspora daughter's return to "mother Africa." The return is prompted by a search for a familial heritage, as well as a sense of self-understanding associated with knowing about that ancestry. This narrative traces diasporan movement from capture in West Africa and into slavery, carriage across the Atlantic via the Middle Passage, to the auction block and dispersal in the New World and the eventual formation of diasporan groups like African Americans and African Caribbeans. The maternal structure in *The River Where Blood* involves past, present,

and future generations; the living and the deceased (the Afterlife); and biological, adoptive, and "other" mothers / mother figures. Although the novel involves multiple voices, it centers on the lives of nine daughters (living across generations and locations) who represent the matrilineage of the First Wife. These Diaspora daughters include Ama Krah (Proud Mary), Emilene (Diaspora), Big Momma (Bohema), Earlene, Sara, Darlene, Cinnamon (Pat), and Alma (Allie Mae). Additional characters whose lives are immediately intertwined (as mothers or daughters) with the central nine daughters include Abena Anim (Ama Krah's mother), Lola (Cinnamon's mother), and Callie Mae (Alma's mother). Each woman represents one or more maternal relationships and experiences (from single motherhood, adoptive / "other" mother, absent or lost or resistant mother, grandmother, teacher, or sacrificing mother), as well as the diversity of generation and geography (from west Africa to the Caribbean to the Americas) that are integral to diaspora discussions. The range of identities illustrated in Jackson-Opoku's novel reflects several of the needs or requirements of diasporan women over time and circumstances.

In the following passage from *The River Where Blood*, Jackson-Opoku extensively and eloquently theorizes the African Diaspora, its formation and its impact on the concept of black diasporic identity. Initially, the passage refers to The River of Blood, which plays a major role in the novel itself as a place of ancestral origin. The river in the passage represents the specific genealogical development of the main characters of the novel as they move throughout the Diaspora, the narrative shifting from one descendent to the next, moving across waters and lands, from relative to relative. Like the river, the descendents appear in large groups or as individuals, aware

of their origins and tributaries or not, changing appearances and tongues. As described in the following passage, The River becomes a driving force that calls on characters to remember, recall, reflect, reconsider, and return to the place of deepest memory, their ancestral origin … (West) Africa:[62]

> *What we know is that it flows deep and shallow over black earth and red; over mountain, through forest, across savanna. In the wet times it may surge over its banks, in drought it has been known to run dry. It has coursed through the land, like blood, or trickled down the face of it, like tears.*
>
> *It has been a lost river, running underground for a time to reappear at some point in the distance. It hungers to join the sea, but it has been known to turn back to the place where it is born. And it always emerges from adversity, reinvented. In rain and drought, fat times and famine, it ever endures.*
>
> *We hear tell of its secrets. "As woman gives birth to children, so water gives birth to gods." We have heard that there are voices that murmur in its meander and thunder in its wake, voices that all can hear but few can understand.*
>
> *We cannot be sure where your river begins, but we do know that the beginnings of things are sacred. I believe there are infinite beginnings. A multitude of sources. Geneses upon geneses. Herstory is woven as tightly as a multihued length of* kente *cloth. Who but the weaver knows where the first thread begins? Who but the earth knows where the first waters stirred?*
>
> *And consider this act of ingratitude. They worship the earth as Mother, though your people have always flowed like the rivers. Fleeing flood and famine, following fortune. Ambling forth with babies on backs, cattle plodding behind them, forests opening before them. Moving easy across fields, tumbling fiercely over falls. Carving out new courses,*

> *forging new languages, absorbing new blood. Ever flowing into the future.* (Jackson-Opoku 16, emphasis mine)

Here, in her description of the process of diaspora formation, Jackson-Opoku highlights several of the varied circumstances that have had an impact on the lives of African Diasporan peoples. Her narrative recalls elements of Butler's defining characteristics of diaspora and my own extension of them in terms of a diaspora narrative. For instance, implications of conditions of dispersal, suggestions of a particular point of origin, indications of relationships with the hostlands that have resulted in "new courses," new languages," and "new blood." Although Jackson-Opoku's multiple references to blood connections have the potential to suggest an essentialist viewpoint of black diasporan identity, she counters this in her multilayered narrative through references to and constructions of multiple sources, begettings, and movements of people, which ultimately connotes a broader complication of diaspora that mirrors the definition of diaspora which grounds my analysis.

Moreover, Jackson-Opoku implies that, at times, Africa's diaspora daughters (and sons) have forgotten her or lost sight of that very first place of origin or that very first ancestor – have forgotten or are unaware of their racial / ethnic history. This is understandable after so many centuries and generations of separation. Consequently, it leads the descendents instead to claim other lands as their "motherlands," "mother countries," or "homelands."[63] Jackson-Opoku's treatment of this idea of forgetfulness and separation and loss of homeland / origin speaks to the larger sense of history, identity, and community and belonging that are a part of the larger discourse on diaspora and on the African Diaspora specifically. Yet, as she theorizes in *The River*

Where Blood, this has not necessarily severed ties between "mother and child" / Africa and her descendents. In her diasporic view, the connection is never broken completely; "it ever endures," re-creating itself in new paths, languages, cultural practices, and peoples, continuously evolving and diaspora-making. Hence, the Diaspora daughters move with their respective generations and times and, literally and figuratively, the tides, ever transforming yet remaining fluid as they produce "geneses upon geneses."

Demonstrated by the underlined phrases in the above passage, Jackson-Opoku has positioned her narrative as tracing the formation of the Diaspora, recognizing the influence of diverse groups, cultures, and blood on Diaspora's daughters. Furthermore, her use of particular phrases and images – such as references to and the metaphor of woman giving birth, emphasis on origins, the term and concept of "Herstory," and the image of "babies on backs" often associated with women – in addition to the overall woman-centered focus of the novel points to a distinctly matrilineal notion of diaspora. This gendered lens emphasizes the generational connection between the mother (figure) and her children and the significance of women's perspectives and experiences in and to the African Diaspora. Discussed together, these characteristics represent a matrilineal diasporic[64] – a critical framework created around and through a collection of several identified *maternal narratives* – that informs this analysis of black women's African diaspora fiction.

The River Where Blood depicts such a matrilineal diaspora; however, Jackson-Opoku emphasizes in several passages that her narrative is one storied construction of diaspora (albeit one of mythical proportions), an example used to re-envision women's experiences in diaspora rather than necessarily reflecting all of them or diaspora in its

entirety (16). She constructs a multifaceted point-of-view that covers one central lineage with several lines that meet, interact, and cross one another. Her narrator states, "And that is just one genesis. A seed of many seeds. A nine-veined river that begins in blood. A river that will beget rivers" (Jackson-Opoku 21). She continues, "Many are the women who will emerge from the Queen Mother's blood, who will flow forth from your waters into the waiting world" (21). In this discussion, Jackson-Opoku depicts the more common descriptions of diaspora: of dispersal, interaction, and transformation. Yet, her focus on women's experiences, as I mention at the beginning of this chapter, points to a "mythic motherhood" that stems from the "Queen Mother's blood," that crosses boundaries of time and place, that links African Diaspora women across cultures, and that positions women and women's voices as central to diaspora formation, to understanding the expansive parameters of diaspora. As with the prevalence of black women's fiction and criticism in the mid- to late-20th century to the present, Jackson-Opoku's text speaks back to, or intervenes in, the pre-dominance of men's perspectives that have produced a majority of diaspora scholarship.

Additionally, a significant aspect of this matrilineal diaspora points to the value of ancestral memory, of remembering and engaging with the past. Invoking the idea of *sankofa*, Jackson-Opoku's narrator asks, "Unless they look back as they move forward, how will they remember the Place Where Blood Is Born? How can they really know you are the mother of all journeys?" (21). Hence, Jackson-Opoku positions the past as a guide or means through or with which to navigate the present and the future. The term *sankofa* is often associated with studies of the African Diaspora, its origin calling forth Ghana, which was a significant location in the transatlantic slave trade and, thus is often

considered one of the "ancestral homes" for African descendants in the Americas and the Caribbean. The term's meaning prompts attention to the past as having a significant impact on diasporans current and future lives and on the ways that we see and identify ourselves. Through recalling the past, we are able to recognize our accomplishments individually and as part of collective societies. By looking to our pasts, we access a spiritual, cultural, and historical connection that can be used to help us understand our lives and to determine our roles in the larger society. In addition, by taking into account ancestral legacies, we recognize our responsibilities to previous and coming generations.[65]

Again, diaspora fiction implies the importance of history, of knowing from which we come. As a philosophical concept, *sankofa* means having a consciousness of past events and ideas as a way toward gaining an awareness of the self, individually and collectively. In this African Diasporic context, *sankofa* offers a framework and perspective of a mythical and geographical Africa as ancestral home(land). By mythical, I mean to imply that diasporic identity can involve imagining a homeland in often-idealized terms.[66] Also, I use mythical to refer to the way some people of African descent tend to look or position to Africa as an always accepting, welcoming home that exists without discrimination. Doing so ignores and/or negates the contemporary socio-political situations in Africa and the differences among Africans and between Africans and African Diasporans; it neglects the historical changes that Africa and continental Africans have experienced over the last few centuries as well.

At strategic times in her novel, Jackson-Opoku allows character Alma to quite easily navigate between black / African descendent communities in North America, the

Caribbean, and West Africa, often being mistaken as "belonging" to diverse groups – as Barbadian, Ghanaian or Nigerian. In a way, this proposes a Diasporan community similar to the mythical homeland mentioned above in which African descendents are automatically compatible because they are presumed to be linked by race or ancestry. But Alma's experiences of being and feeling like an outsider remind readers that building communities and coalitions across cultural differences is a complicated process.[67]

Returning to my use of *sankofa*, I contend that the term delineates a connection between Africa, the Americas, and the Caribbean as part of the initial development of the African Diaspora. However, it also reflects the continuation of the constructed Diaspora, the ways that the diverse communities have been created via diaspora. Jackson-Opoku asserts that descendents *need* to remember or learn of their ancestry in order to know themselves more fully. She illustrates this throughout the novel as multiple descendents hear the call of the ancestors, especially the character Alma, who feels and follows the urge to journey to her ancestor's Africa, to know "her" (read the motherland / continent) for herself and, therefore, to know or find herself. This need is expressed within the context of narratives about family and cultural heritage that have been passed down over generations, stories that Alma learns from her great grandmother Big Momma[68] (about Proud Mary / née Ama Krah,[69] who was born and raised in Africa, sold into slavery, and later escaped to live a free existence[70]). The stories, also depicted in the family quilt Big Momma creates and shares with Alma, inform Alma of her family's African origins – past and possibly in the present.[71]

Motivated by this family history and later events in her life, Alma journeys to find Africa and to find her heritage.

In conjunction with this family history, the image and notion of mother / mothering / motherhood run throughout Jackson-Opoku's entire novel, framing the text in many ways. The Queen Mother is the ruling figure of the matrilineage among those in life and in afterlife. The First Wife, the starting point of the matrilineage in Jackson-Opoku's novel, reveals the significance of fertility, of birthing children in order to birth nations and to continue a familial and/or cultural line in her village, as well as her African heritage. Having visited a "Priestess of many powers" for help in conceiving, she states, "I am the laughingstock of all my age mates" (17), thus indicating the seemingly inextricable link between reproduction and women's identity. Again, Christian ("An Angle of Seeing") and Collins ("The Meaning of Motherhood") both note that motherhood is often integral to society's perceptions of womanhood.

The Priestess holds and knows her *cowrie* shells like "a mother knows the faces of her many children"(17); the Priestess and the First Wife view each other as mother and daughter, "[t]hough her water did not break in this one's womb" (17). "Asase Yaa, the Earth Mother" is referenced to describe the atmosphere on the night the First Wife visits the Priestess. In addition, the narrator engages maternal imagery to describe the night: "The full moon shimmers like a swollen ovum as the First Wife returns along the artery" (21), reflecting the promise of generations given to the First Wife. Too, the River Mother gives the First Wife her child and, subsequently, her nine generations, the ninth of whom must return to the River Mother and who will belong to the River Mother (also referred to as the Queen Mother), "a goddess who is mother to many"

(18). Such maternal references begin very early in the novel; Jackson-Opoku situates the maternal as a lens through which to interrogate D/diaspora. The consistent references to a woman-centered generationality, to grandmothers raising grandchildren, to daughters' relationships with their mothers, among others, call forth an encompassing maternal discourse.

As my primary text and site of analysis, my focus up to this point has been on Jackson-Opoku's novel. However, the integration of a matrilineal diaspora structure is prevalent in both Brand's *At the Full* and Condé's *Desirada* as well. Similar to Jackson-Opoku but in differing African diasporic contexts, Brand and Condé employ this diasporic concept as they illustrate the intersection between identity, dispersal, generationality, and maternity.

On Common Ground in Diaspora

In *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, the narrative follows multiple generations and cultural engagements, highlighting a matrilineage that begins in slavery with Marie Ursule and her daughter, Bola. To save her child, whom she calls her one vanity, Marie Ursule frees Bola from a life of enslavement, sending her away with Kamena, an escaped slave and Bola's father. In doing so, Marie Ursule enables the continuation of her matrilineage, hoping that her future generations will have better opportunities than she has known in slavery – though Marie Ursule realizes, even foresees, that some of her descendants' lives will be difficult (Brand 18-22). This lineage continues through to the present. In her depictions of d/Diaspora, Brand invokes Africa by beginning her novel with Marie Ursule, an enslaved woman who, acting as a leader of a group known as the Sans Peur Regiment, uses knowledge from other

Africans / African ancestors and indigenous Caribbean peoples to commit a mass suicide among the slaves of Mon Chagrin Plantation (14-18). In the midst of this freeing of slaves from Mon Chagrin, one life (Marie Ursule's daughter Bola) remains alive, reflective of the hope for a better life for Africans of the Diaspora. This one child represents the possibility of freedom, of opportunity for an enslaved race. And as is later revealed, Bola engages this expectation in many facets of her life: she has multiple children that extend her familial line she raises the majority of them with a sense of independence that mirrors her own upbringing, and she scatters several of them in ways that echo and continue the idea and formation of diaspora.

Over the years and in relation to her maternity, Marie Ursule's life (through her descendents) becomes an illustration of diaspora. The narrator comments, "In another world without knowing of her, because centuries are forgetting places, Marie Ursule's great-great-grandchildren would face the world too" (18). Within this comment about generations, the "forgetting" intimates that temporal and spatial fluctuations contribute to the expansion of Diaspora, as well as to the effects that being removed from and unaware of one's history can have on future generations. In doing so, Brand exemplifies the cross-historical contextualization and intersectional influence that Adesanmi explores through his use of "fictionalized theoretical discourse" and Reulecke's "generationality." Distance and time can lead to a neglect or unknowing about one's history and the circumstances of ones' ancestry, potentially producing a void in terms of how one understands the state of marginalization based on race, gender, and class that inform the "re-located" (in space and time) lives of diasporans. Consequently, this draws readers' attention back to the concept / idea of *sankofa*, emphasizing the value of

cultural-historical awareness in moving forward and/or understanding the racial, gendered, economic, political, and social realities that have informed the lives of African and Diasporan persons.

However, Brand's novel pursues more than a typical generational connection: Bola's children reflect the cross-cultural engagements of diaspora formations. Although Bola doesn't leave Culebra Bay, her home on a Caribbean Island located near South America, a number of her children and other descendants do, scattering to various lands (such as Venezuela, Canada, and the U.S.) and opportunities.[72] Moreover, each of Bola's children is the offspring of a different man, each of a diverse background, which speaks to the dispersal and cultural diversity associated with diasporan groups. Bola represents the Africans and African descendants dispensed throughout the world. Her interactions with her lovers and her children's interactions with others mirror interactions between diasporans and various geographical locations.

Bola's children then epitomize the multiplicity of cultures and groups that grow out of intercultural connections, creating additional diasporan peoples. Again, Brand's text provides a replication of Diaspora formation, at least in part. Some of the descendants remain close to home, close to the continent or ancestral awareness; others migrate to further locations, consequently expanding and diversifying the idea and reality of the African Diaspora; and at times, the connections are lost for a time, forgotten as the various generations pass, only to resurface at some point as a renewed consciousness or subject of study.

Similar to Jackson-Opoku's literary theorization of Diaspora formation (discussed previously in this chapter), Brand posits ideas about the interconnections of

ancestry, Diaspora, and identity. Significantly, she offers two main discussions of diaspora across time that reflect the impact not only on African Diasporans and their descendents, but also on the descendants of those who have contributed to the oppressive and marginalizing experiences of Diasporans. Brand points to the way that unearned privilege and oppression are inherited and passed across generations with little in the way of checking or questioning such positionalities. First, Brand's narrator envisions the future with a more literal perspective of Diaspora than that given in Jackson-Opoku's description. She reveals,

> *In another century without knowing of her*, because centuries are forgetful places, *Marie Ursule's great-great-grandchildren would face the world too*. But even that forgetfulness Marie Ursule had accounted for. Forgetfulness is true speech if anyone listens. *This is the plain arrangement of the world, they would think, even if they knew different, even if they could have remembered Marie Ursule*. They would say: this is the plain arrangement of the world, this I have suffered, this I have eaten, this I have loved. (Brand 18, emphasis mine)

Thinking about her decision to send Bola away to a place of safety, a place away from slavery and the Mon Chagrin Plantation, Marie Ursule looks through Bola's eyes (commonly considered the windows to the soul) to the future of her lineage. She seeks a glimpse of their lives within the Diaspora, as if to determine the promise of her actions, her sacrifice, for her future generations. Another example of this looking into the future and "seeing" the world of her descendents includes the following as given by the narrator:

> Seeing […] cities she did not know were cities. […] winters and summers and leaves falling in muddy roadways and on pavements, dams bursting and giving way and boats and pirogues crashed on shores and steamers on water far off and aeroplanes way up in the sky and she felt a lifting she would never know. *Her […] face splintered in faces of coming faces, and she knew that if it was the future she was looking at,* then she was keeping this crazy child from it if she took her along. (Brand 49, emphasis mine)

In this viewing, Marie Ursule understands it as her responsibility and even her way to continue to challenge racial oppression, to send Bola forward to participate in and provide generations, "splintered" pieces of Marie Ursule and of Bola. The narrator notes that "[s]ending Bola away […] was like sending messages, but not knowing their destination" (20). As a result, the descendants (and other diasporans) carry the experiences / realities of the past with(in) them. The expectation is that the generations will contribute to the world, hopefully seeing a better, freer world than Marie Ursule has known for herself.

As with general ideas about diaspora, the text acknowledges the "forgetfulness" that occurs between generations, especially as time continues passing. Additionally, it seems a comment on the loss, the forgetting that takes place when the past is unknown or disregarded as valuable knowledge as we move forward. In this consideration, another potential meaning of sankofa, "looking back to move forward" extends beyond knowing of one's history as a means of understanding how far a people, a family, a culture, or a country has come in redefining or improving life. It can suggest that one

looks back, remembers those who have assisted in the progression of life out of and away from negative situations or those who have supported one's individual development. Also, it refers to the idea of remembering to lend a hand to the next person(s) in order to bring others – the community, the culture, the country, the family – up as well. Arguably, this is Marie Ursule's intention with Bola. When we neglect to look back in order to remember and to assist and uplift others, we limit the improvement of humanity.

In her essay titled "Textual Healing: Claiming Black Women's Bodies, the Erotic and Resistance in Contemporary Novels of Slavery," Farah Jasmine Griffin suggests that remembering / even knowing of one's heritage (of slavery) allows healing to occur. She views "contemporary women of African descent [as] in the process of healing from the legacies of slavery and patriarchal oppression. Taking place on spiritual, psychological, and emotional levels, healing is a healthy and progressive response to historical wounds" (qtd. in Reyes 128). Without inheriting or discovering information about one's ancestry, the heritage of experiences and events gets lost. Too often, a repetition of subjugation, marginalization, struggle, etc. on one end and power and privilege on the other then gets taken up as "the plain arrangement of the world" rather than as a signal of generationality (the ripple effect of past events on present and future generations) or a continuation of systemic inequity based on gender, race, class, and sexuality, for example, that needs to be dealt with and resolved.

Or is this "forgetfulness" meant as an opportunity to put aside a traumatic past in order to forge a new, a different existence than the ancestors? Ultimately, the answer is a complicated one informed by the person(s) left to make such a decision. For some,

"erasing" a terrible past prevents future generations from bearing the burden of previous abuses, even if it is just the knowledge of rather than the actual physical and social trauma. In the "Introduction" to their edited text, Verena Theile and Marie Drews address the intersection between memory, history, and personal and communal identity through an analysis of Toni Morrison's *Paradise*.[73] In doing so, they explore the way that a communal (as in the town of Ruby) narrative takes precedence over an individual one, especially when it comes to preserving a community or town's reputation. This is not the case with Brand's text, though it comes up in terms of the personal versus the familial in Condé's text as Reynalda maintains a silence regarding her past out of self-preservation. However, Theile and Drews intimate an important circumstance under which forgetting becomes a purposeful, voluntary act of survival, one familiar to generations of African descendents who prefer to "forget" a past of slavery that seems only to situate blacks in a negative, stereotypical manner.

Significantly, Brand juxtaposes this discussion of Marie Ursule's lineage with that of the slaveholder de Lambert (of Mon Chagrin plantation):

> His blood would run the same through him to his generations. Generations needing a new language […]. His generations […] would take other names. They would even forget de Lambert, the man in their faces […].
>
> […] They had forgotten, or forgiven him like family, what they had no way of forgiving or worse even knowing. They had forgotten, not needing to remember. (19-20)

As a result, Brand allows that both the dominant and the subjugated have ancestral memories, and in the context of discussions about diaspora, both sides are relevant to understanding the construction and effect of diaspora. In the side-by-side positioning of both of these "experiential texts / tellings," Brand posits that the sense of power, privilege, and oppression that each group experiences – positively or negatively – reverberates across generations and diaspora as well. In both, she speaks to the importance of memory, of remembering and forgetting, asserting that it serves each side in some way. For instance, to forestall future oppressions and/or to obtain a life of equitable treatment and opportunity, Marie Ursule's descendents (African Diasporans) *do* need to remember. Drawing on the idea of "sankofa" referenced earlier in this chapter, it's in remembering that we are able to move forward, in knowing and remembering events of times and places past that Diasporans are able to continue and make strides toward improving the lives of others in the world and toward avoiding past problems. Therefore, Marie Ursule, "Her […] face splintered in faces of coming faces" (Brand 49), needs her generations to know and remember their ancestry for the sake of the lineage, to "change" the legacy for future generations.

At the same time, the narrator indicates that, descending from white male privilege as opposed to the black female oppression of Marie Ursule's lineage, there was "No need" for de Lambert's lineage to remember him, to recall their heritage in the same way; as a matter of fact, "forgetting" possibly allows them a certain historical denial of the role they, as a descendent of the dominant participant in racist, sexist societies, have played in imposing oppression on others. It allows de Lambert's descendents a sense of empowerment to continue to reap benefits of unearned privileges

without questioning their origin. It seems that forgetting becomes a consequence of being removed from the past, forging ahead to seek possibilities and forgetting or burying an unknown past, which allows a denial of wrongdoing and a continuation of oppression and privilege.

As one of the final narrative images Brand employs in closing her novel and, therefore, a literary theorizing of the African Diaspora and the concept of diaspora itself, Eula, a descendent of Marie Ursule and Bola, writes a letter to her deceased mother that emphasizes a longing for some sense of known ancestral legacy, a lineage in which the members know and/or know of each other and how they are connected to one another. She wants something to replace the isolation and displacement she has felt among her family, even more so as the youngest of six children. Eula's pressing desire for a visible, traceable heritage, "one single line of ancestry, Mama. One line from you to me and farther back, but a line that I can trace" (Brand 247), marks an important indication of the intersection between matrilineage, identity, and diaspora. Eula knows that she comes from a long heritage, and she knows stories of Marie Ursule and Bola – she even named her daughter after her great grandmother Bola – however, disruptions within her immediate family have hindered her sense of that heritage, her sense of connection and belonging to something larger than herself. Her siblings have mainly dispersed from the family home; their communication with one another is absent or minimal or negative; thus, there is little familial interaction or a feeling of family at all. Eula elaborates on her desire, commenting,

> I would like […] *One line […] with all the places where something happened and is remembered*. I would like one line *full of people who*

> *have no reason to forget* anything, or forgetting would not help them or matter because *the line would be constant, unchangeable*. *A line that I can reach for in my brain when I feel off kilter. Something to pull me back*. I want a village and a seashore and a rock out in the ocean and the certainty that when the moon is in full the sea will rise and for that whole time *I will be watching what all of my ancestry have watched for, for all ages*. (Brand 247, emphasis mine).

Her list of wants demonstrates her knowledge of her ancestor Bola, an awareness that she perceives as potentially stabilizing to her sense of self. Moreover, it invokes ideas of diaspora and identity by including implications of movement, community, ancestry, and the expectation that such a matrilineage could "pull [her] back" when she "feel[s] off kilter" – that it could ground her in a broader sense of diasporan identity. Eula is a part of this community as someone who relocated from an island in the Caribbean to a city in Canada, similar to Brand herself. This connection between character and author seems to support positioning the novel as theorizing diaspora from an experiential viewpoint.

A Quest for Heritage in Diaspora

Mother-daughter relationships are a significant theme in Maryse Condé's work overall, and *Desirada* is no exception. This narrative follows a three-generation matrilineage of mothers and daughters (grandmother Nina, mother Reynalda, and daughter Marie-Noëlle) who are estranged from one another. In the text, each woman is aware of the other, yet the effort toward connecting the groups resides with the daughter. As if metaphorically and/or theoretically suggesting a broader ideation of

diaspora, Condé depicts complicated maternal kinships enmeshed in tragedy, movement, and the unknown, especially in regards to parental heritage. Nina, Reynalda's mother, is a woman from meager circumstances who was raped by her cousin; Reynalda is the result of that traumatic event. According to Reynalda, her daughter Marie-Noëlle is the result of a rape by her mother's employer and lover, an event to which Reynalda claims Nina was complicit. (Nina tells a differing version in which she claims Reynalda had an affair with another man, ending in her pregnancy.)

Throughout the novel, Marie-Noëlle undertakes a quest to discover her heritage, her paternity, and the circumstances of her birth. She seeks to understand her mother as well, hoping this will give her insight into her own life and a sense of belonging. Based on her experiences growing up, Marie-Noëlle has no desire to have children (Condé 128), thus, breaking the matrilineal cycle of neglect, abandonment, and indifference. Throughout her travels across Guadeloupe, France, and the United States, Marie-Noëlle encounters a number of "mother figures" that offer some sense of guidance and connection for her. One example of this is Anthea Jackson, for whom she works as a Nanny (98-101).

Even though told on a more individual scale, the events in Condé's novel echo the betrayal, isolation, separation, relocation, abuse, and questions about origins that are integral to discussions of diaspora.[74] Consequently, it becomes difficult for the diverse persons to find their kin and to find their way back ("home"). Moreover, it is the current[75] generations (through their travels, cultural practices, scholarship, activism, for example) that journey toward finding their pasts, their heritages, and making their

"returns" to an ancestral origin, who locate themselves as part of a larger diasporic community.

On the path of her search and return, Marie-Noelle travels from Guadeloupe to France to the United States on a quest for the truth about her parentage and a stronger sense of self. The absence and lack of information about her paternal heritage and the circumstances of her birth shadow Marie-Noëlle's life. In addition, she knows little about her mother, who has been either physically or emotionally absent for most of Marie-Noëlle's life. When Marie-Noëlle returns to Guadeloupe, she does so to continue the search into her past, looking for information about her parentage that she has been attempting to uncover to some extent since she discovered that her complexion (a light hue pointing to a "white" father) positioned her as different from the majority of the children and people in Guadeloupe. She views her grandmother Nina as a major resource and seeks her out in hopes of acquiring the true story of the circumstances of her birth. Going back to her home country in search of her heritage, Marie-Noelle becomes a "daughter of return" seeking her origins. Nina represents this sense of ancestral heritage that Marie-Noëlle expects will allow her to come to terms with her familial identity. However, Marie-Noelle isn't granted this resolution; her return does not yield the answers or the sense of self-recognition and fulfillment she'd hoped to find. In this way, Condé's novel seems to provide an alternative to the inclusive and resolved matrilineal diaspora and "daughter's return" narratives posed in Jackson-Opoku's theoretical fiction. The return visit leaves Marie-Noelle with questions and possibly even more conflict as she vacillates between the varying truths of her parentage – the version her mother tells, the version her grandmother tells, as well as

the stories from others who knew her mother as a child. Also, as a result of her quest, she has been able to meet and acknowledge another part of her matrilineage in grandmother Nina and her hometown of Desirade. She even learns something about her great grandmother, Nina's mother.

Extending this concept of matrilineage to discussion of a matrilineal diaspora, Condé's text employs specific references to diasporic concepts like kinship, migration, and belonging, among others. As with Brand and Jackson-Opoku and their novels, Condé too uses her text to interrogate the idea and experience of diaspora, including "the lost paradise. Of the Middle Passage, that terrible journey we all took before we were even born. Of our scattering to the four corners of the earth and of our suffering" (Condé 259). And probably more directly than either of the other two authors, she provides text that supports and articulates the idea of diaspora as well as challenges it. Early in the novel, Condé establishes the matrilineage of grandmother, mother, and daughter, which positions the reader to think in terms of a woman-centered text and women's lives – again, a practice that all of the authors use.

However, the relationships between each mother-daughter set are conflicted due to secrets, silences, omissions, re-creations of truth, fabrications, and traumatic events that seem to preclude the possibility of a functioning, interactive matrilineage. As a consequence, Marie-Noëlle spends the majority of her life seeking to fill the gaps in her maternal relationships, generally by locating (even if temporarily) other mother figures, and to address the unanswered questions surrounding her birth, such as the identity of her father and the circumstances under which she was conceived. As the narrator comments, "Illegitimate child, father unknown. A fine identity that was! As long as she

had no other details to record in her family register, she would never make a success of anything" (200). By the end of the novel, Marie-Noëlle finds no clearer answers than she had clear questions or ideas to pursue at the beginning; however, she realizes that she might never find the resolutions she seeks, and that is a valuable acknowledgement for her.

This sense of questioning and unresolved searching for a definitive ancestry mirrors the struggles of many diasporans. For the majority of people in the Diaspora, identities of ancestors have been long forgotten, erased, or re-named and re-created through multiple cross-cultural movements and interactions. In regards to specific expressions of diaspora in *Desirada*, Condé notes, "All Guadeloupeans are related to one another. First of all, most of them came out of the belly of the same slave ship, ejected at the same moment on the same auction block. Second, on the plantations, relationships formed between the newcomers and the others that were promiscuous and incestuous" (161). Here, Condé speaks of the presence of Diaspora as carried over to Guadeloupe in the belly of a slave ship. And her maternal metaphor, especially in light of this dissertation titled *Bodied Knowledges* that centers on *maternal narratives*, is a powerful one that emphasizes the complicated association between motherhood / ing and the institution of slavery. First, it recognizes people of African descent as being birthed from slave ships and "born" / borne into slavery. Second, since children of slaves followed the condition of the mother, the mother herself became a metaphorical "slave ship" or vessel that literally carried and birthed her children into slavery. Then too, the continual birthing of diaspora with each shipload of slaves to the New World meant a rebirth from particular cultural and national identities – generally, from a state

of being free – into a new life of enslavement, in which they were re-named, owned, and dehumanized. So the diasporan peoples to which Condé were re-born from human beings to things and someone else's property.

Also, she points to an intermingling of ancestral lines within the context of slavery that paired kin and different age groups for the purposes of procreation as well as because of unknown familial lines. Still, the comment addresses the idea of a collective community that offers a place of belonging and familiarity. Therefore, the sense of making a connection to/in the Diaspora, by necessity, has to include a broader understanding of the term, including a recognition of the ways that time and social and political evolutions have influenced both Africa and her Diaspora, which opens the space for a more collective and broader experience of diasporan identity.

However, as mentioned above, Condé challenges the meaning and formation of diaspora and its impact on those within it. Juxtaposed with Marie-Noëlle's quest for information about her heritage, her younger brother Garvey offers an opposing view of diaspora identity as part of a search for self, one that opposes the notion of a connected diaspora or diaspora identity. The narrator reveals that:

> [Garvey] would visit the United States, some countries in South America, and, above all, the Caribbean, a silo where so many races had been fertilized before setting off to sow the world. […] In no way was he on the age-old quest for identity. He was a European. A West Indian from an immigrant family. He did not long for a mythical past nor was his heart set on winning back a beautiful native land. His placenta was buried under one of the plane trees in Savigny-sur-Orge. (Condé 209)

Despite French nationals or Europeans who would identify him as *not belonging*, as "other," Garvey claims his identity as European, as well as West Indian. The narrator speaks of diaspora – which is usually associated with a mythic quest or a quest for a mythic homeland / origin – one that would link people of a certain ancestry. The quest supposedly ends with a return to that *native* land, usually physical but also psychological or intellectual or cultural. In this notion of diaspora, the people are often searching for a lost past that will somehow complete (or make more complete) the self, a concern that has been discussed in Jackson-Opoku and Brand's novels as well. Yet Garvey does not see this as an issue for him. Although he is part of a diaspora, he doesn't view it as significant to his choice of identifier.[76] Significantly and in opposition to Marie-Noëlle, Garvey denies any kind of quest or a need to *connect* with "a mythical past" or "a beautiful native land."

Concluding This Thought

Read together, the narrative frameworks of the novels present a matrilineal diaspora in that they focus on key women characters and maternal relationships: mothers whose children are dispersed throughout the diaspora and the daughters seeking to understand their connections to a larger woman-centered community or identity inherited across generations. The authors demonstrate that an awareness of one's heritage can provide valuable knowledge and experiences, and the journey itself provides opportunities to learn of one's past, to hear the stories of family, and to use them towards personal development – either to strengthen one's connection to that past or to give one a narrative against which to create an identity. Just as the return experiences are different, so are the experiences of the daughters (and sons) of the

diaspora. Toni Morrison writes, "'If you come from Africa, your name is gone. It is particularly problematic because it is not just *your* name but your family, your tribe. When you die how can you connect with your ancestors if you have lost your name?' (qtd. in Wilentz, *Binding Cultures* 97). Wilentz continues, suggesting, "The concept of knowing one's name, tribe, and cultural heritage is paramount […], but Morrison goes one step further; she shows the necessity of stripping off the layers of dominant culture which has hidden both the names and values of 'that civilization which exists underneath'" (97). *The River Where Blood*, *At the Full*, and *Desirada* each demonstrate the function and characteristics of a *matrilineal diaspora*, one that theorizes the possibilities of connecting with ancestors despite having "lost your name" and all that that encompasses.

This woman-centered space encourages a look beyond patriarchal and heteronormative expectations and definitions of diaspora to consider the diversity and complexity available in diaspora narratives that focus on women's experiences and the lives formed around them. Used here, it serves as a guiding framework for thinking about the texts as theorizations and representations of the Diaspora. It intersects ideas and experiences of diasporic beings with a maternal discourse that focuses on the matrilineages presented in each novel and that work to, in a way, recover "name, tribe, and cultural heritage" lost amid the displacement and disruption (and relevant contributing factors) of d/Diaspora formation.

The matrilineages indicate the significance of generational connections, ancestry, and identity in thinking about diaspora. For the women characters at the center of this fiction, recognizing and acknowledging that ancestry is significant to their ability

to know themselves, to feel grounded in a sense of belonging that extends beyond the immediate, moving across generations, multiple interactions, and historical events to form a diasporic structure that positions them as contributing and related to a larger community than the immediate one they know. For the main characters that perform as part of this matrilineal diaspora, the diasporic networks are either supportive spaces that they yearn to engage, or they are spaces against which the characters choose to define and construct their identities. For some characters, the sense of a larger connection allows them to quell a longing and to feel as if they belong, especially when their daily lives include efforts to resist or survive circumstances informed and formed by interlocking systems of oppression and disrupted family structures among immediate family members. For others, it confirms an identity that one has taken on and keeps one linked to a kind of familial community, even if determining to disconnect from current family relationships – generally in terms of a daughter's understanding of her mother / mother figure. Thus, the diaspora is presented as an important factor in identity formation.

Chapter 2: The Mother-Daughter Dyad: Disrupted Images

"My past was my mother…. Oh, it was a laugh, for I spent so much time saying I did not want to be like my mother that I missed the whole story: I was not like my mother – I was my mother." – Jamaica Kincaid, *Lucy* (emphasis mine)

"I slip my mother's tongue on like a glove / and wonder if I will become like her / absolutely. / […] Her name at times, does not fit me. Irma McClaurin, "The Power of Names" 63

"There is a place […] where the daughter is never fully a woman until her mother has passed on before her. There is always a place where, if you listen closely in the night, you will hear your mother telling a story and at the end of the tale, she will ask you this question: 'Ou libere?' Are you free, my daughter?" Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* 234

The passages above, written by three prominent black women writers, suggest a connection between mother and daughter (beyond that of kinship), one in which the daughter's sense of self is significantly related to her understanding of or relationship with her mother. They point to a complicatedness of that relationship as well: the identities aren't so easily linked or separated, the interconnections so easily made or separable, and the daughters recognize that their present and future lives are influenced by their pasts, their heritage, which, on a broader scale, points to diasporic ties. And as the full narratives from which these lines are taken suggest, there is little linearity in the daughter's thoughts and interactions with the mother. Generational differences, traditions, expectations, separations, and other experiences come to bear and must be resolved (or even understood as un-resolvable or not fitting) in order for the daughter to become a "complete woman," as Simone A. James Alexander views it (25). In this effort toward a diasporic link between the maternal and black women's diasporic lives, the *mother-daughter dyad* provides a valuable space through which to contemplate and analyze diaspora and black women's experiences in such a context. Caroline Rody, in

The Daughter's Return: African-American and Caribbean Women's Fiction of History, supports this idea, asserting that,

> In the emerging body of literature identified in this study, history is reimagined in the form of a romance: the romance of a returning daughter and a figure I call the mother-of-history. Coming back like daughters – intensely devoted and yet convinced of the arrival of their own moment – African American and Caribbean women writers recast the conventions of historical fiction as well as received narratives of their peoples' founding trauma, New World slavery. Staging mother-daughter relationship as the site of transhistorical contact. (3)

Particularly in the novels for this analysis – *The River Where Blood Is Born*, *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, and *Desirada* – the authors "recast" black women's diasporic lives in ways that address the impact of a "founding trauma" on generations of diasporans, and as I argue, this is specifically explored through the *maternal narratives*, one of which is the *mother-daughter dyad*.

The main women characters are representations of this recasting. They are depicted as "coming back like daughters" – though many do so as a means of clarifying the familial history they've been given or that has been kept from them, as such, clarifying a personal awareness of self. In a poignant way, this calls to mind the Ghanaian concept of "Sankofa" – looking back or understanding the past in order to move forward. For the diaspora daughters, it is imperative that they look back, understand their heritages to some extent, either by tracing the past to Africa (as in Jackson-Opoku's *River Where Blood*), to a living foremother (as in Condé's *Desirada*),

or to a memoried place of origin (as in Brand's *At the Full*). For it is in doing so that they reach some resolution with themselves, their lives, and their mothers – literally and symbolically, a site of origin. This overall approach to the novels seeks not to engage in a psychoanalytical examination of the mother-daughter relationships; instead, it attempts to examine the *dyad* and accompanying tropes as they function in black women's diaspora literature from the viewpoint of "theory [as] explicating empirical examples" (Grice 41).

Used in this chapter, the *mother-daughter dyad*, also referred as the "mother-daughter relationship," encompasses a number of variations and elements. It includes such multi-generational kinships as the (great) grandmother-mother-daughter triad. It expresses the idea of relationships between "daughters" and surrogate mother figures – often a grandmother, aunt, or older sibling, someone of the community, or a woman known as the "other" or "adoptive" mother. The term refers to the interactions between a mother figure and her daughter or ward. Additionally, because it highlights a consequential aspect of the mother-daughter relationship and explores it through the interaction (or lack there of) between the mother figure and the child, this *maternal narrative* encompasses the sense of motherlessness that some daughters – or even the mothers themselves as (or reflecting upon their experiences as) daughters – experience and the condition or feeling of matrophobia that exists in some capacity between mothers and daughters.

Mother-Daughter Relationships

Within the diaspora fiction used in this project, the diverse references to Diaspora's daughters emphasize the mother-daughter relationship as significant to the

idea and theories of diaspora. As such, Africa (in its multiple incarnations as place, idea, past/heritage, symbol, etc.) symbolizes the "mother figure" to the "daughters," who are epitomized through Diaspora and Africa's descendants. Too, diaspora daughters are represented in the diaspora locations that have been created via various diasporic movements of descendants to the Americas, the Caribbean, and Europe. In the overall trajectory of *The River Where Blood Is Born*, for example, Africa and the Queen Mother are positioned as mother figures whose daughters have been removed or, more accurately, are taken from them, literally ripped from their shores and enslaved. Throughout the novel, the "mothers" await their daughters' return, a reconnection between mother and daughter, ancestor and descendant. The severed connection between these two entities is depicted as having had a negative impact on both parties: the mother is losing her vibrancy and her strength, and the daughter appears lost, depicted as if on a journey to discover her ancestry and her sense of self, which are implied as integral to the quests However, the "daughter of return" finds her way back "home" to Africa and to the Queen Mother – either a physical return or an acknowledgment or awareness of a particular historical and geographical heritage.

To illustrate the prevalence of this motif within this diaspora literature, I point to key examples of this *mother-daughter dyad*. First, in a passage that speaks to the overall matrilineage and diasporic form of Jackson-Opoku's novel, the Priestess briefly foretells the lives of the First Wife's nine daughters / generations in the Diaspora:

> "*Some will stay close to home. Others will stray. Some will cross waters to other lands.* Others will work the land of their mothers. Some will be dancers, others stumblers. And one, my daughter, will be a child of this

> river. […] One of your daughters will be called by *the one who is the soul of our people, who is mother to us all*. This one must guard the shrine of the River Where Blood Is Born. One day she will be called, and she must come." (Jackson-Opoku 21, emphasis mine).

In this narrative, the author explicates the process of diaspora. As emphasized in the above quote, diaspora includes physical, geographical movements, but the references can suggest emotional, spiritual, or psychological processes as well. For example, staying "close to home" can mean maintaining a relationship with Africa even as one moves throughout the Diaspora or even if one was born *in* the Diaspora, and crossing "waters to other lands" can indicate voluntary and involuntary migrations. Both of these reflect Butler's (and William Safran's) characteristics for/of diaspora, as explained in chapter one. At the same time, the imagery used to describe both the mother-daughter dyad *and* the Diaspora demonstrates the ways that these concepts intersect and become inextricably linked in the *maternal narratives* of diaspora fiction and in this fictionalized theoretical discourse. A complicated and evolving concept, our continued questioning and theorizing of diaspora allows us to explore its dimensions and meanings more fully.

However, one of the more demonstrative discussions of the connection between the mother-daughter relationship and Diaspora identity takes place between Alma (née Allie Mae) and her great grandmother, Big Momma. I've included two of the more significant ones in this analysis. During her summer visit in Cairo, Illinois, Alma and Big Momma engage in a number of conversations about quilting and family in which we witness a passing down of knowledge (of culture and family and womanhood)

across generations. Interestingly, quilting becomes a means through which the characters are able to talk about family, heritage, gender, and more. It provides a communal site of connection and interaction, conversation, creation, and recollection between other mother and daughter.

As part of this process, the focus on quilting is significant in emphasizing a sense of gendered and generational connection. The idea of quilting connotes family cultural heritage, such as gathering with family and/or friends, sharing, storytelling, talking, and creating – a time of communing among women. Traditionally, quilting involves using pieces of cloth and other available materials that hold memories of people (especially family members), places, and events. The pieces pulled together tell a story and record family history. Quilts serve a particular functionality as well: first, they incorporate leftover or otherwise individually unusable materials (a kind of recycling) to create usable coverings; second, they act as a kind of protective component (providing warmth) and a decorative element to a space; and third, they are artifacts of particular time periods or records of a family ancestry.

Alice Walker's short story "Everyday Use" is an example of the multifaceted value of quilts as both historical documents and as functional pieces that provide comfort. For instance, in the story, sisters represent differing takes on cultural heritage: the older and educated daughter Wangero (née Dee) views the quilts as symbols of African heritage that she can use to help her fit in and prove her racial and cultural belonging; the younger, more introverted, and less intelligent daughter Maggie understands the quilts as family heirlooms to be treasured and used as intended, thus allowing her to engage with and appreciate her cultural heritage on a daily basis. For

Walker's Maggie, as for Jackson-Opoku's Alma, appreciation for family and cultural heritage comes through an interactive relationship with a maternal figure and consciousness of one's ancestry.

Overall, quilting used in this diaspora narrative illustrates the goal of mother-daughter relationships in which mothers are perceived as models for their daughters. As Fultz explains, "[M]others provided road maps and patterns, a 'template,' which enabled [daughters] to create and define themselves as they moved from childhood through adolescence to adulthood. Though daughters must forge an identity which is separate from their mothers, they frequently acknowledge that a part of themselves is truly their mother's child" (61). As such, the daughters acknowledge a certain internalization of the knowledge imparted to them from their mothers or mother figures. For Alma, this takes place in relation to learning to quilt from Big Momma, as well as in a family heirloom of beads that Big Momma gives her.

As Alma learns about her heritage, herself, and her family, she gains to a valuable sense of identity. During a first conversation, Big Momma tells Alma about quilting as a form of remembering and documenting one's heritage. Big Momma and Alma discuss a particular quilt that Big Momma has been working on for years, one that speaks to the importance of blood, of ancestry, as well as to the symbolism of the river that links the family throughout the novel:

> "'Looks like these pieces come from everybody in the family,' the girl observes. 'Like pictures in a family album.'
>
> "'It's a lifetime's worth of work, honey. Been sewing at this old crazy quilt so long, I'm 'fraid to run it through the machine. *Don't never forget the bridges you crossed over on*.'

> […]
>
> "'Ain't none of us alone in this world, Little Daughter. Nana, my great-granny, used to keep a place in the corner with a piece of something from all the kinfolk: buttons, baby teeth, locks of hair, scraps of cloth. I do the same thing with my quilt. These patches are our peoples; the born and the dead, the lost and the left behind, the righteous and the wrongdoers. And what do you make of this red thread winding into each piece?'
>
> "Allie studies it. She traces a finger over the line of red, running through like a winding river.
>
> "'Maybe it's the blood that joins us all together. Hey, some of these patches got red running in, but none coming out. Did you forget to join them?'
>
> "'Everything pretty got some problem in it. That's what makes it interesting. You don't want nothing that's too perfect. Ain't no questions in it left to answer.'" (Jackson-Opoku 152)

Big Momma's comments speak to diversity, dispersal, and generations as she explains the purpose of "'Scraps,' […]. Bits of some of everything. Overalls, some tafeety from an old petticoat. Hopsack, linen, lace" (150). The scraps symbolize pieces of people's lives and their experiences, which are then used to design a quilt of the family ancestry, producing a family tree that traces the movements and lives of her ancestors and descendants and creating a historical document of stories (and people) that often go untold or get lost amidst a dominant narrative. Jackson-Opoku's *The River Where Blood Is Born* highlights such voices through attention to the stories of black women of the Diaspora.

Moreover, the conversation between Big Momma and Alma regarding the family quilt, which provides both art and functionality,[77] speaks to the notion of mothers passing along life lessons to their daughters through conversations and

storytelling. This is discussed in literature on black women's lives and mother-daughter relationships, such as Gay Wilentz's *Binding Cultures* and collections like *Double Stitch: Black Women Write About Mothers and Daughters* edited by Patricia Bell-Scott, et al. and *Rise Up Singing: Black Women Writers on Motherhood* edited by Cecelie S. Berry, both of which explore the relationships – complicated and diverse as they are – between mother figures and their daughters.

This passage reflects generationality and other connections between family members and the relation of those connections to the idea of diaspora.[78] Big Momma describes the scraps as encompassing the family's heritage, all connected by "the line of red, running through like a winding river." Thus, she informs readers of the significance of the River Where Blood Is Born that is the source and connection for the diasporic matrilineage at the center of the novel and, consequently, prompts us to consider the complexity of recalling and negotiating Diaspora and diaspora identity. The imperfections associated with the "line of red" point to the reality that our histories and our kin are not so easily traceable, the details of each life aren't so readily known. Yet, they reflect an overarching idea of diaspora that Jackson-Opoku writes early on in her novel – one that suggests that sometimes the links are visible only for a while, fading away and reappearing in other places or lost forever (16). Additionally, in the passage that follows, Big Momma reveals the generational lesson of keeping abreast of one's history as much as possible when she recalls that her great-grandmother kept pieces or memories of family members as well, thus inspiring Big Momma in her efforts to remain attentive to the family in the same way that she, Big Momma, is doing for Alma.

In relaying this information, Big Momma teaches Alma, creating a "pattern" for her to follow as she undertakes her life's journey.

Another example of this lesson occurs after Big Momma and Alma stop by the cemetery, "visiting" family members buried there and paying tribute to them. This means of remembering family members keeps them alive – in the Afterlife in the story and for the remaining living family. As she recalls this moment, consequently foreshadowing her eventual trip to Africa and her desire to track her ancestry there, Alma considers the family history lesson she's been given:

> "Big Momma said that Proud Mary was her great-grandmother.
>
> "If my great-grandmother's great-grandmother was born over in Africa, then I might be got some kin over there. It makes me wonder who they are and what they're doing. […] Do they still remember Proud Mary, the one who went away? Do they wonder what happened to her? […]
>
> "If I ever went there, […] I wouldn't know where to look for them, because I don't know them and they don't know me.
>
> "Blood is thicker than water, that's the way a family is supposed to be. Like the red thread in Big Momma's story quilt. […] The blood flows like red rivers through the veins and arteries. *But all the blood in the body is connected, so it has to come back to the source.* Which is the heart.
>
> "*But it don't seem like our family is connected right. […] Our bloodlines run every which way. I don't think none of it goes back to the source. It's a deep cut somewhere and all the blood just gushes out.* […]
>
> "But now I'm in Cairo, Illinois. Cairo is named after a city in Africa. Africa is where the first woman in our family comes from, that's what Big Momma says. For the first time I feel like I'm connected to

> something. Like a tumbleweed putting down roots." (Jackson-Opoku 155, emphasis mine)

This moment intimates a mother-daughter connection in a few ways: one, it recognizes a connection between Alma and her ancestry; two, it identifies the generational link between Alma and her foremothers, particularly her great-grandmother, who provides an important maternal influence for Alma at a time when Alma's relationship with her own mother (Callie Mae) is strained as a result of Callie Mae's marriage to Otis and his disruption of their previous everyday lives and routine; and three, it offers another example of and acknowledges the great-grandmother as a "first teacher" to her "daughter" – she instructs Alma in gaining an appreciation for herself and her family history that guides her journey throughout the novel.

Yet, the mother-daughter relationship raises those consistent questions associated with diaspora and diasporan persons thinking about their connections to the world around them, to the people around them, and to a diasporic community. As Alma's thoughts indicate, at the same time that diaspora implies loss and separation, questions and the unknown, it suggests a sense of connection, of belonging to something greater than the self and greater than the immediate experiences one knows. And it is through this maternal narrative of the *mother-daughter dyad* that Jackson-Opoku theorizes the impact and meaning of Diaspora for its descendants.

Brought together, these discussions become a visible reflection of the intersection between maternal narratives and an understanding of women's lives in relation to the African Diaspora, as well as the interconnections between family members and the relation of those linkages to the idea of diaspora. Importantly, as I

suggest, the novels and the mother-daughter interactions operate as part of a "fictionalized theoretical discourse"[79] on the African Diaspora – as an overall expression of the complications in identity formation in a diasporic context as well as the benefits of pursuing and forging such a broad sense of self. For example, Ama Krah's experiences of being taken from her home in West Africa, enslaved, shipped to the Americas, losing her first child to slave owners, losing her tongue and being unable to communicate with her children or to share her story with others … these events play an important part in the separation of family lines; the loss of family history, stories, memories, and cultural traditions; the disruption of family relationships, and experiences of oppression based on gender, race, and class. While such experiences may resonate in similar ways across numerous Diaspora family histories, such legacies have their own significances for each Diaspora family. Yet, the experiences of oppression and marginalization, separation, loss, silencing, to name a few, point to the multiple factors that affect identity construction among Diasporan peoples – especially as identity is formed through interaction, experience, family, community, socio-political impact, and so forth. The following examples illustrate these influences in relation to mother-daughter interactions as reflecting and guiding the pursuit of identity.

Also significant here, throughout Jackson-Opoku's novel, she creates an otherworldly space of the Afterlife, which plays a central role in the novel and diaspora narrative, serving as a place where the Queen Mother and the women ancestors reside and look after their descendents. This other space and its inhabitants, rather than being mere outsiders looking in, are positioned as mothers and guides, significant influences to their daughters as they move throughout the Diaspora, finding home and, as needed,

finding their way in the world. They exemplify what Fultz explains is "[a] nurturing female community of grandmothers, aunts, and friends [that] often encircles their 'daughters,' in order to ensure some familiarity in their journey into a world characterized by uncertainty and even hostility" (61-62).

Thus, these images continue the notion of the *mother-daughter dyad* as representing and pointing to the importance of heritage and origins and family in the main characters' lives, proposing a similar way of thinking about the links amongst Diasporan peoples. As *The River Where Blood Is Born* implies, Africa's diaspora daughter has to return to the heart, the source – represented as Africa, The River of Blood, and the Queen Mother. This gives a nod to discussions since in the 19th century in the Americas and the Caribbean, at least, of the idea of a Diasporan community that similarly should make a "return" trip to its origins in Africa. The founding of Liberia and then Marcus Garvey's hopes for a United States of Africa are key moments in this idea.[80]

In the novel, the return is a literal, physical return to the continent for Alma and another character (and distant relative) Darlene. But for other characters like Earlene (Darlene's mother) and Big Momma, the idea of return is more a conscious attention to or remembering of one's ancestry, or the return means awareness of one's connection to a larger diasporic community, acknowledging the history of African descendants in relation to particular locations within the Diaspora – thus understanding the continuing historical and current implications of dispersal associated with Africa. In the novel, the "Diaspora daughter" returns in order to reconnect with the "mother," again demonstrating a representation of the mother-daughter relationship that reflects

generational connection and ties to the past, characteristics indicative of diaspora and diaspora fiction and queries of identity within this space/site.

At the Full and *Desirada* address the mother-daughter relationship as well, yet their central depictions are significantly different from those in *River Where Blood*. While Jackson-Opoku emphasizes the positive effects of mother-daughter interactions, even as she complicates mother-daughter relationships,[81] Brand and Condé tend to focus on the complexities of such associations. In doing so, they intimate some of the intricacies that exist between diasporans and the continent (positioned as a kind of mother-daughter with Africa and her Diaspora). Even more, the novelists raise key issues relevant to diaspora studies, such as: Is it problematic to consider Africa as "home" / "mother" to descendants so far removed (both temporally and geographically) from the continent? Do descendants looking back expect a parent-child relationship? How does a diasporic beginning – for instance, a historical link to slavery and related economic endeavors versus contemporary links to war, politics, education, and economic concerns – influence Diasporans' relationship to Africa and to the Diaspora? While the answers to these questions and more are not necessarily the focus of this research, the literary examples suggest ideas relevant to the kinds of discussions that could contribute to possible responses.

In Brand's text, the spirits of the Ursuline Nuns, the nuns who'd purchased Marie Ursule when she was first brought to Culebra Bay and later sold her to de Lambert, provide a sense of guardianship for Bola during her early years until she is able to take care of herself without them watching over her, but their incorporeity and attention to the past makes them inadequate maternal figures. Marie Ursule conjures the

nuns as temporary caregivers because she has no one else and because they inhabit an isolated location on Culebra Bay, which means security for Bola. Overall, Bola lacks a woman-centered supportive community, or really any community at all, despite the multiple children she has or the people who come to inhabit her somewhat desolate space in Culebra Bay. Having grown up in isolation, Bola interacts with others based more on desire than anything else. As someone who wasn't raised with the sense of connection to others, discussed thus far as providing models of behavior, Bola isn't equipped to teach it to her children. This is evident in the limited sense of mother-daughter interactions reflected in the novel. For example, Eula sends her daughter Bola2 a descendant of the first, to live with her grandmother, whom Bola2 believes is her birth mother; Sese, Eula's sister, gives up her child for adoption; and Cordelia raises her children, but she takes on motherhood as a duty, as an expectation for women, and as a means of establishing herself with the community and possibly overcoming her past.[82] The strained relationships between mothers and their children appears to be a theme in the novel, either through the mother's indifference to her child(ren) or the fact that she, in some sense, gives her child(ren) away.

As a matter of fact, the most visible relationship between a mother figure and her daughter takes place between the second Bola2 and the woman she believes to be her mother (who is actually her grandmother). Unfortunately, while this Bola2 and her maternal parent seem to have an interactive and communicative association, the maternal figure in this relationship is deceased and presented as a figment of the daughter's imagination. Brand's text, then, suggests that Africa-as-mother is no longer viable for the descendants in the ways that we often expect because they, like Bola2, are

holding on to an idea from a historical past too long gone and no longer accessible in the way that it once was or might have been.

Instead, we are presented with an intersection of what was, what is, and imagined possibilities. Here, I draw on Benedict Anderson's conceptualization of "imagined communities" to indicate the reality that, as Diasporan beings, African descendents can recall or know only so much about an African origin or homeland. I suggest that there is a limit to certain knowing that gives way to the imagined, to theorizing. As such, attempts to establish connections are based on what we can conceive regarding an African past and what we can see or know in the present that informs our consciousness of the past. We reconstruct our histories, our "diasporan memories" even, based on what we can imagine, which comes out of whatever recorded histories are available and hypotheses we have about life in particular geographical locations, during specific time periods, under particular social, political, economic, gendered, and racial / ethnic contexts. In his discussion of "imagined communities," Anderson contends "that what we think of as the past is an 'imagined' concept, put together selectively from fragments, based on our present ideological needs" (Alexander 10-11). Deborah E. McDowell echoes this idea, clarifying that, "despite its basis in the concrete certainties of 'then' and 'there,' complete with recognizable names and familiar faces, history is a fantastical and slippery concept, a making, a construction" (156).[83]

To an extent, as I have just indicated, I agree that our understanding of the past is based, at least in part, on a constructed notion. However, like Alexander and McDowell, I am hesitant to accept that the past is only conceptual because doing so

would be a "further negation of its reality" (Alexander 11), a refutation against which African Diasporan peoples – already marginalized and neglected in diverse cultural, national, global, political, etc. histories – struggle against. Black women's diaspora fiction, as I assert throughout this dissertation, works in opposition to this limited representation by providing their own narratives and highlighting black women's voices and experiences. Brand, then, is calling attention to the complicatedness of the mother-daughter relationship for Diasporans, as is Condé.

In *Desirada*, Condé's depictions of main mothers and daughters are strained and generally non-existent; the maternal interactions between such characters take place in terms of surrogate or "other" mother-daughter connections. Marie-Noëlle and her mother Reynalda are estranged and have been since her birth when Reynalda left her to be raised by a woman named Ranélise.[84] As discussed in *At the Full*, daughters who have little to no role model in creating the self within a world of oppressions and contradictions seem incapable of creating such an environment for their daughters or others and appear constantly on a self-quest. Consequently, Reynalda, who had a distant and tense relationship with her own mother is unable to effectively mother her own child beyond the obligatory financial and need-based provisions. She works continuously to "improve" her conditions, as if challenging the criticism she received growing up.

Ranélise raises Marie-Noëlle until she is ten years old, the point at which Reynalda decides to reclaim her daughter – more out of a sense of obligation and ownership than anything else. As such, Ranélise views herself as Marie-Noëlle's mother, "she had completely forgotten that Marie-Noëlle had not come out of her belly"

(11), and vice versa. In the context of this relationship and in terms of mothering, Brand raises the question of what determines a mother: "Who was the child's real maman? The one who had cared for her […] or the one giving herself airs in France?" (15). At the same time, she seems to imply that, in the context of diaspora and challenges to marginalization based on gender and race, the expectations of family, and especially mothers, can be negotiable, and the ability to provide substantial maternal or even personal role models is hampered by past events – a negative heritage of indifference and/or provisional caring passed down from grandmother to mother to daughter, as illustrated in the relationship between Nina (Reynalda's mother), Reynalda, and Marie-Noëlle.[85]

Still, in terms of the surrogate mother figures, Marie-Noëlle finds several. In absence of her biological mother being involved in her life as nurturer and teacher, someone who models and guides her into womanhood, Marie-Noëlle has Ranélise, mentioned above, who loves and cares for her during the first years of her life as if she were her own child. Then, even at a time when she is living with her mother, Marie-Noëlle seeks out a mother figure. She finds "Madame Esmondas, Clairvoyant," who provides a maternal influence and who, in her stories about her own mother figures and her interactions with Marie-Noëlle, demonstrates what it's like to have a "real" relationship with a mother. It's the kind of connection Marie-Noëlle continues to seek in the motherly or mentor-like women she encounters. As such, she connects with Anthea Jackson, for whom she works as a nanny and who, through her own professional and social interests in Africa, introduces her to the idea of a Diasporic community.

In these last two novels, the strained or barely-there mother-daughter relationships and the need for alternative, "other" mother figures recall the impact of dispersal on families, especially when they are separated from one another. This happened often in the context of colonial influence and practices associated with the institution of slavery. In place of the original families, new associations are formed, and as a result, questions about the original relationships abound and motivate searches for resolution and reconnection.

Motherlessness

Although discussed as a separate sub-category of the *mother daughter dyad*, "motherlessness" intersects with other sub-categories. As evident in the problematic or unfulfilling mother-daughter relationships discussed above, the mother's absence, in whatever way that occurs, contributes to the discord between the two parties, thus linking the "mother-daughter relationship" to "motherlessness." As used here, "motherlessness" indicates the literal or figurative absence of a mother figure, especially the biological mother, and often is depicted in the form of emotional, psychological, and physical absences.

A strong first example of motherlessness arises in Jackson-Opoku's novel with the character Emilene (née Diaspora), the first daughter of Ama Krah (Proud Mary). On the Sable Venus, upon arrival in the New World, Ama Krah's daughter must birth and name herself. Desperately attempting to prevent her child from being born aboard a slave ship, Ama Krah fights against the labor pains she feels during her journey across the Atlantic. Yet, the baby struggles against her mother's efforts and "births" herself. Diaspora accepts that her mother's refusal to birth and then to name her is an effort to

diminish the pain of separation that Ama Krah knows will and that does happen at the end of her forced journey. And in this moment of motherlessness, of not quite claimed by her birth mother and not yet taken by her "adoptive" mother, initially, the child names herself and becomes "A Daughter Named Diaspora" (55) – that is, until she is renamed Emilene by her new "parents" / owners, Mother Mercy and Gareth Winston. The child's choice of name emphasizes the idea that she is a daughter of the African Diaspora – conceived in Africa, a child of Africa (African descent), captured into slavery (inside her mother's womb), and dispersed to unknown lands on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. Her beginnings are an illustration of key aspects of the concept under discussion in the research.

Also, in the context of motherlessness, this idea of re-naming is important (and takes place throughout the novel) because it acknowledges that dispersal often requires a shift in identity – in how one is positioned and perceived in the world – and it recognizes the separation of mothers from their daughters / children as a consequence of slavery, leaving many children motherless. And even when mothers were able to remain with their children in some manner, the mothers / parents were often "absent" due to the harsh demands of plantation life. It points to the reality that Africans dispersed into slavery were renamed – a stripping of identity. The first line of Emilene-as-Diaspora's introduction in the narrative and matrilineage states, "If I could tell my story I would. If I had a voice in my mouth that I could command, others would know my name" (54). This statement and its context are significant in a few ways. First, it speaks to the silence of black women as a consequence of slavery / dispersal, and it underscores that many diasporan women's stories have gone untold and unheard because the women

have been silenced. As an example, Emilene-as-Diaspora wishes she had "a voice in my mouth," a means of expressing herself and owning her voice, which she achieves in some capacity later in the novel. However, for Ama Krah, her birth mother, the lack of voice becomes a reality (her tongue was cut as punishment for her attempts to escape slavery), which limits her ability to communicate verbally with anyone, especially her children, and therefore restricting her relationship with her children,[86] ultimately contributing to the motherlessness Emilene experiences (even in the Afterlife), despite her relationships with Mother Mercy and Nanny Griggs.

In a related sense, the second important aspect of Emilene-as-Diaspora's first line is that it speaks to her experiences of being Mother Mercy's "adopted daughter" / slave. Seeing the child in Ama Krah's arms, Mother Mercy, wife of plantation owner Gareth Winston, claims Diaspora as her "daughter" and renames her Emilene – in one instant, stripping the child of her mother, her identity, and her heritage. Also, because Emilene is Mother Mercy's "child," she is in various ways isolated from the black community around her, and because she is not white, she is not really accepted as part of the dominant class, ultimately, located as in-between both groups. Although Mother Mercy "adopts" Emilene as her own daughter, race and status as a slave prevent the relationship from taking on a real mother-daughter association. Emilene expresses this when she says that Nanny Griggs, a slave woman charged with caring for her, is the one who gave her hugs and reassurances, who nurtured her, mothered her, not Mother Mercy, who never touches Emilene – as if fearful of contracting something or contaminating herself. However, regardless of her concern for Emilene, Nanny Griggs realizes that her relationship with the child can go only so far under the circumstances.

Thus, in her relationship with Mother Mercy, Emilene is an emotionally abandoned child.

Third, Emilene-as-Diaspora's comment speaks to the idea of re-claiming or allowing black women the space to have / use their voices, to express themselves, and to talk and reveal their experiences as black women – a goal of both contemporary black women's fiction and black feminist theory – as well as the importance of telling black women's experiences at all. This too is a form of motherlessness. In being taken as slaves, as property, and, therefore, as beings who have no say in the order and operation of their lives, these diasporan women were abandoned by society and rendered motherless, ignored, torn away from mothers / family, country, and home. They were left to reconstruct some semblance of identity on their own or through created communities as possible. The narratives of motherlessness reflect the historical experiences of diasporan women.

To demonstrate the connections further, I provide the following additional examples of motherlessness that speak to the impact of diaspora on identity in regards to black women. In *The River Where Blood*, Lola's relationship with her daughter Cinnamon (née Pat) is an example of motherlessness in that Lola abandons "motherhood," the role of being a mother, and as such abandons her daughter to the "maternal," nurturing of her husband Clyde. As I discuss later in the chapter on "Mother's Resistance," Lola does not choose to follow traditional expectations of other black, middle class women, which includes having children. Matter-of-factly, she very specifically indicates that she does not want to be a mother. However, believing (or assuming) that all women want to be mothers, her husband sabotages his condoms,

forcing her into a state of maternity and arguing that she'll change her mind. Still, Lola continues to assert her position, telling Clyde that, if he wants their daughter to have a mother, then he will have to "mother" her himself. This is significant in multiple ways: 1) Lola provides an alternative representation of black womanhood, especially in asserting her voice and her viewpoint regarding motherhood and her identity; 2) the meaning of "to mother" is positioned as a human behavior, discussed in terms of nurturing, caring for, and loving, behaviors not only associated with women, but also characterized as qualities available to any person;[87] and 3) as a result, this example of maternity prompts us to reexamine and broaden the ideas associated with manhood and fatherhood as well.

In *Desirada*, each of the women of the matrilineage that drives this novel – Marie-Noëlle, Reynalda, and Nina – experiences the absence and/or abandonment of her mother, which has a profound impact on her life and her process of identity formation. As if developing in a ripple effect, the experiences of each woman influence her ability to "mother" her daughter and event to see herself in such a role. As suggested earlier, mother figures are thought to be responsible for socializing their daughters and teaching them about womanhood and their cultural and social behaviors. When the mother or mother figure is absent, this negatively affects the daughter. In addition to the separation from a significant maternal influence, these women experience the motherlessness of place / home that often serves in a similar capacity as well; one tragedy after another and harsh conditions stemming from poverty, racism, and sexism shape their existences. Nayana P. Abeysinghe notes,

> Nina, Reynalda, and Marie-Noëlle share certain events in their lives that have made an indelible mark on their being. These events are characterized by their profoundly traumatic nature. All three women are torn from the place of their birth, where, despite the harsh conditions, they feel rooted in a sense of well-being and belonging. […] Furthermore, all three women grow up in the shadow of the missing father and, perhaps more significantly, in the shadow of the missing mother. For in the case of Reynalda and Marie-Noëlle, the mothers are emotionally absent from their lives, while in the case of Nina, the mother has died. (319)

In Condé's novel, Reynalda's relationship with her mother and her relationship with her daughter come across as examples of motherlessness. First, both Reynalda and her mother describe their relationship as somewhat estranged, like two people related but who have no specific affinity toward one another – basically, Reynalda doesn't feel "mothered" by her mother Nina, and even blames her for her being molested / raped when she was a child; however, Nina's indifference to Reynalda is linked to the fact that Reynalda is the product of Nina's rape by her cousin Gabin.

Then too, Marie-Noëlle, who was raised in her first ten years by an other mother, Ranélise, who rescued a pregnant Reynalda from her attempted suicide by drowning, is an example of motherlessness. Her birth mother Reynalda abandons her then sends for her at age ten; however, Reynalda isn't the mothering type, so although Reynalda reclaims her motherly "right" to her daughter, she continues to provide no real mothering; in fact, Reynalda's reclaiming of Marie-Noëlle is positioned, again, as something carried out because of a sense of obligation and ownership – a claiming of

what belongs to her. Reynalda's husband, like Clyde in Jackson-Opoku's novel, mothers the children – preparing meals, making sure that their needs and desires are met, and playing with them. Marie-Noëlle feels this separation, this abandonment by her mother, in addition to a loss at not knowing her father's identity. So, she feels doubly abandoned. She spends a significant amount of the novel trying to get to know and understand her mother, to discover her father's identity, and collecting mother figures along the way, as if seeking to replace the absence created by her mother, not just by her initial abandonment and subsequent indifference, but also by removing her from the home she had for ten years with her adoptive mother Ranelise. Abeysinghe agrees, commenting that "[Marie-Noëlle's] separation from Ranélise and Guadeloupe throws her into a state of shock, and the 'recovered' Marie-Noëlle is but a ghost of herself—a shadow, a zombie who will spend years of alienation, loneliness, and exile in unfamiliar places as she attempts to find something or someone 'qui pourra poser une pincée de sel sur (sa) langue'" (321).[88]

In part, the idea of motherlessness reflects the unfortunate yet too common circumstance of colonization that often separated mothers from their children, dispersed people from their homelands. Also, it emphasizes the complicatedness of motherhood for black women marginalized by racist, sexist, classist systems of oppression and under patriarchal institutions and practices like slavery, colonization, gender socialization, etc.

Finally, in *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, motherlessness is most often represented in terms of abandonment and absence. Eula, the mother of Bola2, "abandons" her daughter and sends the child to her mother's house, which she left in order to avoid the oppressive situations of the family home, which include the abuse

and violence from her older brother Priest and the suffocation of life in a small town; she moves to Canada, where she hopes to have a better life for herself. And in many ways she does; however, the loss of her mother – in not being in better communication with her – and her abandonment of her child continue to "haunt" Eula, to the point that she writes her deceased mother a letter to explain herself, her actions. Also, the first Bola in the novel is "abandoned" by Marie Ursule, her mother. Marie Ursule sends Bola away from the plantation where she and others are slaves and where she plans and implements a mass suicide as a rebellion against slavery. In order to save her daughter, she has to send her away, to abandon her to an unknown life, yet one distances away from slavery.

Also in Brand's text, the character Cordelia feels abandoned, emotionally and maternally, by her mother who determines that only one woman can live in her house and moves the daughter out to her sewing shed. Later, when Cordelia's father attempts to molest her, the mother chooses to save her marriage rather than protect her daughter. Then, in an interesting way and different take on this idea of motherlessness, Bola "abandons" her children as she willingly sends a number of them off to live with their fathers, never to know or see their mother again, and she's absent through her indifferent form of mothering.

The connection of these examples of the narrative to a diasporic sensibility seems a bit evident. But to clarify the associations I'm making, I call attention to the sense of loss and displacement that these characters experience. As indicated previously, the women who experience the abandonment or absence of their mothers, in each novel, end up engaged in a quest … for self / a sense of identity, some aspect of

their heritage, to resolve some familial issue, and/or to gain insight into the mother's character. From the perspective of this dissertation, which seeks to make connections between *maternal narratives* and black women's identity, the authors' representations of black womanhood here as linked to the idea of quest reflects the sense of separation and loss that has historically affected many in the diaspora, especially when such a positioning is accompanied by a lack of knowledge or connection to one's heritage and/or when one experiences marginalization in society based on race, gender, and class differences.

Matrophobia

"PARTUS SEQUITUR VENTREM—the child follows in the condition of the mother." (Saidiya Hartman 80)

Another important, and potentially contradictory, sub-category, "matrophobia" denotes a fear of becoming (like) the mother or, in this diasporic sense, also a fear of repeating the oppressive and marginalizing experiences that the mother has endured, for example racist, classist, and sexist conditions of colonialism, slavery, or patriarchy. It speaks to the idea of separation and generational difference that exists between Africa and her Diaspora, as well as between mothers and daughters in / of diaspora. The spatial contexts are interconnected and lend themselves to a theorization of d/Diaspora. Descendants of slaves and other colonized persons have wanted to avoid the oppressive experiences of their elders or ancestors who were taken into slavery; similarly, children whose parents, grandparents, and guardians, including other extended family, have been marginalized seek ways to move beyond the interlocking systems of oppression that affected their elders.

Naoko Sugiyama[89] contends that the sense of oppression and "powerlessness" that women experience in society becomes reflected in the mother-daughter relationship. As a result, the mother and daughter connect through a feeling of weakness instead of a sense of strength. And while this might be true to a great extent when the mother is viewed as a primary model of identity for the daughter's ideas about womanhood, the desires to overcome oppressive circumstances can create a foundation of strength for building that relationship. For instance, having witnessed the negative circumstances of their mothers' lives, daughters then aspire to achieve better for themselves and, hopefully, to uplift their mothers and/or future generations along the way.

Ultimately, the *mother-daughter dyad* highlights the notion of mother and daughter as a connected, interdependent pair. The daughter is seen as an extension of the mother (Grice 38), the reflected image or model of what the daughter will become. In many women's writings, this relationship is characterized with the mother as the authority figure sharing her stories and experiences with her daughter. Furthermore, the daughter views the mother as the guide for her development.[90] Through observing and imitating or challenging the mother's identity, the daughter begins to construct her own. Yet, part of discovering this self-agency involves daughters seeking to distance themselves (emotionally, geographically, and / or circumstantially) from their mothers.[91] Diaspora daughters seek to construct their own identities separately from their mothers, independently of their mothers' marginalized lives.

Elaborating on the desire for and experience of disconnection, Wendy Ho defines the daughter's need for a mother-daughter separation along the same lines as

Adrienne Rich in *Of Woman Born*. She quotes the poet Sukenik: "It is a way for a daughter to disavow the condition of her mother as a victimized and compromised […] immigrant [or minority] woman, who constantly reminds her of a woman's subordinate status in culture and society" (qtd. in Grice 91). Discussing Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, which is also a black woman's diaspora novel, Braziel addresses this idea as well, suggesting that complications of the *mother-daughter dyad* develop as the daughter seeks and creates her own identity. Braziel contends that the matrophobia that a daughter feels toward her mother reflects her "fears [of] an over-identification with her mother that will erase the possibilities of her own future becomings" ("Daffodils" 126). Therefore, this identification or "over-identification" can be problematic for the daughter, especially when it seems or becomes a limiting experience for the daughter.

In her discussion of the *mother-daughter dyad* in Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, McGill comments that "a matrophobic theoretical framework [posits] the erasure of the mother – the attempt to position the mother as object and not subject of a novel – [and] serves as a means by which theorists both argue a discontinuity with past ideas of femaleness and hypothesize the burgeoning presence of an autonomous female persona" (34). As such, McGill views the separation from the mother as introducing a new definition of "femaleness," of womanhood that highlights black women's subjectivity. The daughters' desire to separate themselves from their mothers to avoid repeating what they perceive of as the mothers' oppressive or stifling lives, by disrupting the view of "mother as model," supposedly enables daughters to construct their own selves. McGill's comments position this as a generational difference.

From a cross-cultural point-of-view, Angelita Reyes addresses matrophobia as part of the *mother-daughter dyad*. She comments, "Decidedly, there is the kind of mothering—historical, biological, or other—that devours and destroys. Contemporary black women writers [as daughters] across cultures deal with these issues of fear and the detriment and determent of mothering" (Reyes 9). Reyes employs Rich to examine this "fear,"[92] yet she aligns her own reading with Simone A. James Alexander's contention that one becomes complete "when one has a sense of 'home,' when one has made peace with the mother and the mother's land" (Alexander 25). And for Alexander, the "mother," whether birth or surrogate, represented as a woman or land / place, must be a "nurturing presence," one with whom the daughter legitimately connects. Otherwise, the process of self-identifying continues, unresolved. I would argue that Condé's Marie-Noëlle is such an example.

However, I suggest that a complete separation isn't realistically possible, for whether in agreement or opposition, the mother acts as a lens through, against, or in line with which the daughter constructs her own sense of self. The daughter "creates" herself in relation to what the mother is or is not; consequently, the mother remains a (needed) point of reference for identity development. Along similar lines, Amy Kaminsky contends,

> the daughter must eventually come to a recognition of the separateness of the (m)other, of her mother's selfhood as a precondition of her own. [T]he daughter, as an unavoidable part of her differentiation, that is, of her separation from the mother, carries a bit of her mother with and in

> her. Paradoxically, only by retaining this residual connection can she truly recognize her mother's wholeness, and her own. (142)[93]

This process of understanding and asserting identity, therefore, is a complicated for mothers and daughters of the Diaspora, even more so in contemporary manifestations of Diaspora, but also as a result of historical circumstances, generational differences and experiences within the Diaspora. Ultimately, there is a temporariness and/or limitedness to the idea of a complete separation from the mother. Literary scholar Naoko Sugiyama states, "Daughters, in their psychological development as individuals, feel a need to distance themselves from their mothers, while at the same time, keeping strong attachment to them, a struggle wrought with tensions" (2).[94] Similarly, Grice notes that, even as the daughter develops into her own person, a "psychological entanglement with the mother continues as a primary identification of the girl-woman.

The ongoing relationship between mother and daughter is thus fraught with the ambivalence of desire for separation on the one hand and the need for a continuing symbolic relation on the other" (38). This aspect of matrophobia is evident in the discussion of motherlessness as well (which demonstrates how these narratives are interdependent / intersect with one another). For example, Marie-Noelle feels her mother's absence from her life, yet even as she searches out her own sense of self in opposition to her mother-as-model, she clings to some sense of wanting to know her mother, if for no other reason than the fact that the mother is perceived as integral to Marie-Noëlle's understanding of her parental heritage and, therefore, a greater self-awareness. Or if read from Alexander's point-of-view in *Mother Imagery In the Novels of Afro-Caribbean Women*, as long as Marie-Noëlle seeks a "whole" self through a

relationship with her birth mother, someone who has offered no signs of a "nurturing presence" for her daughter (or any of her children), then Marie-Noëlle will be unable to find the fulfillment she desires; instead, as noted with Abeysinghe previously, she will continue to search for something or someone to ease the emptiness she feels. For Diasporans seeking a "whole" sense of self in relation to the African Diaspora or a global black community, a resolution to the search process would then involve a connection to the mother or motherland, understood as an associative consciousness of one's family and cultural heritage, of a racial and cultural community, and even of the African continent's historical relevance to the lives of African descendants.

First, in *The River Where Blood Is Born*, Alma watches her mother, Callie Mae, work at least two jobs to take care of her and her older brother Benny after their father abandons them. Then, she watches her mother become oppressed under the dictates of her second husband Otis, who polices Callie Mae's (and Alma's) actions, "comings and goings," and attire – a verbally and psychologically restrictive relationship. And although Alma's mother is present physically, at times the tension of their relationship as Alma vies (with her mother's work and with Otis) for her mother's attention leaves Alma feeling a maternal absence. As Alma sees her mother's struggle, she recognizes that she doesn't want the same for her own life. She is taught to see education as a way out of the poor-to-working class, out of racist situations, and out of an abusive and otherwise limiting existence, and her mother encourages and aids her as much as possible toward this goal.

Other examples of this motif in *River Where Blood* focus on Ama Krah and her mother and Sarah and her mother, and in *At the Full*, the motif encompasses Cordelia

and her mother. (As discussed earlier, in *Desirada*, Marie-Noëlle and Reynalda and their mothers are the main examples of matrophobia.[95]) While still in Africa, Ama Krah sees her mother, Abena Anim, as too traditional, too caught up in the typical cultural practices of their village, all of which Ama Krah views as limiting. Believing this attention to tradition to be stifling to her desire to explore the world around her, especially as her attraction to her friend Kwesi grows,[96] Ama Krah rebels against her mother's dictates and, at this moment, prefers not to be like her mother or follow her rules because she sees greater opportunities elsewhere. Then, Sarah, a descendent and one of the nine daughters, who was born and spent her earlier years in Barbados before moving to the United States with her adoptive mother, Darlene, realizes the ways that her mother's life was limited by sexism, racism, and classism and by a lack of education and opportunity. Her mother, Marita Wells, was one of the many mistresses of "Old Man" (Selwyn) Winston, one of the wealthiest men in Barbados and Emiliene's great grandson; she died in a field during a tropical storm, pregnant with another of Winston's children. Prior to this, Sarah's mother gives her into the care of Darlene, who becomes Sarah's "adoptive" mother and takes her to the United States. Reflecting on the oppressive life her mother lived, Sarah chooses not to repeat it, not to allow herself to be oppressed by poverty, by racism, by a man.

In *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, Cordelia want a life different from her mother's marginalized existence. More specifically, she wants a life of wealth and recognition, so she leaves her mother's home in order to set her plans in motion. Cordelia's goals include marrying someone who has potential, has a job, and is doing well for himself in one of the nearby towns and to choose someone with whom she can

have a family and establish herself within the community. Also in opposition to her mother, Cordelia chooses someone who will not dominate her but would, instead, bend to her will.

Therefore, I employ the previous examples to demonstrate the prevalence and importance of this aspect of the *mother-daughter dyad* to considerations of the ways that black women's lives have been informed by diaspora.

Concluding Thoughts

Jackson-Opoku, Brand, and Condé "foreground the mother-daughter relationship as the site of [and means through which] transhistorical contact" becomes possible and comprehensible (Rody 3). These novelists, their narratives, and their main characters (or the authors *through* their main characters and texts) seek to explore an "inherited history" (Rody 3) as a means of theorizing the concept of diaspora, diasporan identity, and the African Diaspora itself. Emphasizing the notion of an inheritance left and passed down *across generations* rather than to a single daughter or a single journey to be collected extends the importance of the transcultural and "transhistorical contact." The repercussions of that "traumatic ancestral past" on the subsequent generations expose diaspora as a reality and as a historical consequence under investigation in this dissertation.

Chapter 3 ~ Mother's Resistance: *Not* Made to Mother

"Every woman is *not made to mother*." Jackson-Opoku 24, emphasis mine

"Some women just *ain't made to mother*." Jackson-Opoku 307, emphasis mine

"I'm *not made to be a mother*." Condé 87, emphasis mine

From an observation and assertion about gender roles and expectations to a character's personal declaration about mothering, Jackson-Opoku and Condé emphasize an important delineation between womanhood and motherhood, at the same time contending that one need not be a mother to be a woman. Furthermore, these novelists, along with Brand, prompt readers to be cognizant of the potential limitations that such conflating puts on women's sense of identity, including the construction of that identity. Taking these narrative comments, signaled in the epigraphs above, as a point of entry for discussing the maternal narrative "mother's resistance," this chapter examines the ways that black women's writings about womanhood and motherhood in the African Diaspora often question aspects of those gendered identities. The complexity of the Diaspora, for example in being multiply-located, allows the women characters, and consequently black women themselves, the space to deviate from and to resist typical, traditional, and/or derogatory representations of black womanhood and motherhood. This is especially true when those representations are placed in opposition to white, Western ideals.

I use the idea of "resistance" to refer to the myriad ways in which women oppose, challenge, or speak back to the expectations that tend to, automatically and necessarily, conflate and/or associate being a woman with being maternal. By "necessarily," I mean to suggest that, from a societal perspective (and possibly a

cultural one as well), the ideas and expectations of womanhood necessitate / require its association with womanhood. In order to define or identify oneself as a "complete" woman, one must be able to claim (or want) an identity as "mother" – in any of its varied incarnations. But being able to reproduce (versus adopt or serve as "other" mother) has the potential to position a woman as more fully in her womanhood or acceptable in certain cultural and social circles. Although we resist this melding of identities in diverse feminist circles, nevertheless, it exists to some extent within the larger global community.

More specifically, although the multiple narratives and representations associated with depicting maternity in Jackson-Opoku, Condé, and Brands' novels seem to encourage or emphasize women's lives and experiences in relation to motherhood, this is a surface reading. In actuality, the authors challenge the always already conflation of womanhood and motherhood; they critique the practice of mothering, in terms of there being certain expected behaviors tied to it, as socially interconnected with womanhood. The novelists do this in several ways. In the more obvious and striking constructions, they place the women characters in maternal positions or in some way associated with such roles and then permit the women to deny or denounce any desires to be mothers. Alternatively, the authors pose the question of motherhood – what it means, what it involves, or whether it should be expected of women – to their characters and therefore to their readers.

Following this, they allow the women agency in regards to things maternal: to decline to have and/or care for children, to practice somewhat indifferent, non-specific mothering, and/or to pass on to others the responsibility of their children. I would argue

as well that, taken in the framework of generations and Diaspora, these narratives of resistance become opportunities for the characters (and so the authors) to speak back to generations and cross-cultural knowledge passed down about mothering. It allows them to filter through the events and circumstances that play into black women's experiences with mothering. Additionally, it allows these same subjects to decide how much of what they have garnered from their own mothers- / other mothers-as-models they wish to incorporate into their own lives. Movement in and throughout Diaspora, and the formation of identities and communities in such spaces, places that often have their own gendered, raced, and classed rules or ideas about family structures.

In the novels examined, the significance of this theme is suggested in the similar comments of the black women / mother characters saying that they were not *meant* to be mothers or, more broadly, acknowledging that motherhood / mothering is not for every woman. Specifically, this is demonstrated by the epigraphs above, taken from the novels analyzed in this work. Jackson-Opoku, Brand, and Condé employ depictions of this idea in relation to some of their women characters, and Jackson-Opoku and Condé each incorporate some form of the phrase "not made to mother" into their elaborate narratives.

Jackson-Opoku's Queen Mother recognizes this as she contemplates granting fertility to the First Wife, the central ancestor of the novel. One of the First Wife's descendents, Lola makes this statement too during a conversation with her daughter Cinnamon about their mother-daughter relationship. Condé's Reynalda acknowledges this to Marie-Noëlle regarding their relationship as mother and daughter and Reynalda's absence as a mother. And even Brand's Eula, a descendent of the novel's main ancestor

Marie Ursule, seems to express this sentiment in a note she addresses to her deceased mother where she comments on her abandonment of her daughter Bola2 (a descendent of Marie Ursule and the first Bola). These women, all mothers who have strained, estranged, or non-existent relationships with their daughters, are located across the Diaspora – in West Africa, the United States, Culebra Bay and Canada, and Guadeloupe and France, respectively – allowing us to consider this question of gender as expansive across and throughout the Diaspora.

As indicated in previous chapters, Brand, Condé, and Jackson-Opoku address the function of the maternal in black women's experiences, specifically in a diasporan context. Here, that discussion continues by considering ways that black women work with and/or against that maternal in order to assert or simply express a self-identity. Within the novels examined, the literary representations of motherhood and/or mothering are prevalent: from mother-daughter relationships and conflicts, to grandmothers and adoptive mothers as role models and teachers, older sisters as maternal beings to young, teen mothers and older mother figures, and living and non-living mothers to lands / places referred to as "motherlands" or "mother countries."[97] Together, these images provide a lens through which to analyze black women's responses and resistances to patriarchal gender expectations that position motherhood as synonymous with womanhood.

The correlation expected between womanhood and motherhood tends to negate or ignore women's other expressions of identity, which includes, for example, expressions of sexuality, creativity, and voice (herstory). Often, mainstream or popular depictions of women's sexuality tend to be situated or discussed in relation to

procreation more than individual identity. This link is often discussed in terms of continuing a family line or a cultural group or in terms of populating the nation. Again, the idea is that women stand in service to a larger group or community, which can preclude the personal or additional identifications. In such spaces, black women must deal with questions of how the self or self-choice fits into narratives of nation, culture, community, and family. How does one find the self amidst association to such varied yet related identities? Alternatively, is it possible that Diaspora opens up a space for addressing such issues?

Historically speaking, the correlation between such identities (of mother and woman) has been a conflicted and contradictory space. Black women, based on their social locations with race / ethnicity, class, and gender, have not necessarily aligned with traditional expectations of womanhood, or rather, they (referring more to black middle to upper class women) have done so out of a need to conform or because of a societally enforced expectation that they should. Outside of black social and cultural groups, expectations of the quiet, submissive, maternal figures are based on behaviors historically associated with middle to upper class white womanhood. Thinking in opposition to this idea of woman, also referenced as the "angel in the house," a "long-sufferer for her children and husband" […],[98] Reyes posits "mothering-women" as more indicative of black women cross-culturally, specifically as persons whose lives are impacted by colonization. She elaborates on the inaccuracy of the "angel in the house" image, contending, "The women of my New World history could not be angels in the house; nor could their ancestral mothers have been allowed that privilege. Reality was considerably different across cultures in the Americas" (Reyes 8) and throughout the

Diaspora. This reality includes the effect of racism, sexism, classism, and colonialism in social perceptions of black women's lives.

In the forming of the Diaspora, constructions of race and gender accompanied the movement of Africans throughout the Diaspora and have contributed to and influenced the ways black women are viewed and depicted in popular culture. Karla F.C. Holloway echoes this idea, contending that "racism and its consequential commodification of human lives were European constructs,[99] exported to the African continent and the Americas not only by the slave trade, but by colonialism" (4).[100] Perception and commodification are linked, playing significant roles in the ways that black women are represented. As such, black women have been and, unfortunately, still are positioned in opposition to the more "traditional" images of womanhood (the cult of true womanhood), and this results in representations as hypersexual, "superstrong,"[101] domineering and emasculating, hyper-maternal, or lazy.

In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins addresses these negative maternal images, which she articulates as sustained stereotypical representations of black womanhood: 1) the matriarch, 2) the mammy, 3) the welfare queen, and 4) the Black lady.[102] Each representation indicates a policing of and limitation on black women's bodies, specifically their maternity and their sexuality. The images reflect assumptions and critiques of black womanhood initiated under colonialism and slavery – and continued in contemporary manifestations. Keeping this point of view in mind, the above representations provide particular points of departure for identifying and analyzing "maternal resistance" as depicted in the chosen novels. I argue that Condé,

Jackson-Opoku, and Brand explore Diasporan women's lives and experiences across cultures, providing and responding to such stereotypical images.

Collins elaborates on the stereotypical representations and the ways they suggest interconnections between black women's maternity and sexuality. She argues,

> For example, the mammy […] is asexual and therefore is free to become a surrogate mother to the children she acquired not through her own sexuality. […] In contrast, both the matriarch and the welfare mother are sexual beings. But their sexuality is linked to their fertility […]. The matriarch represents the sexually aggressive woman, one who emasculates Black men because she will not permit them to assume roles as Black patriarchs. She refuses to be passive and thus is stigmatized. Similarly, the welfare mother represents a woman of low morals and uncontrolled sexuality […]. In both cases Black female control over sexuality and fertility is conceptualized as antithetical to elite White male interests [and therefore deviant]. The Black lady completes the circle. Like mammy, her hard-earned middle-class respectability is grounded in her seeming asexuality. […] Despite the fact that the middle-class Black lady is the woman deemed best suited to have children, in actuality, she remains the least likely to do so. (Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* 84)[103]

Ultimately, such ideas about black women's identities and the idea of the mother as a sexual being raises multiple issues. The categories that Collins highlights suggest specific references to black women's sexuality in terms of maternal narratives about the women and their bodies. In her articulation of each image, the connection between the

sexual and the maternal is expressed in regards to whether or not the women characters reflect a "proper" maternal figure, in which case the sexuality reflected in the representation is associated with the ability to reproduce or to "mother." As such, sexuality is tied up in a particular purpose (procreation, continuing a lineage) and only to the most "qualified"; or sexuality becomes non-existent in place of a woman being able to properly "mother" her children / charges. Either way, the maternal takes precedence over the sexual.

On the other hand, if maternity and sexuality are tied together, existing in the same space or discussion, yet sexuality is *not* specifically linked to maternity, then the idea or representation is viewed as somehow deviant. In other words, linking two identities that are typically viewed as in opposition to one another in this way seems problematic[104] – in the scheme of things, mothers are not necessarily read as thinking about or having sex, and women who have sex (and enjoy it) are not necessarily read as mothers. Again, this stems from a hesitancy to view women as empowered sexual beings. Yet, as part of the narrative of resistance, I consider how thinking beyond these limitations reflects or allows a sense of empowerment.

Through their fiction, black women writers attempt to counter negative images like those Collins discusses, as well as to counteract the immediate association of black maternity and black women's sexuality.[105] As such, they seek not only to provide more positive, alternative ideas of black motherhood, but also to demonstrate black women's agency in choosing and defining an identity separate from the maternal. This is not to suggest that identity defined with or in relation to motherhood is necessarily problematic but an effort to expand beyond it. In the Diaspora novels of Brand, Condé,

and Jackson-Opoku, it is not so much that the women are not appropriate as maternal figures and therefore choose not to be mothers; rather, the women, ultimately, reject or re-work the concept of mother, thus liberating themselves to realize and own their sexuality, their identity.

Un-Gendering Mother & Other Resistances

Contributing to patriarchal notions of gender roles, both Clyde (Lola's husband) and Ludovic (Reynalda's husband) expect their wives to have children and want to be mothers, so much so that they press this identity upon their wives despite the women's objections. First, Lola reveals that Clyde doctored his condoms, forcing pregnancy upon her. He assumed that pregnancy and seeing her baby would change Lola's mind about motherhood; however, she proves him wrong, telling him that, since he wanted the child, he has to mother her himself (308). Moreover, Lola indicates that she mothers in name only – and not so much in name (as "Mama") since she doesn't allow Cinnamon to refer to her as mother until she is in her 50s – and sees herself as separate from the act of giving birth. This is demonstrated in her declaration that she never wanted children, that her husband made the decision and manipulated her.

Maintaining her stance against motherhood as a part of her identity, Lola passes the responsibility of raising their daughter to her husband, placing a man in a position of mothering and challenging the traditional expectation of what mother(ing) looks like. Addressing this seeming reversal of gender roles, Lola explains to her daughter Cinnamon, "I never wanted to be nobody's mama. Never did. Some women just ain't made to mother, and I always knew I was one of them" (Jackson- Opoku 307). As she grows up, Cinnamon (née Pat Brown) comes to see her father as the one who mothers

and her mother as more of a friend than a mother. Cinnamon's father is the mother figure in her life, as the one she goes to for general advice and information, the person she can talk to about diverse, everyday issues. On the other hand, Cinnamon talks to her mother about shopping and fashion, more like a girlfriend or confidante than a mother.

Unfortunately, these examples potentially position the mother in a negative light as unloving and uncaring and situate the father in the maternal role as out of necessity, mainly because the mother is absent in some way. Because our societies generally define mothering, nurturing, and caregiving as feminine gendered behaviors, women who act outside of these behaviors are considered to be deviant. When men take on such roles, they too are perceived as acting outside of gender expectations, outside of characterizations of masculinity, and so, taking on feminine roles to feel a void. Women are socialized to mother others; men are socialized to protect and provide financial support. Yet, even as we as feminist scholars and as a society make strides to broaden and/or re-define ideas of gender, those traditional expectations remain with us and are reinforced via the various media that are so prevalent in our lives. So even as we see the ideas of nurturing expanding beyond a particular gendered body and images of black women gaining a voice that allows them to resist what can be the constraints of motherhood, the slightly negative slants remain visible in terms of the women (and the men).

Nevertheless, because Jackson-Opoku explores alternative views of the women and their relationships with their daughters, readers are prompted to reconsider these relationships as well, even to think of the women not just as mothers, but as empowered women who make a choice about their lives and their own awareness of self. For

example, knowing the context in which Lola became a mother, her relationship with her daughter suggests agency for herself.[106] As I indicated at the beginning of this chapter, Lola became pregnant against her will. Operating under the assumptions of traditional gender roles, as described above, Clyde acted on a belief that womanhood and motherhood are synonymous in his relationship with Lola. In resistance to such a perspective, Lola asserts agency in defining her womanhood and refuses "to mother" her child, informing her husband that mothering is his responsibility.

Jackson-Opoku continues this challenge to gender boundaries, this resistance to gender expectations, through several characters that critique, either straightforwardly or indirectly, roles as mother or the institution of motherhood. She does so, in part, by indicating ways that the promises of motherhood, of the maternal, have fallen through for the women characters, often illustrated through barren women, single mothers, other mothers, women who give up their children, and women who die during childbirth. Also, Jackson-Opoku demonstrates this by discussing ways that women view themselves outside of maternity. For example, even the Queen Mother of the River Where Blood Is Born acknowledges, "Every woman is not made to mother" (Jackson-Opoku 24), recognizing that not all of her daughters will or should be mothers.[107] Also, the Gatekeeper of the Great Beyond, one of the maternal figures who watches over the ancestors and the souls waiting to be born, exemplifies a challenge to gender expectations and an acknowledgment of her sexuality. Instead of lamenting no longer being able to reproduce, she sees menopause[108] as an instance when one's womanhood, in relation to the self rather than as associated with caring for others, comes into its full

power (3). Moreover, the Gatekeeper acknowledges her desires, asking, "How could I deny him […]? How could I deny myself?" (3).

Offering additional examples of this maternal resistance, in Condé's *Desirada*, Reynalda discusses her mothering (or lack thereof) with her oldest child Marie-Noëlle. After giving birth to her first child, Reynalda left for France, abandoning her, leaving her in Guadeloupe with a surrogate mother, Ranelise. After a ten-year absence, Reynalda sends for Marie-Noëlle because Ludovic encourages her to do so. Hence, Ludovic prompts Reynalda to take on maternal characteristics – those associated with pregnancy and with caring for one's offspring. And in her interactions with both of her children, daughter Marie-Noëlle and son Garvey, Reynalda's actions suggest more a sense of ownership and responsibility than a sense of maternity (Condé 38-39, 45).

Then, pregnant with her third child, Reynalda informs Marie-Noëlle, "'I never wanted this child. It was Ludovic. I'm not made to be a mother, as you know all too well. And that's why you're not happy. Garvey's not happy either. You think I don't worry about you? You're wrong, but I can't give you what I never received myself" (87-88). Here, Reynalda seems to support the idea that mothering is a learned versus an innate characteristic.[109] Generally, Ludovic's efforts to change Reynalda's mind and behavior prove unsuccessful, for although Reynalda has three children, she never displays the qualities expected of a mother, that Ludovic assumes or that society associates with motherhood. Instead, Ludovic provides the mothering for the children (Condé 29).

As indicated, there are multiple depictions of women's resistance to the maternal. Similar to Jackson-Opoku's Lola, Condé's Reynalda resists the typical

gendered expectations of motherhood. Her desire is to pursue more literary, scholarly, and activist commitments, working with teenage girls and young women who are experiencing troubling circumstances, in some ways situations reminiscent of her own complicated past. Based on her experiences growing up, Marie-Noëlle has no desire to have children (Condé 128-29), thus, breaking the matrilineal cycle of neglect, abandonment, and indifference.

Similar to Jackson-Opoku and Condé, Brand too provides multiple narratives related to mothering / motherhood that sit in opposition or simply as alternatives to traditional notions of mothering. A significant example, the character Bola seems to take a somewhat relaxed, almost indifferent approach to mothering. Her pregnancies seem surprising consequences to her affairs with men (Brand 67), whom she takes on as they suit her interests or her desires. Having "raised" herself, she has no model to draw on in determining her method of mothering, models which several black feminist scholars intimate as playing valuable roles in a child's development into adulthood.[110] In addition, having grown up in isolation, Bola doesn't appear to need or follow a communal or societal expectation of childcare or mothering that later generations encounter. Instead, she follows her own sense of things, which is visible in the ways that she keeps or gives away her children, attends to their needs or sends them to figure things out on their own (67-72).

Before ending this section, it is important to discuss the male mothering that takes place in at least two of the novels discussed. Because the men's characters / roles are significant, they raise a number of questions about gender and mothering. For example, what is important about men being put in these feminine gendered roles?

What does it suggest about the men and the gendering of nurturing behaviors in our society? What does this reversal of gender roles mean for theories of Diaspora, specifically in the context of Diaspora and maternal narratives?

In Lola forcing Clyde to "mother" his daughter or Reynalda expecting Ludovic to take on mothering the children, novelists Jackson-Opoku and Condé both ask readers to think about the act of mothering, which tends to be gendered feminine and associated with women (mainly because it is associated with childbirth). Reyes addresses this issue, stating,

> Mothering is a term that conveys the intensity of caregiving on many levels. Feminist mothering reclaims the roles of women even as it is also a human attribute. Harriet G. Rosenberg highlights the cross-cultural caregiving role of mothering in such a way that "caregiving is explained as a quality of human, not female, nature. … The web of caregiving … moves well beyond the limited confines of the nuclear family. It is based in kinship/community ideology. It is not sentimentalized as a form of self-sacrifice" (Rosenberg 48-49). Mothering […] is meant as a caring of the mind, body, intellect, and culture of ourselves and our extended kinship of community within the diversity of the matrilineal diaspora. (Reyes 8-9)

Thus, Jackson-Opoku and Condé suggest that mothering, in the sense of nurturing and caring for and within a diasporic community, should be seen as a human characteristic rather than one limited to women and particular practices of gender socialization. The example with Clyde Brown continues after his death; his spirit attempts to enter the

Great Beyond of the Queen Mother. The question of whether or not to allow him entrance into this space occupied by the women ancestors again raises the question of "mothering" and mother figures and to whom such a label can and should apply. In claiming that he "mothered" Cinnamon Brown, Clyde argues that he should be granted entry just as any "mother" ancestor would. Hence, the authors give us, through Clyde, Ludovic, and another father figure named Simon Winfield (in *The River Where Blood* and descendent Earlene's father),[111] examples of this broadened view of nurturing.

Furthermore, not only do we see women resisting specific aspects of gender socialization, but also we see the men resisting similar gendered constraints. The narratives of men taking on what are traditionally women's roles are important. The men characters are enthusiastic in their non-conformity and more than willing to participate in the caring for and nurturing of their children. In the "absence" of expected mother figures, the fathers attempt to fill those spaces. They demonstrate Rosenberg's and Reyes's descriptions of mothering as a human nurturing of the whole individual. They make visible the opportunities for men to demonstrate their caring qualities freely as well as suggest the possibility of resisting gender constraints often associated with diverse societies, communities, and cultural and/or religious groups. In a context of community, of diaspora community, and with a recognition of the need for change and adaptation in order to accommodate new spaces and social structures, it seems almost expected that flexibility with gender and caring would occur, even if out of necessity.

Still, these alterations are not without complications. As much as Clyde attempts to guide his daughter Cinnamon, or Ludovic provides a caring space for his stepdaughter Marie-Noëlle, or even Simon is initially the only caregiver Earlene knows,

each young woman longs to know her (maternal) heritage or have a more intimate, nurturing relationship with her mother. The mother's "absence" is clearly felt by daughters. And although associated more with *The River Where Blood Is Born* than either *Desirada* or *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, this sense that maternal absence has an impact on the daughter's sense of self reflects the issues brought up in the fictional Diaspora narratives around the impact of dispersal and separation from an ancestral home or a knowledge of one, what Missy Dehn Kubitschek calls a "tribal historical experience" (7) and which she states is necessary for a stronger or more complete identity.[112] This idea resonates with the idea of "sankofa,"[113] for it is in knowing one's past or, more specifically, having a sense of history that one is able to move forward and continue making diaspora.

Re-Claiming Self Against or Through Maternity, Sexuality, and/or Heritage

Black women writers across the Diaspora write to comment on and challenge negative, stereotypical images, thereby providing alternatives for maternal figures and of motherhood for black women across cultures. Often, in discussions about motherhood and women's sexuality, the latter tends to come secondary to the former. However, an effort to (re)claim one's individuality or a certain subjectivity can require a person to reject, suppress, or elevate one aspect of identity over another. In line with this view of mothers as sacrificial beings, the expectation is that women will forego their own needs and desires to assure that their families and communities are taken care of first. Because "so much sanctification surrounds Black motherhood[, …] 'the idea that mothers should live lives of sacrifice has come to be seen as the norm'" (Christian, qtd. in Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* 174). Furthermore, "The controlling image of

the ‘superstrong Black mother’ praises Black women’s resiliency in a society that routinely paints us as bad mothers. Yet, in order to remain on their pedestal, these same superstrong Black mothers must continue to place their needs behind those of everyone else, especially their sons” (Collins 174). Such expectations have the potential to set up black women for failure, for feelings of inadequacy, and for a continuation of inadequate and negative representations.

Some of these alternatives include depictions of mothering-women and daughters challenging traditional ideas of motherhood, as discussed in the previous section; re-claiming their sexuality, specifically the opportunity to be sexual beings or to act on one’s sexual desires; and re-claiming their heritage, either through a remembering, an acknowledgment of one’s past, or claiming a particular agency. Ultimately, Lola positions herself as unwilling to give up her sense of self, her identity, in order to fulfill traditional gender expectations. In fact, Lola is a businesswoman – she owns two businesses, one of which is a bar. She further indicates that, while she cares for her daughter, her affections are mainly for her husband (Jackson-Opoku 308). Lola retains control of herself and her sexuality despite being “told” (as one of the Black ladies that Collins mentions) that she, as a respectable woman, can and should have children. In deciding *not* to have Lola take on the traditional expectations of motherhood and/as womanhood, Jackson-Opoku positions Lola as the agent of her own desires, able to create her own path.

Similarly, Brand positions Cordelia, a 50-year old woman and mother, as someone who re-discovers and re-claims her sexuality (Brand 99-105). Initially, in *At the Full*, Brand’s Cordelia approaches mothering as a duty and as a means to an end:

"Cordelia made him [her husband Emmanuel] three children […]. She washed them and oiled them and taught them their place. […] She had taught them the ordinary things they needed to know so that their life would hold no mistakes or mishaps. […] She would never walk up behind them and whisper their downfall" (117), as her mother had done to her (119). With purpose, she sets out to find a man (a husband) who will bend to her will, to her desires for a stable life, and thus someone who appears able to hold a stable job, provide for a family, and establish himself and his family with a satisfactory level of status in the community (108-09, 112-13). In this role, and as a "Black lady," Cordelia, who decides to marry, to have her children, and to gain respectability at the cost of her sexuality, suppresses the full power of her desire, fearing that it would disrupt the image of class, propriety, and control that she is working to establish.

Consequently, in the early stages of her marriage, she limits her husband's access to her sexuality, and on the occasions when they do have sex, she teaches him how to please her sexually, tells him exactly what is needed to help her achieve pleasure. However, even this instruction and her responses to it are tempered by a certain sense of propriety, and thus, Cordelia doesn't express herself completely or allow herself her full sexual potential. Then, at age 50, after her children are adults and have moved out of the family home, basically, after the immediate role of mothering is complete and her position in the community is firmly established, Cordelia liberates herself, allows her sexuality an opportunity to explode and to extend beyond expected gendered boundaries of the conservative heterosexual relationship to which she has felt tied down and that she has experienced throughout her marriage.[114] She engages in affairs with both Kumar Pillai, the ice-cream freezer man (Brand 100-01, 122-23), and

Miss Yvonne, the seamstress (101, 123-27), learning the desires of her body, the sensuality of being touched.

Cordelia's actions cause her husband to leave her; her children and later the neighbors protest her behavior, yet Cordelia ignores them all; she tells her husband, "'I am finished with this now. I am a woman who just want to live her own life. I give you a home, I give you children. I am finish now'" (Brand 121). She is now content and in control of her sexuality, no longer confined by the socially constructed notions of respectability and proper womanhood. Thus, it is in allowing herself to explore her sexuality – which Brand writes as not necessarily dictated by gender, but rather by feeling, desire – that Cordelia has complete control over herself. As Collins suggests, "Heterosexuality itself is constructed via binary thinking that juxtaposes male and female sexuality, with male and female gender roles pivoting on perceptions of appropriate male and female sexual expression. Men are active, and women should be passive" (*Black Feminist Thought* 84). In allowing Cordelia to challenge this expectation of passivity – first in directing her intimate moments with her husband and then in initiating the relationships with both of her partners, Brand challenges the notion of a "true womanhood," of heteronormative sexuality and womanhood, and stereotypical notions of black women's sexuality as deviant, instead positioning it as choice, as agency.

In a somewhat similar take on desire, Bola (Marie Ursule's daughter and Cordelia's ancestor) allows her desire to direct her actions, be it with her interest in the water and its various characteristics, her children, or the many lovers that she takes (Brand 67-69). She asserts her own identity on many levels, claiming self-awareness

often lost to or denied many women, especially for those operating under the strictures of a society that continues to perceive women's sexuality as linked to procreation.

Another way that black women characters (across cultures represented in the novels) resist both stereotypical or expected gender roles and representations involves gaining an awareness of their heritage and/or gaining one's agency. In Jackson-Opoku's novel, the character Emilene (née Diaspora) claims her identity from the slave owners who bought and "adopted" her. Emilene was born on a slave ship to Ama Krah and was immediately taken from her birth mother after their arrival in Barbados. Upon disembarking from the ship, Mercy Winston, a white woman married to Gareth Winston, owner of the Rivers Plantation, "claims" the child as her own, purchasing and "adopting" the child as her daughter (Jackson-Opoku 61), a contradictory position for Emilene, who is both owned as property and supposedly positioned as a member of the family.

Therefore, Emilene becomes acutely aware that her mother-daughter relationship with Mother Mercy is not a typical one: "I was no daughter of Mercy. I was a pampered pet of the Winston household, owned body, soul, and voice. And so likely would live out my days, silent and untouched" (71). And her feelings are justified through her experiences: Mother Mercy does not show affection or tell Emilene about her cultural heritage – this knowledge comes from Nanny Griggs (67-68), another slave on the Rivers Plantation; she attempts to treat Emilene like her daughter, yet racial differences and social positionings keep the two from forming a cohesive connection; during their interactions with others, even with Emilene's "father" Gareth, Mother Mercy speaks for Emilene, denying her a voice of her own or the agency of choice (66).

Emilene notes, "At times I have wondered if I were even there. As if silent, black, and untouched, I had simply begun to fade away" (67). Mother Mercy attempts to police with whom Emilene might have an intimate relationship, expecting someone of race and status equal to Mercy's own to show interest, yet race (among other differences) prohibit such possibilities – Mercy seems oblivious to such differences (71). With such a complicated beginning, Emilene has no knowledge of her birth mother or her ancestry,[115] which becomes most obvious when she passes into the Afterlife and later meets her mother, Ama Krah. She doesn't exactly have a place in her environment, doesn't belong with the slaves or the slave owners. As a result, Emilene is a representation of the impact of colonization and the institution of slavery on descendants of the African Diaspora.

Nevertheless, Emilene establishes her identity by taking hold of her life and asserting her agency, against the dictates of Mother Mercy. She rids herself of her "adoptive" parents by poisoning them (75); then, she institutes herself and her son Wynn (the product of rape by Gareth Winston[116]) as the rightful heirs of The Rivers Plantation both by writing a letter to this effect to Mother Mercy's sister in Mother Mercy's voice and by informing the overseer, Mr. Kilpatrick, of her intentions to run the plantation herself (62-65, 76). In these ways, Emilene stands up for herself, (re)claims her voice that had been "enslaved from birth" (66). Yet, as a result of her upbringing, her losses in terms of mothering and (knowledge of) ancestry, and her inability to establish a relationship with the black community surrounding The Rivers, Emilene is left incapable of engaging fully in the "construction of a tenable black female identity" (Kubitschek 6).[117] She lives and mothers in isolation.

Earlene is another example of a character torn from her heritage, yet who ultimately reasserts her identity by reclaiming that heritage. A descendent of the First Wife, daughter of Big Momma (Bohema), and mother of Darlene, Earlene loses the memory and reality of her heritage as a child when her home is burned down and her father is murdered because racists want his land. Earlene had already "lost" her mother when Big Momma decided not to follow her husband and child when they left Cairo, IL, for a new home. Because Earlene was so young, she has no recollection of her mother; however, during a road trip, she stumbles across the home and family land from her childhood and the town named after her father. The reclamation here involves Earlene recovering her childhood memories of life with her father in their home and making plans to reclaim her father's land. Significantly, Earlene comes to a new sense of identity during a moment when she leaves her adult children behind while heading to perform as part of a commemoration of her years as a singer, repositioning her identity as a woman who *happens to be* a mother rather than just a mother. Thus, mother is *one* identity rather than her *entire* or *only* identity.

Resistance as Empowerment

As depicted in a number of characters from the selected novels, often the women repress an aspect of themselves in order to be mothers. Having given birth at some point and/or raised their children to a certain degree, that experience is the extent of the mothering that they do, the motherhood that they take on in relation to their children. In one sense, the women's resistance to the norm of motherhood expectations indicates a re-claiming of the self, an establishing of a self-identity disassociated from the reproductive process.

As much as possible, these narrative representations raise questions about the impact of oppressive legacies on black women across cultures. They point to some of the ways that black women explore and establish subjectivity in spaces that have often silenced them. In various ways, these black women writers' "revised image[s] contribute[] to defining our heritage and lineages as we transform the residue of colonialism into agencies of empowerment across our cultures and national alliances. Our lineage is transcultural and transnational. In this narrative, lineage is past, present, and future" (Reyes 8). Hence, recognition of ancestry, a Diasporic heritage, plays a key role in black women's identity formation and perception of agency. More specifically, understanding the social and cultural history of gender, race, and class in the Diaspora reveals how such factors have and continue to influence identity among black women. It sheds light on the ways that black women (as with the characters) might feel limitations on their expressions of womanhood, especially when considered in regards to maternity, and it highlights their resistance to representations that can and have constrained their lives for centuries. Since one of those means of resistance include men taking more active roles in the "mothering" or nurturing and caring for the children, it indicates that black men too have been constrained by and/or within certain Diasporic legacies.

As I imply in my examination of Brand's, Condé's, and Jackson-Opoku's Diaspora novels, this fiction illustrates a sense of subjectivity in Diaspora that can be overlooked when the focus of examination highlights or concentrates on the ways that black women tend to be oppressed, based on race and on gender. If the tendency in analysis centers on the struggle more than on the sense of agency or self-empowerment, then readers can miss the ways that women locate and claim agency in their lives amidst

a male-dominated society that promotes attention to specifically gendered behaviors. Yet, the authors direct attention, not so much to the legacy of dominance and oppression that have been strongly influential factors in black women's diasporic lives. Instead, they provide examples of a number of ways in which black women resist such controlling influences, creating their own new paths and/or reclaiming older ones.

Chapter 4 ~ Mother's Voice: Having Her Say

"Yet so many of the stories that I write, that we will write, are my mother's stories. Only recently did I fully realize this: that through years of listening to my mother's stories of her life, I have absorbed not only the stories themselves, but something of the manner in which she spoke, something of the urgency that involves the knowledge that her stories—like her life—must be recorded."
Alice Walker, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" 240

"Remembrance, or historical memory, is a creative act of diasporic longing, if not the actual recovery of a lost ancestral African homeland, yet it remains a necessary creative act." Jana Evans Braziel, *diaspora: an introduction* 17

In the first epigraph, Alice Walker speaks to the value and influences of the mother's voice, the mother's stories, and, to an extent, the function of those stories and their telling in the listener or daughter's development. Additionally, she speaks to the need to document, and take notice of the mother's stories – which include her life experiences, her thoughts, her creativity, her wording, the topics of her narratives, the way she tells the stories, and what she knows and relates in them. Attending to the mother's voice and/or herstory is about fully acknowledging the person and the voice with which she speaks. Through absorbing the mother in this way, the daughter absorbs the mother into herself. In the second quotation, Jana Evans Braziel expresses the intertwining of memory and diaspora (the one being fundamental to the other) and the importance of both in forming diasporic identity – in the sense that it involves a longing for and a longing to recover one's ancestry as a means to constructing the self. Both Walker and Braziel's statements speak to the need to seek out and recover diasporan voices and experiences, histories and creativities and to allow for the necessary act of expression. In this examination of Jackson-Opoku, Brand, and Condé's diaspora fiction, I analyze black women's narratives and the use of memory and storytelling as agency in

crafting voice and articulating the self, specifically as it allows the maternal figures to think through and/or create a sense of identity. Significantly, through this process of analysis and theorizing, black women's fiction not only demonstrates a reclamation of black women's stories through the women characters and their storytelling, but also the actual novels and this analysis extend that effort, becoming additional means of telling (writing) the diversity of black women's lives and experiences.

This recovering of voices is a familiar practice among black women writers of fiction and nonfiction, literature, history, and criticism and their intersections. In the context of recovering stories and experiences through black women's fiction, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Sherley Anne Williams' *Dessa Rose*, and Dionne Brand's *At the Full* provide significant examples. Most well known, Morrison based her novel on the story of runaway slave Margaret Garner, "who attempted to kill herself and her children rather than be returned to slavery" (Christian, "Somebody" 336). Williams' novel stems from the lives of two southern women: in Angela Davis's "Reflections on a Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slavery," Williams learned of "a pregnant slave woman who helped to lead an uprising and whose death sentence was delayed until after the birth of her child," and from Herbert Aptheker's *American Slave Revolts*, Williams learned of "a white woman living on an isolated farm who was reported to have given sanctuary to runaway slaves" (337). And Brand created her novel around a slave woman she read about in V.S. Naipaul's *The Loss of El Dorado* and Rhoda Rhedock's *Women and Labour in Trinidad and Tobago*. The woman, who was named Thisbe, "had poisoned a plantation. And she was brought to trial and they had tortured her. […] And before they hung her she said, 'This is but a drink of water to what I've

already suffered'" (Walcott and Sanders). Drawing on these real women's narratives, the authors bring the women to voice by creating a space in which the women's stories and their voices could be heard. Additionally, through their writing, the authors demonstrate the need to record these and other black women's experiences, to write them as fuller stories rather than the limited footnotes or blurbs that do little to express the women as living beings affected by the multiple circumstances of life.

Although using a more personal source, Jackson-Opoku draws on real life experiences in constructing her narrative as well. As she indicates in the interview with Robert Flemming, Jackson-Opoku's novel began as a travelogue of her travels through Africa in the 1970s. While her narrative has expanded to include multiple voices, time periods, and histories, she draws on her own experiences and those of various persons she encountered in order to create her diaspora narrative, one that contemplates the life and experiences of women in and of the various places and cultures and times of the African Diaspora. As such, her text speaks to a goal of highlighting black women's lives, voices, resistances, and subjectivities – characteristics that inform our understanding of black women's identity.

In each of the primary novels, stories and storytelling are important and carried out in several ways. As Reyes suggests, "Storytelling is one way of accessing the memory sites" (132), of recovering past events, histories, ancestry. Trin T. Minh-ha refers to "mother's talk," by which she means to indicate a passing on of stories (her own and those of foremothers) to the children or descendents. She states, "To (re)tell stories is 'to enter into the constant recreation of the world, of community, of mankind'" (Minh-ha 28). This becomes important in the retrieval not only of black women's

narratives, but their voices as well – so not only their experiences, but also *their* expressions of those lives. As illustrated by the various characters, especially the mother figures, numerous factors contribute to the making of memory, the making of voice, and the making of identity. "Therefore, textures of memory refer to the multiplicity of ways in which memory returns and the different layers of remembering the past [that occur] in storytelling" (Reyes 132). In creating such expansive and layered cross-cultural, matrilineal stories, Jackson-Opoku, Condé, and Brand themselves engage in the recreating and texturing and the varied ways of telling story and their effects on the generational connections and relationships of the African Diaspora through which the women characters establish identity and assert agency.

Within each text, the authors engage storytelling as a means of relaying news and creating intersections between characters. The acts of telling and listening to stories are integral means of sharing information, particularly family histories. As with the recognition that women have been and are considered the first teachers, the ones who initially share cultural and familial histories with subsequent generations, Karla Holloway notes that "African-American and African history document that the tellers were women and their stories and songs were the oral archives of their culture" (24). Similarly, the idea or experience of women characters telling their stories represents a continuing of traditions and a reclaiming of voice. It is a regaining of their ability to speak *for* and *of* themselves and to reveal aspects of their lives that have otherwise been hidden, ignored, negated, or marginalized – as have many black women globally.

For these novels and the Diaspora context, having voice is equivalent to making the "self" visible. It is also comparable to demonstrating agency in the construction of

identity and the relating of lived experiences. Through the experience of storytelling, identity formation can be based on actual events and/or the author's adjustments during the telling. Here, I mean to indicate the difference between the behavioral practices in which the women engage (what they actually do or have done) and the narrative practices they use to create an identity (what they say or omit from a story to suggest a particular image or idea for the listener). This does not mean that the narrative version is necessarily inaccurate; however, it might include exaggerations, restructuring of memoried information, or reinterpretations based on hindsight or temporal distance that influence one's perception of self. As a matter of fact, "Many women writers […] create new ways of interpreting history and culture," suggests Reyes (6). Storytelling, as used in *Desirada*, *At the Full*, and *River Where Blood*, is an example of this re-interpreting and re-presenting of black women's experiences across cultures within the African Diaspora.

As discussed thus far, Condé, Brand, and Jackson-Opoku's writings are examples of this decoding or clarifying. Individually and collectively, they employ an intersectional lens that elucidates their theorizing and analyzing of black women's lives across the Diaspora; therefore, the stories the authors tell highlight the effect of, for instance, gender, race, class, and culture on black women. A significant means of articulating this analysis, then, takes place through storytelling – and the ways that memory contributes to how and what stories are told and the teller's ability to recount the stories. "For many of us, memory through storytelling is what inscribes our history" (Reyes 129) – whether that be personal history about and told of one's life and through stories shared between mothers and daughters, grandmothers and granddaughters, other

mothers and daughters or those shared in terms of a broader cultural, national, and/or racial history.

Drawing on Karla Holloway's critical analysis of voice in black women's literature, I position the Diaspora novels of Condé, Brand, and Jackson-Opoku as "works that claim the texts of spoken memory as their source and whose narrative strategy honors the cultural memories within the word" (25), as well as the speakers of those memoried texts.[118] The speakers here are multiple, from the characters who speak to the authors who are writing from / out of their own diasporic realities – their identities, experiences, and cultural backgrounds; the persons they've encountered during their travels; their own familial heritages; and other diasporic influences such as other writers and scholars.

The sharing of personal life stories emphasizes and is a part of the process of forming subjectivities. The women characters in each novel move throughout their matrilineal narratives, encountering one another, seeking signs of their family histories, and connecting (or not) with various maternal figures. These multiple movements and interactions assist the women in their journeys toward self, and they include "three essentials: the decision to explore history, the absorption of heritage, and [the] interpretation of the past's uses in the present. The heroines' historical exploration generally centers on female ancestors, particularly mothers and grandmothers, with storytelling as the primary means of discovery" (Kubitschek 22). This is demonstrated most evidently in the interactions between Jackson-Opoku's Big Momma and Alma, yet it also resonates within other mother-daughter-like relationships available throughout the chosen novels.[119]

Speaking to the articulations of black women's diasporic voices in black women's fiction, Gay Wilentz echoes this idea of women as first educators in terms of cultural practices and social and gendered behaviors. This is congruent with Kubitschek's heroines, who too seek this matrilineal heritage, this source of knowledge, and the knowledge itself. Continuing, Wilentz acknowledges the importance of voice, of women's stories for black women and for the African Diaspora community in general. She comments,

What we see from the voices of these Black women writers is that their concerns may not be entirely different from those of their male counterparts in wanting to communicate a message, liberate and bolster their own people, and improve their society; but […] these women writers […] address the formerly unvoiced members of the community—the wife, the barren woman, the young child, the mother, the grandmother. They look at their existence as a continuum, an invisible thread drawn through the women's stories to women readers and the men who will listen. Through their alternative, mothering practice, these writers (re)construct residual herstory as emergent culture. (xxxiii)

Significantly, in her discussion, Wilentz posits black women's voices and their impact on readers / the community in relation to the maternal, as does Kubitschek. And although it has the potential to appear as an enforcing of the intersection or, more problematically, the elision of the separation between womanhood and motherhood, key here is the suggestion of "alternative mothering," which reflects the idea of "mother's resistance" discussed in the previous chapter. Additionally, Wilentz aligns "herstory" with the idea of maternity, mirroring the chapter's goal of examining the function of

mother-women's[120] voices in black women's diaspora fiction as it reveals a sense of identity for the black women characters and, similarly, black women of the Diaspora.

Importantly, although stories and storytelling are prevalent within the novels used, I limit the ones centered in this work to those that either directly or indirectly indicate the woman-as-also-mother or mother-figure character speaking for herself. For instance, I analyze stories and storytelling moments where the maternal characters speak in a first-person perspective or where the narrator specifically indicates that the maternal figure has said something. This includes monologues, letters, and conversations or any combination of these. Furthermore, while there are a number of moments in which the maternal character's story may be given, as with Cordelia (*At the Full*), Madame Esmondas (*Desirada*), and Anthea Jackson (*Desirada*), I pay particular attention to the character having a voice (especially an elaborated one), and I focus on the character speaking / expressing her/himself. The "mother's voice" or "herstory" is one of the ways that women's resistance to certain gender roles and expectations is revealed. In such narrative formats, women gain the opportunity to speak for themselves, to tell their *own* stories of their experiences rather than having to do so necessarily through their daughter's or someone else's re-telling.[121] Notably, since I am working with the idea of the maternal or mother figure, and in line with the analysis in the previous chapter on "mother's resistance," Clyde and/or Ludovic would be acceptable additions to this category and discussion.

Furthermore, memory plays a significant role in the storytelling and the intentions of the stories used. It involves the individual characters' ability to recall and re-place ideas in certain contexts and to establish the significance of their memories to

the information being shared or passed along. Memory is also a complicated entity because it involves remembering through various emotions and traumas (physical, mental, and emotional) and, in a sense, re-living those moments. Earlene (from Jackson-Opoku's novel) is an example of this link between memory and storytelling. In order to tell her story, Earlene has to recall being a child, having her home set on fire, feeling the fire on her body (head) and her life, leaving her father yet expecting him to join her in safety at her little river,[122] losing and then regaining the memories of the men responsible for her loss and suffering, all while encountering the daughter (and therefore the family) who thrived as a result of Earlene's own family's demise.

Discussing the important role of memory to the act and art of storytelling in black women's writing, Karla Holloway suggests, "Memory is a tactile path toward a cultural recovery" (25). Being able to utilize memory and to draw on or connect with it and other historical elements (also a form of re-memory) creates a space for recapturing culturalisms. In terms of the African Diaspora, such culturalisms might suggest diverse African influences, also known as Africanisms.[123] Within the chosen Diaspora novels, the intersection between memory and such cultural recovery is visible in references to ancestors (and the Great Beyond / Ancestral Afterlife or generational foremothers), goddesses (the Queen Mother), mythic stories and figures (Ananse), particular items (trade beads and *kente* cloth, a picture or letter), language and names (repeated across generations), and places (lands, rivers, homes). As with a number of the women characters, proximity to or memory of such things leads to a sense of reclaiming or articulating one's voice. Again, this is echoed with Earlene. Hearing and seeing the little river of her childhood and being on the land that once belonged to her father facilitates

her memories, enables her to re-place herself in her lost family history and therefore to recover her past and her heritage.[124]

Taken on a broader scale for black women of the Diaspora, the women characters' recovering their history and their voices indicates the possibilities for black women. It suggests the value of knowing one's history, regardless of how far the reach of that history extends. Being able to connect oneself to a larger community, on whatever level, allows one a stronger base from which to form an identity. Knowing from whence one comes, as implicated in the idea of "sankofa" used throughout this dissertation, positions one as tied or connected to more than just the immediate self. Having such a historical foundation gives one a greater sense of being, of empowerment in the creation of identity, mainly because it points to a legacy, to a site of belonging – that one, traceable line for which Brand's character Eula longs.

Remembering Generational Connections in <u>The River Where Blood Is Born</u>

Among her characters, Jackson-Opoku stresses remembering the ancestral past as key to a more developed sense of self. She demonstrates this through several character relationships. For instance, several of the conversations between Big Momma and Alma attend to a need to recall one's ancestry, and not just their identities, but the events and circumstances of their lives as well. Big Momma teaches Alma about family and remembering through a quilting lesson that incorporates scraps of fabric from family members across various generations, a discussion about menstruation that involves mythic stories passed down from Big Momma's great grandmother and involves blue story / trade beads that originally belonged to Ama Krah (Proud Mary), as well as references to Ama Krah's container with bits and pieces of things from family

members. And as I discuss in the chapter on the mother-daughter dyad, knowing of her familial heritage provides Alma with a more grounded sense of self, one that even influences a change in her name from Allie Mae Peeples to Alma Peeples, which she defines as "soul of the people" – fitting for the diasporic journey she takes and her function in the novel as a daughter of return.

In addition, the storytelling that takes place between characters, such as between mothers / mother figures and daughters, expresses the link between identity and memory. Some examples, a number of which I discuss in-depth later, include Callie Mae's letter to Alma; Earlene's recollection of her childhood; and the numerous collective narratives across centuries, cultures, continents, and existences among the living and the dead.

Jackson-Opoku's use of this technique of highlighting the mother's telling highlights the link between identity and voice. As indicated already, this storytelling in *River Where Blood* takes place in several capacities: Callie Mae's letter to daughter Alma, Lola's conversation with daughter Cinnamon, Big Momma's quilting lessons with granddaughter Alma (as well as her conversation about menstruation and womanhood with both Alma and Cinnamon), Earlene's visit to her childhood hometown, the Gatekeeper's beadwork (collecting lives – and their stories – to create a string of story beads of descendents for the Queen Mother),[125] and Emilene's letter[126] that allows her to liberate herself and her son from slavery.[127] Since I discuss Lola's ideas about motherhood and Big Momma's quilting with Alma in earlier chapters, I will focus on other characters that I haven't discussed much previously. This allows me to emphasize the variety of examples of the maternal in each novel.

Earlene: Reclaiming Memory, Reclaiming Heritage, Reclaiming Self:

Contemplating the effect of not remembering her heritage, her family, Earlene comments, "'[…] I was lost, disconnected from the source of my little river. Mrs. Bryn Mawr never lost the river of her blood. She knew who she was, her mother, her grandparents, and maybe their grandparents. She has her history. When her children and grandchildren ask her about the people they come from, she has pictures to show them and stories to tell'" (Jackson-Opoku 109). In addition to losing track of her family, Earlene points out that she doesn't have the "pictures to show […] and stories to tell;" she doesn't have recorded evidence of her ancestral existence. In essence, her history was erased, discarded. And in situating this comparison between the two women, one black and the other white, against a history of racial strife, Jackson-Opoku directs readers to attend to the intersections of gender with race (and class) that have influenced black women's lives and history, specifically in the Americas here, but, I would argue, throughout various parts of the Diaspora where race/ethnicity, culture, complexion, and more contribute to how difference is read and viewed.

However, as I suggest in the Introduction, much of black women's writing across cultures has been associated with the idea of reclaiming, relocating, highlighting, and studying black women's narratives and/or their experiences. Along this line, Earlene continues, forewarning Mrs. Bryn Mawr's maid, "'This is my father's land, Flossie. Simon's Acres. A Black man gave his name to this lily-white town. And everybody around here is going to know it, or my name ain't Earlene Winfield Josephs. I'll see you around'" (109). Ultimately, the memory brings a sense of closure in that Earlene is able finally to recall her earlier years, her family, and so some of her heritage

– a legacy she can now pass on to her own children.[128] Invoking the concept of "sankofa," Reyes comments that diasporan women "reclaim segments of the past and look to the future in order to fulfill themselves" (129), and this seems the case for Earlene (as well as for other women characters discussed here via the Diaspora), especially as the future suggests more equality and opportunity than a visibly and culturally segregated past allowed.

Earlene gains a stronger, fuller sense of self because she has recovered her family history; she is once again connected to her "source," an association that she plans to establish more specifically, since, as she tells Flossie, "I'll see you around." And for the listener (as reader), Earlene's memory suggests that history and heritage are and have been often lost, yet (in some ways) they are recoverable, regardless of time and distance and interlocking systems of oppression like racism and classism that have previously kept them hidden.[129]

Callie Mae: Remembering the Past, Telling Herstory:

Similar to Earlene's engagement with memory in order to tell her story, Callie Mae draws on memory in writing a letter about her life to her daughter Alma. In the letter, Callie Mae recalls her years as a young woman, meeting Benjamin Peeples (her first husband and Alma's father, also known as King) and working as a nanny for a wealthy white family.[130] These and other memories provide an opportunity for the mother to have and use her voice, to share with her daughter.

Doing so, Callie Mae expresses the impact of motherhood on her life, on the kind of person she has become. Specifically, she refers to it in somewhat the negative, stating, "Motherhood turned me into somebody I didn't like" (210), especially in terms

of her relationship with her husband – it made her "[a] prying, jealous, hateful somebody" (210). In addition, Callie Mae acknowledges the complications that her life has had on Alma – with her working at least two jobs and depending on Alma to help her, marrying Otis, and not having as much time as she would have liked mothering. She indicates too that, since her own dreams of travel and experiencing the world were deferred, she has wished that Alma would have opportunities to pursue her own dreams and to travel the world, allowing Callie Mae to live vicariously through her daughter's encounters.

At the same time, Callie Mae speaks of motherhood as limiting, stifling her identity: "But don't a day pass when I don't wonder what I would have done and where I would have gone if I'd lived my whole life as a free woman. With no babies to keep me home" (211). Thus, Callie Mae contemplates how different her life would have been had she chosen to "live" her life for herself instead of becoming a mother and having others depend on her. Although this example doesn't necessarily fit with the others of "mother's resistance" discussed in this research, Callie Mae's questioning her choice, her life, and more does speak to a resistance to the heteronormative gender expectation that all women are "made to mother," that it is a natural and desirous identity for all women. Even for women who appear to take on motherhood more readily – for example in regards to the difference between Callie Mae's approach to being a mother and that of her cousin Lola – acceptance of the role is not without questions or concerns or regrets.

Furthermore, the idea of the "mother's voice" as her own is emphasized in this example of Callie Mae's letter as well. In writing to Alma about a contest that asks

contestants to write stories about "My Most Unforgettable Character," Callie Mae, admitting that she isn't the best writer, suggests to Alma, "Maybe you could write it up for me" (207); later, she writes, "So you take it and fix it up, make it so it reads right" (213). Retaining claim to her story, Callie Mae passes the narrative along to her daughter, implying a kind of "giving permission" to the daughter to "speak for / with" the mother on this occasion. Also, it reflects the inter-generational story-sharing between mother and daughter that typically includes a passing along of advice on how to develop one's womanhood and/or identity.

Still, the understanding is that the mother's voice, her telling, her thoughts, and her experiences are given rather than the daughter deciding the mother's narrative. Callie Mae's story is very specifically delineated in the novel (in a letter from mother to daughter), and it suggests Jackson-Opoku's awareness of Walker's assertion that the mother's voice needs to be noted and recorded, thus that the mother's voice needs to be heard for itself. Callie Mae's narrative allows the mother to be positioned as a person, as an individual outside of all other associated identities of, for example, mother, employee, wife.

<u>Emilene: A Lost Daughter Finds Her Way; Liberated Voice, Liberated Self</u>:

Diaspora, also known as Emilene Winston, has two significant chapters to her story and reclaiming her voice. In the first, the focus is on a daughter of the Diaspora who loses contact with her kin and is lost in the Diaspora. In the second, a voiceless woman regains her voice, her agency, and liberates herself from the silence that enslaved it.

First, Emilene, who is the first of the familial line separated from her heritage in the New World (taken to Barbados instead of the Americas), longs for the knowledge of her real family, as opposed to her "adopted" family in which she feels like an outsider. The little cultural information, and therefore sense of belonging, she gets comes through the mythic stories from the continent and lessons about the healing (and damaging) qualities of various plants and herbs that her nanny, Nanny Griggs, tells her. Literally a child of the African Diaspora – one born on a slave ship crossing the Atlantic and docking in the New World – as a child, Emilene expresses a desire to know of her ancestry via her conversations with and thoughts of Nanny Griggs. Without her mother available to share this heritage with her, Nanny Griggs becomes a temporary substitute. As part of her storytelling and sharing with her charge, Nanny Griggs gives Emilene a scrap of *kente* cloth that is the last remnant she has left of her birth mother, one that she in the Afterlife attempts to brush off as meaningless, yet that allows her to join her ancestors in the Great Beyond. It's as if the piece of cloth relays a story of ancestry that Emilene, in her isolation, never knew. Instead, the scrap of cloth allows her to speak of an unknown past, of her inheritance.

In this line of events, Emilene listening to her story, first told to her by Nanny Griggs, and then being able to share her story in the Afterlife reflects a physical manifestation to her narrative, one that allows her to connect with her ancestors and that illustrates the relationship between storytelling or story and self-awareness. She is given entry to join the matrilineal ancestors – the scrap of cloth from her birth mother gains her entrance; she assists in welcoming new ancestors; she is with them on their journey home and gets returned to the *motherland* she has never known. In this way, Emilene's

physical participation becomes a part of the later process of awareness of self that she experiences.

Significantly, in the second story, Emilene-as-example very specifically demonstrates the way that voice is integral to one's sense of self: through the loss or unavailability of her voice and then her efforts to reclaim it (and herself) as her own, not the property of someone else. Initially, she writes a letter to Mother Mercy's sister Eleanor to claim her independence and inheritance. Using Mercy's voice, Emilene writes, "I have decided that all I have shall pass on to Emilene and the child. I feel in my heart that they will do all they can to uphold the approbation of our good name, a name they both share" (65). Here, Emilene positions herself in a way similar to what Mother Mercy had attempted to do for all of Emilene's life – in spite of the disparities in race, class, and status that privileged or oppressed them differently. She states her right as a member of the family and as above the other blacks / slaves on the property,[131] one worthy of her inheritance. Markedly, although alleged as Mercy's voice, Emilene is the one who speaks; in gaining her voice, she takes the opportunity to "tell" *her* story as well, at least key aspects of it that provide explanation of her relationship to Mercy and why Mercy might leave The Rivers to her.

Later, in a more pressing example, Emilene identifies herself and her heritage confidently to Mr. Kilpatrick, an overseer from a neighboring plantation who inquires as to her intentions for The Rivers Plantation. When the overseer demands her to "Speak your voice, wench!" Emilene finds it difficult to respond at first. Despite having previously written the letter declaring her freedom and her identity, an assertive act on her part, she has yet to "vocalize" this awareness of self to anyone, even to her own

ears. She notes, "And while I may no longer be owned in body, I have yet to regain a voice enslaved from birth" (66). Her response, or lack of one, is not out of the ordinary for persons living under oppressive, subjugating circumstances who find it difficult to overcome having pressed upon them the mentality that they are inferior. This includes internalizing that oppression. As Emilene discovers, being physically and being psychologically liberated are two separate things. While she has been physically liberated from the institution of slavery and its entrapments via a declaration from the British government and a letter to Mercy's family, she isn't psychologically free until she recognizes and claims her voice and her "self."

So, prompted by a charge to "speak her voice," finally, Emilene is able to assert herself aloud and more concretely. She declares, "'I am called Emilene. Emilene Winston. A daughter of the Diaspora and mistress of this estate. I expect that I and my son will be staying on. The Rivers is not for sale, by your leave, Mr. Kilpatrick. Take that message to your master'" (76). It is important to note too that, in this last statement of identity, Emilene views herself as a dual subject, one with a double, though, as mentioned earlier, complicated heritage: 1) as the "adopted daughter" of Mercy and Gareth Winston (slave owners) *and* 2) as a descendent / daughter of the Diaspora – represented as the Queen Mother, the River Where Blood Is Born, and/or Africa it/herself (and also the enslaved).[132] Nonetheless, this is a reclaiming of voice for Emilene, who has been silenced most of her life as the supposed "adopted" daughter / property / pet of the Winstons.[133]

Ama Krah: Reacquired Tongue / Voice, Name, and Identity:

A final example of voice and identity from *The River Where Blood Is Born* is revealed in the Afterlife or Great Beyond where the ancestors gather to watch over their descendents. Here, Ama Krah has an opportunity to tell her story, and she explains the loss of her voice and its effect on her life. Ama Krah comments to the other ancestors, "'When my tongue was taken, I could not say my true name to those in the place I found myself. The worst thing about being voiceless, of being enslaved, was losing my name. […] There is no one left behind who knows Ama Krah, *soul born on Saturday*. My life is gone, but I have reclaimed my voice. All I wish now is to be able to speak to my daughters'" (89). With the loss of her freedom and of her tongue, Ama Krah's identity becomes subject to the labeling / naming of others. This shift from inability to ability to speak for self indicates the value of voice, especially in creating identity.

First, Ama Krah's voice is taken as a consequence of being captured into slavery – she has no choice, no say in what happens to her child or herself, and she is forced to learn a new language / form of communication. The absence of voice prevents her ability to claim and hold on to her baby, her first child born Diaspora and renamed Emilene. As a result, she is unable to know and develop a relationship with her daughter. In the Great Beyond, when mother meets daughter, the latter has no recollection of the mother who gave birth to her (just a worn piece of the *kente* cloth in which she was swaddled upon her birth. Importantly, Ama Krah's experience of being made voiceless mirrors the experience of many in the Diaspora, mostly during slavery and similar oppressive practices, but also in regards to the involuntary separation from a

homeland and the feeling of being lost or displaced, being renamed, and losing a sense of one's former life while adjusting to a new location.

Second, the loss of voice limits Ama Krah's ability to interact with and communicate with the children she *has* had some opportunity to raise. The "returned voice" makes her an unknown to the daughter who knew her mother through grunts and sounds, not actual words. Literally, Ama Krah's voice was taken from her when her tongue was split; consequently, being enslaved and being unable to speak (not just because of a split tongue, but also because she is considered someone else's property) means a loss of identity that's available through ownership of self and the ability to "name" oneself[134] – for Ama Krah, this means not being able to say / tell others her name and not being able, as she states, to speak to her children.[135]

However, being "re-born" in the Afterlife, Ama Krah is now not only able to speak for herself (her tongue is restored physically and linguistically), but also she is able to "re-name" herself (to let go of the colonizer's naming and tell others her birth, African name). She can reclaim and re-tell her matrilineage (of her own mother, her motherland, her travels, and the children she has borne) and so verbally affirm her identity in ways that colonialism, racism, and sexism have not permitted. Again, Ama Krah is able to speak for and of herself, using her own voice to do so.

These and other "diaspora daughter" mothers in *The River Where Blood Is Born* speak from and of diverse spatial and temporal locations – colonialism, the Jim Crow era, contemporary periods (80s and 90s), school integration and the Civil Rights Movement, of Illinois and Ghana, Barbados and Canada. Yet their stories all resonate with the idea of liberation and finding the self – ideas echoed by their daughters who

search for self in the people they meet and the places they travel. For instance, Alma collects lovers and friends from various locations around the world, hoping to connect with a heritage and cultural connection that she feels is missing in her own life. Again, Alma is a primary example through her trip to Barbados with her friend Sarah and later her trip across West Africa, hoping *not* to hear the "*Nah Baby, it ain't me*" that signals she hasn't found the what, who, and/or where for which she has been searching.[136] Cinnamon searches through men for acceptance and sexual fulfillment, which remain elusive to her despite her efforts; Alma (and Cinnamon briefly) learns about her heritage as part of a larger diasporic community from Big Momma. And Darlene (Earlene's daughter) searches to fulfill her "Momma jones,"[137] which comes in being an adoptive mother to Sarah, in "mothering" or caring for others, and later in having her own child.

Continuing … Voicing the Self in Diaspora Fiction

Like Jackson-Opoku, Brand employs story to reveal identity, and with key characters, she emphasizes the value of memory in constructing identity as well. Briefly, Brand employs a number of examples of memory as functional to characters' development and individual narrative. Marie Ursule is able to call forth the Ursuline Nuns to create a safe space to send her daughter Bola. Also she uses the memory of her life in slavery to prompt and carry out her act of rebellion against slave owner de Lambert and to remember why she wanted to send her daughter Bola away instead of subjecting her to the mass suicide or condemning her to a life of slavery. Kamena's memory (on several levels) fails and aids him as he searches for his refuge, which is Terre Bouillante, and his life becomes a series of directions and quests to find it. Bola2

(Eula's daughter) uses memory (and imagination) to create an alternative reality for herself. Eula uses memory to reflect on her life experiences and to talk to her mother in her "blue airmail letter" to Dear Mama. Then too, traumatic memories of life with her older brother Priest leave an oppressive mark on Eula, yet in a couple of those memories / recollections, she demonstrates a sense of self-empowerment, such as when she remembers how she protected herself against his additional attempts at molestation. Cordelia draws on the memory of her childhood to create a new life for herself; she creates a life in opposition – in terms of class and status especially – to her own childhood environment. And finally, Private Sones recalls his childhood and his service in the military; he re-lives those memories every day, memories that seem to have stalled his life. Based on his interpretation of his actions during those times, he punishes himself for not being a better soldier and a better son and for being dishonorably discharged from the military, thus bringing (to his mind) shame upon his family.

These brief illustrations indicate the importance of memories, storytelling, and articulations of self throughout Brand's novel, for both men and women and in driving the plot. However, in the context of maternal narratives and examinations of identity via black women's voices and stories *within* fiction, I provide more elaborate examinations of a few main characters that serve in m/othering roles as well.

In *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, Dionne Brand, like Sandra Jackson-Opoku, uses multiple narrative forms to express the significance of voice in terms of constructing one's identity. She does this through the overall narrative format of her novel; however, she engages letter writing, character reminiscence, or character imaginings. While the sense of first-person voice of mother figures "telling" their own

stories isn't as prominent or present in Brand's novel, she does attend to the experiences of the key characters. And most relevant here, she uses narratives of maternal figures and their experiences in relation to, outside of, or in opposition to motherhood to explore the linkages between voice and identity.

Eula: Letter to Mama, a Letter to Self:

For instance, although positioned more as a daughter than a mother, as with the other characters discussed in this chapter (mainly because her voice is written as a daughter speaking to her mother), Eula's reflections on motherhood and her choice not to mother her child allow her to be taken up simultaneously as an example of "mother's resistance" and as a mother telling her story, which includes her decision to resist. In addition, in recalling her experiences of growing up, her relationship with her mother and her family, and her experiences in Canada, Eula gets to tell her story, to have a voice *not* silenced by familial, cultural, or societal gender expectations. She has an opportunity to explain (tell her story about) why she has rejected motherhood. In her writing, Eula reveals, "I thought that I had come here [to Canada] to be independent" (Brand 232), to be separate from the life and lifestyle and the problems of her family in poverty-driven Terre Bouillante. Initially, she finds this difficult to do because she lives with and under her sister Sese's rules and expectations.

Then too, the letter is a reflection of Eula wanting to be important, to be loved and missed and noticed by her mother. She writes, "I wanted to think of you quarrelling with some small child for misplacing my letter, as if it were so necessary for you to have it and to have some sign of me that was close" (229). In part, Eula seems to construct her identity in response to her relationship with her mother. Specifically, she

determines her sense of self in resistance to what she witnesses as her mother's life (and that of others in the town of Terre Bouillante) and in opposition to her own childhood experiences. She chooses to be independent and separate from her past, to the point that she severs ties and communication with her family. That is until she writes this letter, which appears to reconnect her, but such a physical reconnection seems impossible at this point since Dear Mama is dead. Now, Eula can seek only a spiritual, emotional, memoried relationship, one created from her memories of her mother, her mother's actions and reactions, her smell, her weight, her body type, and her movements.

Eula (as daughter and mother) writes a letter to her deceased mother.[138] In it, she explains aspects of her life and her absence from her mother, things that she might not have shared had Dear Mama been able to read of her daughter's thoughts and experiences. But knowing that her mother is not present to read the letter allows Eula the freedom to say what she needs to say in order to release the weight of the past.[139] Eula writes, "I would not tell you this if you were here or able to read this" (228). Eula reveals, "I am writing you this letter because I have no ordinary things to tell you. No things we share now and are used to. I am writing only to imagine you reading it with children around your bed. I recognize this fantasy because of course there are no children and no bed. I am writing to no one. You are dead" (236). She writes the letter knowing that her mother will never be able to read it. Consequently, the letter is more about Eula having a space to release the past and the judgments of others and to say goodbye to her mother.

Another similarity to Callie Mae, Eula acknowledges that motherhood / mothering would have changed her, would have limited her life. By sending her

daughter to Dear Mama, she "felt all new again. […] I hated the child. She was an intrusion" (Brand 243), a hindrance to Eula's attempt at independence and self-discovery. And unlike Callie Mae who acquiesced to motherhood, Eula rejects it.

Here, as in Jackson-Opoku's novel, the letter is an interesting piece, an inspirational site of storytelling: it allows Eula to "talk" to her mother, to reflect on her past and express herself on several issues, including her lack of a desire to be a mother herself. Yet it gives her the peace of mind of being able to say them without having to worry whether or not she has disappointed or offended or burdened her mother. This letter lets Eula work through her choices and her actions and to accept herself. Previously, she'd defined herself against her mother, stating, "I always waited for you to wake. So my life would continue" (258). Writing and telling, then, provide a kind of catharsis that allows Eula to concentrate on herself, on creating her identity as a separate entity.

Storytelling / Truth-telling, Recalling and Liberating Identity

Nina, Reynalda, Marie-Noëlle: Same Circumstances, Different Memories and Stories:

In Condé's use of "herstory" in *Desirada*, voice and memory are prominent factors in the telling and in the stories told. Throughout the novel, daughter Marie-Noëlle searches for the truth about her parentage. In doing so, she gathers bits and pieces of information from numerous sources, including her mother and her grandmother. The expectation seems to be that, knowing of her heritage, Marie-Noëlle will be better able to understand her past and to move forward in constructing her own identity. She does this by drawing on the stories she hears from her mother and her grandmother. Because Marie-Noêlle's relationship with her mother has never been one

of communication and active engagement, she seeks out her grandmother, a woman she has never met, to fill in the details and provide insight regarding Reynalda and her early life.

As the women, directly and indirectly, attempt to assist Marie-Noëlle with her quest, they tell their (opposing) stories and use their voices. Because they are discussing events that impact current relationships but took place decades ago, both women necessarily use memory in their storytelling. As such, the stories and storytellers demonstrate the intersection between memory and storytelling that Reyes discusses and the use of storytelling as a way to discover / recover the past that Kubitschek addresses in her text. Yet, Abeysinghe indicates, the narratives in the novel, specifically those associated with Reynalda's experiences, "are rife with contradictions, ambiguities, and gaps. […] The inaccessibility of the truth about the past, and the ensuing impossibility of reconciliation with the past and self, perpetuates the fracturing of the selves of the three women" (324). Furthermore, she contends, "Not possessing the knowledge of their experience, each generation of mothers recreates this lack [of resolution] and subjects its daughter to the same suffering that was inflicted on them" (Abeysinghe 324). Therefore, while the women have the opportunity to use their voices and to express their identities, the understanding of their experiences is clouded by their family history; the women are unable to overcome the contradictions revealed in their narratives in order to move forward with their lives.

However, instead of viewing this as necessarily hindering the women, I suggest that the understanding that their narratives will never be the same allows them to move forward and not remain hindered by the contradictions. For Nina and Reynalda, a

collaborative or similar narrative ending and resolution of the past and self are not necessary because both women "know" for themselves a version of the family history – at least of the family history that has affected the three women's lives. They are set on their versions of the past, comfortable with the "truths" they know, and refuse to be swayed. Still, acknowledging the impossibility of gaining truth from either Nina's or Reynalda's stories seems to offer a resolution of sorts for the daughter who hears and needs them, probably more than the mother figures themselves.

As such, Nina and Reynalda have their stories, their storytelling, their voices, and their lives and identities – at least identities that they have created and with which they are comfortable. The only person in this matrilineage who seems to question the past and those narratives, who appears to need a sense of closure, is Marie-Noëlle. Yet, by the end of the novel, she seems contented enough with the reality that there can be no real "truth" beyond that which one is willing and able to believe.

Even more, the complexity and unknown, which previously left her uncomfortable and incomplete, now seems to offer her a sense of security, a flexibility in choosing her identification. Marie-Noëlle comments, "I had ended up liking this identity, real or imaginary. In some way or other my monstrosity makes me unique. Thanks to it I have no nationality, no country, and no language. […] It also provides an explanation to everything surrounding my life. I can understand and accept that and accept that there never was any room in my life for a certain kind of happiness. My path is traced elsewhere" (259). At the end of her narrative, Marie-Noëlle realizes, "Ashamed, I shall keep silent until I too learn to invent a life" (260), as her grandmother Nina and her mother Reynalda have done for themselves. And in context with the other

discussions of finding and voicing one's identity discussed in this chapter, Nina and Reynalda's narratives aren't so much about reclaiming voice as demonstrating their ability to use it.

In considering the benefits of black women's storytelling in the selected texts – such as an emphasis on voices that are often overlooked or silenced, a diversity of views on historical events from personal, social, and political perspectives, etc. – the characters demonstrate that not all herstory, or rather the ability to tell or recall, is available to the tellers. On one hand, this could be the result of a re-writing of the narrative and purposeful omission of certain details, or it could be the effect of traumatic events and temporal and/or spatial distances that can make it difficult to recall past events. Often, the reality or "truth" of a situation is dependent upon the perspective or intent of the storyteller / witness.

Keeping this in mind, remembering can be disconcerting to the storyteller, especially if it requires the individual to recall tragic and/or oppressive situations, because it requires the person to re-live those moments or because it might be perceived of as a passing on or an endorsing of negative histories and representations. Reyes notes that not everyone wants to remember or to pass along stories of an enslaved or oppressive past; therefore, they practice what she refers to as a "deliberate amnesia" (130). The same goes for experiences with any form of personal, familial, or communal trauma. There seems to be a sense that passing along the trauma passes along an unbearable weight that presses upon the future generations who hear about but don't experience the trauma directly – yet, instead they potentially experience it indirectly through the re-telling, as might be argued Marie Ursule witnesses among her

descendents when she looks into the future and sees their prospective lives,[140] or it might be compared, as Abeysinghe suggests in her analysis, to Nina, Reynalda, Marie-Noëlle's experiences discussed above.

Based on the comparison of Reynalda's story to "Nina's Tale" and supporting information from other characters, Reynalda seems to integrate a combination of forgetting, re-writing, and suppression of past, possibly traumatic events in recalling her earlier years, generally those prior to her giving birth to Marie-Noëlle. Together, the diverse perspectives result in a number of ambiguous narratives in *Desirada*. Through her analysis of Condé's novel, Abeysinghe explains,

> Ranélise recounts the story of Marie-Noëlle's birth to her, and describes how Reynalda came to live with her. She tells her about the attempted suicide and the near drowning. Reynalda's employer in Paris tells the story of Reynalda's arrival from Guadeloupe. Aside from these accounts, all other narratives in the story are rife with contradictions, ambiguities, and gaps. Reynalda's interrupted monologue does not reveal anything about her experience at *Il Lago*, and Ludovic's narrative contradicts that of Nina. Even the relatively straightforward factual account to Reynalda's employer contradicts Ranélise's sister Claire Alta's account to Marie-Noëlle of Reynalda's departure from La Pointe. The inaccessibility of the truth about the past, and the ensuing impossibility of reconciliation with the past and self, perpetuates the fracturing of the selves of the three women. (324)

Importantly, Abeysinghe points out the multiple uses of storytelling in the novel, yet her analysis indicates several prominent issues as well.

First, among the several narratives, each providing sections of a particular life's story, it is difficult to get the "whole" picture regarding Reynalda's identity. Moreover, it looks as if the ambiguity of identity is intentional on Reynalda's part. As she states in one of her storytelling moments in the novel, growing up, she always wanted to overcome her humble beginnings and the underestimation of her abilities by those in her community who rejected her because of her dark complexion and her family's poor conditions (52). Reconstructing identity, leading people to see and believe according to one's direction, is a means to that end. Read this way, Reynalda thus presents a public and a private image and history that suits her ambitions, not the needs of Marie-Noëlle or her other children. And as discussed in the previous chapter, this sense of identity does not include mothering as is generally expected, especially for someone who is a mother. Not having had a mother who mothered her beyond taking care of the basic necessities, Reynalda is unable / unprepared to mother her children.

Next, the question of "truth" versus fabrication is raised in the re-telling of events that have affected the lives of Reynalda, Nina, and Marie-Noëlle, and the concepts tend to be inextricably linked. These main matrilineal characters look to the past more in an attempt to put or leave it behind them, to accept it as something done and gone and to move forward, living their lives. This is evident in regards to Marie-Noëlle; both her grandmother and her mother give her this advice. As if echoing each other, Reynalda tells her daughter, "That's all I can give you. The *truth*. In the hope you'll understand and that you'll start to live your life" (*emphasis mine* 88). Nina too

advises Marie-Noëlle, "I can only give you the *truth*. I can only tell you what happened. […] If you want my advice, forget all of this and go back where you came from. […] There's no place for you here. […] You've got schooling. […] education. […] good health. Live your life. What more do you need?" (184 emphasis mine). Truth appears a relative term in Condé's novel. Interestingly enough, the "truths" to which both women refer, although addressing the same basic events, relate to opposing views.

In light of this, the question of truth remains open for Marie-Noëlle, yet she also realizes that the truth is a socially constructed concept determined by the teller and based on what one does and is willing to believe. Marie-Noëlle has spent so much of her life looking back to her ancestry, especially her parentage, initially perceiving it as a necessary unknown that must be solved before she is able to liberate herself from the past and move on with her life. Yet, as she learns, there are multiple stories of her origins, and so of her mother's life, the "truth" of which depends on which version of the stories she chooses to accept.

In addition, telling "truth" is associated with a kind of cathartic release for the maternal characters. For example, in observing Nina at the end of the telling of her narrative, Marie-Noëlle notes, "As if she were *draining herself of this past*, retched up from the very depth of her being *for her own sake*" (186). The telling, which began in an attempt to provide her granddaughter with some details about her origins and Reynalda's life, turns out to offer Nina a sense of release as well, as if she has removed a massive weight or stressor. As the entirety of "Nina's Tale" demonstrates, she suffered several traumatic events – from the loss, at an early age, of her grandmother and her parents to the loss of her home, from being raped by her cousin and rejected by

her aunt to living in poverty, from being accused of abusing and mistreating her daughter to experiencing an unrequited love. Nina compares her childhood beginnings of working in cotton fields to slavery,[141] and she describes the oppressive expectations put upon her because of her gender and race quite vividly, highlighting the lasting impressions of such experiences.

Overall, "Nina's Tale" addresses a range of issues that influenced her life, including disparities of gender, race / color, ethnicity, class, and intellect and/or service. At the end of so much living, the storytelling allows Nina to empty herself of the pressures of the past and to be comfortable with herself and isolation, once again in her cabin on Désirade. Analyzing "Nina's Tale," Abeysinghe comments,

> By telling her story, Nina understands and accepts her past. The return to la Désirade enables her to recuperate to a degree the lost link to her self. The return to the land where her life began, the land from which she was separated, enables Nina to come to terms with the traumatic events of her past […], all of which were played out on la Désirade. By giving voice to her experiences, including her lack of love for Reynalda, she confronts herself, performs the act of witnessing, albeit belatedly, and restores historical continuity to her life. (325)

Emphasizing the importance of the mother's story / voice in *Desirada*, the grandmother's story provides background of the family heritage and, via storytelling, gets passed along, transmitted from mother / mother figure to daughter. It provides a story of matrilineage that Marie-Noëlle has not previously been privy to because her mother reveals only so much of that past as it relates to her. However, Nina's story, in

addition to providing her *own* story, challenges Reynalda's story of her childhood and provides an alternative narrative. As indicated previously, the multiple and contradictory narratives raise questions regarding the notion of "truth" and the knowability of "truth," especially when memory is required in determining and relating that truth.

Ludovic's comments to Marie-Noëlle illustrate a similar letting go for Reynalda. He states, "[Reynalda] told me she was going to publish a novel, the autobiography she's been working on since I've known her […]. In that way she'll *liberate herself* once and for all from the *truth*. But knowing her as I know her*, her truth will, of course, be fiction. Besides, what else do we construct when we talk about ourselves*?" (Condé 256, emphasis mine). Here, writing becomes the form of storytelling and is situated as freeing Reynalda from the "truth" (secret) that she has been carrying around. Abeysinghe suggests that, in her storytelling moments, Reynalda "speaks about her life on la Désirade and in Guadeloupe, but is unable to speak about the trauma of rape and/or abuse. This gap in her memory will continue to leave the event unwitnessed, keeping her fractured self alienated and whirling in a confused temporality, a fractured chronology" (325). However, I would argue that, through the writing and potential publication of her novel, Reynalda moves toward overcoming her silence and gaining witnesses to her life experiences, either healing "her fractured self" or constructing a new version of the self – depending on the reading of Reynalda's narrative as "truth" or fabricated.

Supposedly, based on Ludovic's comments and my reading of the text, liberation is available because Reynalda is able to write of her experiences, to share

them in a way that she hasn't been able or willing to share completely with anyone – giving out only pieces at a time. In writing her autobiographical novel, Reynalda would have a means and an opportunity to work through her *own* traumatic past, similar to her mother, to tell *her* truth. Still, if, as suggested, Reynalda's truth will be fiction, can it offer her the liberation that Ludovic expects, or is the content not as important as the act of telling?

Also relevant in this statement, readers are reminded of Holloway's arguments regarding the connections between memory and storytelling and identity, as well as the potentially problematic intersections between these spaces. As Condé intimates via her character Ludovic, identity construction involves some variation simply in reaction to outside influences, and since memories are created from what, how much, and if we are able to recall things from our pasts, then we cannot expect complete accuracy in using our ability to remember in order to gain a sense of self. And in situations like those of Nina, Reynalda, and Marie-Noëlle where secrets are used to protect or forget or even to avenge a perceived wrong, memory in storytelling can be even more subjective.

Speaking with my own voice, in my own words …

Voice and story give insight into a person's identity, which covers a range of thoughts, experiences, expectations, and more. When an individual's voice is eclipsed or a person is unable to share her/his person story, is unable to access subjectivity in personal expression, the whole being is simultaneously unavailable. However, the invisibility of the individual is more oppressive and tragic when that voice is silenced, not by choice, but by force. Moreover, such conditions speak to a greater need for society to respond, to make spaces and opportunities for those neglected, negated, and

quieted voices to be heard, to be allowed to sound out. In doing so, we gain a greater chance to understand the world around us, especially because the un-silenced voices and the finally told stories tend to provide us with information, perspectives, and experiences of which we have been unaware.

Allowing the voices to speak and the stories to be told gives us access to a broader view of our history. For this dissertation, that history involves black women's experiences in the African Diaspora and across diverse time periods and cultures, as demonstrated in the three novels chosen for this analysis: *River Where Blood*, *At the Full*, and *Desirada*. As Kubitschek states, "These novels exist to be read, and their very existence gives an example of their shared thematic insistence on continuity and change: they incorporate both historical knowledge and mode (orality) while changing their message and mode sufficiently to offer stories accessible and useful in the present" (81). She continues, arguing, "[O]ral [and written] narratives communicate histories […]. *The female character's ability to construct and tell her own story, in a version that she can bear to speak [or write] and to finish, is frequently the measure of her wholeness*" (181 emphasis mine). While Kubitschek's focus is in providing a critical discussion of African American women's novels and history, her point is relevant to this discussion of black women's writings across the Diaspora and to a goal of this examination.

For this chapter, I explore several of the stories and storytelling in Jackson-Opoku, Brand, and Condé's novels as they relate to maternity. Moreover, in line with the overall goal of this work, I contend that the "mother's voice" offers another avenue for exploring black women's identity within a Diaspora context. Such narratives

highlight the idea of black women who are (or are positioned as) mothers using their own voices and telling their own stories in accounts of their experiences with identity formation.

As demonstrated through the several expanded examples, the black women characters' ability to yield their own stories and through their voices and/or with their permission reflects a greater awareness of self. Often, this ability for voicing or storytelling has included an ability to remember and acknowledge a past that has kept them silent. In *At the Full and Change*, *The River Where Blood*, and, to some extent, *Desirada*,[142] the women characters analyzed here, and therefore the authors, seem to emphasize the viewpoint that one's past is useful, either to the character herself or to her descendents. Often, taking agency in recalling one's past and/or telling one's story provides a cathartic release for the character telling the story as well as, depending on the relationship, for the person hearing it, thus signaling a personal and, often, communal sense of empowerment.

Postscript ~ This Daughter's Return through Reflections on the Maternal

> "On the cusp of a new century, black women's writing has been preoccupied with the recuperation and representation of the past four hundred years of black people's lives in the United States and throughout the African diaspora. […] Genealogies are woven together out of individual and collective memory, encoded in stories, songs, recipes, rituals, photographs, [quilts,] and writing." Cheryl Wall, *Worrying the Line* 5

> "Identity is […] a vital component of diasporas; it transforms them from the physical reality of dispersal into the psychosocial reality of diaspora." Kim Butler, "Theorizing Diaspora" 207

In Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*, the protagonist engages in a quest for self, initially one through which Lucy attempts to separate herself from her mother, yet ultimately, she realizes that she is "not like my mother – I was my mother." Along similar lines, Eula, a descendent of the matrilineal ancestral character Marie Ursule in Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, writes that, rather than separation, she wants a closer, traceable connection to her foremothers, "one single line of ancestry, Mama […] from you to me and farther back" (247). Eula longs for a deeper, memorable relationship with her mother that would ground her identity in a supportive and constant familial history. Alice Walker further complicates this perception of the interconnection between mother and daughter and subjectivity. In searching for evidence of her mother's expressions of creativity and identity, Walker acknowledges that, during the process, she has absorbed her mother (through the mother's stories and storytelling) into her own writing and, consequently, into her own ideas regarding black women's sense of self and creative expression, especially as part of a maternal legacy.

Yet, Irma McClaurin reminds us that, while daughters may "try on" our mothers' identities / voices in the process of discovering ourselves, those mothers' selves do not fit us perfectly: "I slip my mother's tongue on like a glove / and wonder if

I will become like her / […] Her name at times, does not fit me" (63). As a matter of fact, trying to "wear" the mother's identity or speak in the mother's voice can be restrictive. Edwidge Danticat's narrator in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* notes, "There is a place […] where the daughter is never fully a woman until her mother has passed on before her" (234), until a discernible delineation between the two has been made. Therefore, Danticat implies that the daughter's subjective self is limited or otherwise influenced by her relationship to / with her mother. However, even as such separation has the potential to lead to a fuller self-perception, it is not without its repercussions, nor is the severance necessarily a complete one. In *The River Where Blood Is Born*, Sandra Jackson-Opoku articulates this idea through her narrator, who comments that, "When a child is separated from her source, […] blood still spurts from the unhealed wound. Phantom pain haunts the amputated limb. And though she no longer holds her in her arms, a mother's voice may call out to her" (26) – as might Africa as a maternal voice call to her Diaspora children to remind them of their heritage.

The above references recall the various epigraphs used in the chapters of this dissertation and so reflect key issues and connections addressed throughout the work. Covering a range of ideas surrounding mothers, daughters, and identities, voices, lineage, and legacy, the textual references remind us of the complexity of the *maternal narratives* prevalent throughout black women's diaspora fiction. Additionally, they reveal the negotiating that takes place as black women, as daughters and as mothers, attempt to establish a sense of subjectivity and agency in our global society where they struggle to resist the effects of such oppressions as sexism, classism, racism, and xenophobia.

Integrating the writers' fictional and personal discussions of black women exploring identity as (easily or disjointedly) reflected through the mother,[143] the epigraphical comments provide a multifaceted representation of the narratives explicated throughout the previous chapters of *Bodied Knowledges*. The mother thus becomes a mirror or model, a foil, and/or a symbol of identity that the daughters must navigate in order to gain a greater awareness of themselves. The process is complicated, and it is affected by the contextuality of both the mother's life and the mother-daughter relationship.

However, in considering maternity as a means through which to contemplate black women's identity, the characters – as mothers / other mothers and as daughters – remind readers that the distinctions of self aren't so clear or easy to delineate. In a similar way, black women's identity within the African Diaspora isn't easy to demarcate either. It is complicated by history, memory, gender expectations, social and cultural practices, race / ethnicity, geography, and movement, as is the Diaspora itself. Part of the process of interrogating these complexities involves acknowledging these many voices, identities, and influences and theorizing their importance and the experiential knowledges created through them.

Consequently, I contend that black women's fiction illustrates a sense of subjectivity in Diaspora that can be overlooked when the focus of literary analysis centers on the ways that black women characters, and so potentially black women, tend to be oppressed or marginalized because of their race / ethnicity and gender. In centering the struggle and ignoring the agency or self-empowerment that the characters display, we miss the ways that black women locate and claim agency in their lives

amidst a male-dominated society that promotes attention to specifically gendered and raced behaviors. Unfortunately, this means that we get stereotypical representations of those outside of the social norm. Yet, my intention in this dissertation has been to attend to the ways that the authors examined here direct our attention not so much to the legacy of dominance and oppression that has been a strongly influential factor in black women's lives – though acknowledging such influences is important. As a matter of fact, in general, the more marginalizing social practices are placed in the background of the women's lives, as everyday effects or historical events that have become part of the women's experiences. I have looked to how the novelists provide examples of a number of ways in which black women have and continue to challenge and/or resist controlling influences, creating their own, new paths and/or reclaiming older ones.

Each of the novels centered in this thesis depicts a different view of diaspora – not just in the locations, time periods covered, and character movements, but also through the actual formations of the African Diaspora. As I have discussed in significant part throughout *Bodied Knowledges*, matrilineage and *maternal narratives* in each novel are situated as representative of diasporic movements, conflicts, complexities, relationships, and intercultural / cross-cultural contexts and connections. Within each of the texts, for example, the authors create their depictions of Diaspora not only around women's voices, lives, and experiences, but also around particular women-centered generational relationships (mostly between mothers / other mothers and daughters). In addition, the narratives follow the journeys of those descendents across times and places.

For example, in *Desirada* Diaspora is examined through a narrative of mother and daughter relationships that eventually connects daughter to grandmother and other mothers, as well as to her birth mother. As I have discussed throughout the dissertation, initially, the construction of Diaspora appears basic, generally traceable, moving back and forth from past to present and between main characters like Nina, Reynalda, and Marie-Noëlle. It shifts among several other mothers as well, including Ranélise, Anthea, and Madame Esmondas, who are close to and/or who provide some form of "caretaking" for Marie-Noëlle. And that aspect of Diaspora in the text is easy to follow. However, the inclusion of supporting characters like Marie-Noëlle's half-brother and stepfather and the family friends from Africa and their experiences as diasporan beings, though not examined here, reveals the multitude of perspectives and experiences involved in Diaspora formation. And Jackson-Opoku's novel, with its many black women characters, across numerous generations, in diverse locations, living and non-living, aware or unaware of kinships, and representing different branches of the same matrilineage, provides the most vivid depiction and theorization of the African Diaspora. Admittedly, as the author indicates prominently throughout her novel, this is just one version, one theory, one lineage of several possibilities. Still, even within this one grand narrative, Jackson-Opoku provides multiple voices, multiple stories, which are significant to my reading of Diaspora.

In a recent talk given for TED Talks, TED Global 2009, novelist Chimamanda Adiche spoke on "The dangers of the single story." Using her own experiences as an example, Adiche states, "All of these stories [negative and positive] make me who I am. To insist on only these negative stories is to flatten my experience and to overlook the

many other stories that formed me." Building on her point, I recognize that literature has always provided readers with a glimpse into diverse worlds, communities, cultures, and families … sometimes positive and other times negative, stories similar to or very different from our own. It has allowed us to experience and understand diverse places and times and different peoples' lives within those places and times – in the past, present, and future. Depending on who we are and what we know, both individually and collectively, the literature has resonated with us, prompting us to our own memories in a number of ways, such as of being with or without family and friends, of traveling and encountering new people and/or old acquaintances, of dealing with diverse issues both positive and negative, and hopefully, of learning more about ourselves along the way, as the characters in this analysis have suggested. But it is the multiplicity and diversity of these stories that are valuable because they encourage us to access a number of stories and perspectives – my expectation of the diaspora fiction and analysis in this dissertation.

Yet, in addition to this opportunity for readers to encounter more than the "single story," authors of such literary works theorize and provide critique as well. The literature, then, serves in part as a commentary about the world around us – some of it very direct and easily visible and others more subtle and imbedded in the literature, awaiting a keen eye and ear to recognize it. Christian, for example, demonstrates this in her analysis of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Sherley Anne Williams' *Dessa Rose*, through which she examines "story" and "voice" as elements of agency for black women during slavery. Hazel V. Carby provides a similar perspective of fiction in her critical cultural and historical analysis of black women's writing, including that of

Pauline Hopkins, Frances Harper, and Nella Larsen, among others.[144] Gourdine, Reyes, and Alexander each point to the critical cultural, social, political, and historical interventions that take place within black women's fiction and through our analyses of such texts; specifically, Reyes and Alexander do this using black mothers and motherhood as a point of entry and exploration into black women's writing.[145] In this way, literature provides us with a diversity of lenses through which to see and question societal practices and interests, their impact on others and on ourselves.

Throughout this dissertation, I have approached the literature in such ways – as providing insight, critiquing gendered and cultural representations, making connections, exploring the world and its relationships, and examining and theorizing about the lives that are depicted within it. Specifically, I have taken up a critical lens for reading black women's diaspora fiction as providing both the entertaining and the culturally reflective narratives that centralize black women's lives and their experiences within those lives. In addition, I have considered some of the implications of race, gender, class, and geography in these characters' lives, contemplating how the narratives might inform our understandings of black women's diaspora identity, at least in part.

Nevertheless, I have positioned black women writers and their African Diaspora novels as part of a fictionalized theoretical discourse about black women's diaspora identity. I situate the diaspora fiction as the site of both the authors' investigations of the world around them and of my own critical engagements. Furthermore, acknowledging the diversity and complexity and the expansiveness of this Diaspora and its relevant themes and topics, I have focused my inquiries on the presence and function of *maternal narratives* in this black women's diaspora fiction. I have concentrated on three

novels located in and of the African Diaspora – meaning that 1) the texts in their settings, narratives, and authors reflect and depict a diasporic location (temporally and spatially); and 2) the novels were written by authors who are diasporan beings themselves through their own identities, travels, and writings – because this multiply-layered diasporic perspective reinforces and complicates the sense of Diaspora as fluid and flexible that the authors use in their writing and creating.

In their diversity as black women of the diaspora, I contend, Brand, Condé, and Jackson-Opoku use significant and intricate approaches in exploring black women's lives in and of the African Diaspora. In conjunction, the *maternal narratives* provide an important point of entry for analyzing this fiction as maternity, and its accoutrements are prevalent throughout the discourse of belonging, identity, Africa, and ancestry associated with literature and scholarship on the African Diaspora. *Maternal narratives* are prominent stories in black women's fiction, as identities that the women characters take on (willingly or unwillingly) or that they oppose / resist. Moreover, the role of mother is invaluable in the context of Diaspora because it is a site of bodied knowledges that are fundamental to the creation and/or nurturing of generations and the handing down / recording and continuation of familial and cultural histories.

Various black feminist theorists and critics and black women novelists – positions that often intersect or operate simultaneously for some – argue that young black women gain a sense of identity and gender construction through their relationships with their mothers or mother-like (other mother) role models.[146] As much of the literature and scholarship on mother-daughter relationships and/or *maternal narratives* reveals, mothers typically pass down knowledge and values to their

daughters, which direct them in their decisions about who and what they are. The daughters, then, begin the quest or questioning of the self, trying to discover and create themselves, their identities, through adaptations or resistance to those values. African diasporic women novelists and their discussions about and depictions of women in relation to motherhood illustrate mothers and other mothers in situations through which I critique the experience and influence of mother(ing) as a socially constructed, gendered and raced category of identification and association with others. And just as the act of mothering becomes a social location for the mothers, it also becomes a point of identification for their daughters, the point through which a daughter's connection to the mother either promotes or hinders her sense of self. Thus, the mother-daughter relationship (or lack of one) has a significant impact on women's process of identity development.

As stated earlier, inherent in the concept of diaspora are the ideas of movement, migration, dispersal and quest. In diaspora fiction, specifically that by black women writers, the protagonist is often depicted as “in movement” or on a quest. The movement is associated with the main character’s (usually female in black women’s fiction) search for self or effort to discover some aspect of her identity that has been elusive: for example the truth about her parentage, a relationship with a parent (usually the mother), an awareness of her sexuality, the connections of ancestry, and/or an understanding of one’s past. The discovery or conclusion of any of these unknowns (either decisively or simply the journey toward discernment) reflects not only the character’s self-realization, but also, it echoes some of the confusion and conversations

taking place around identity within diaspora communities – for this work, the African Diaspora.

Moreover, in the fictional works analyzed, the quest for identity plays out as an effort to discover self through familial relations and ancestral connections, remembering past, and/or resolving conflicts, especially with maternal figures and in maternal contexts. As many of the featured characters discover, the quest concludes (at least as much as it can) when they re-construct the past into a more accessible format, acknowledging and/or confronting it in order to be whole, to find peace with(in) the self. Similarly for black women of the Diaspora, reconciling with and/or responding to a history of loss, of movement, of interlocking systems of oppression creates a foundation for understanding and examining diaspora identity. Ignoring the past and feelings of displacement leads to a denial of self or incompleteness,[147] in addition to an inability to move forward in determining new ways of thinking about and constructing black women's subjectivity and producing representations of black women's agency. At the same time, attempting to become something new or to ignore one's familial, cultural, and racial history leaves the characters feeling empty, as if they have lost something. Thus, a balance between the past and the present or an understanding of their situations allows them an acceptance and resolution of self.

This is, in an important way, how I see black feminist diasporic literary study as intervening in our continued comprehension of not only the African Diaspora, but also black women's lives and the many factors that influence their experiences across that Diaspora. Additionally, my dissertation adds to such scholarship in contributing to the discussions of the intersections of black women's identity, maternal discourse, black

women novelists' literary representations, and the African Diaspora. Definitely, the period between the latter 20th and early 21st centuries has witnessed the production of much scholarship on such interconnections; just the full texts alone are significant, including works where one or several maternal narratives are employed to examine gender and diaspora.[148] This prevalence of work produced speaks to the growing interest in these topics, both individually and collectively, and to the relevance of such concepts in the study of black women's lives. As indicated in the Introduction to *Bodied Knowledges*, my analysis continues the work already in progress, yet part of its significance is that it emphasizes *maternal narratives* (collectively) as a site of analysis of black women's identity in the Diaspora rather than examining 'mother" as a gendered category of identity or social condition. In other words, I use the depictions of the maternal as a means to exploring black women's experiences instead of critiquing or focusing more specifically on the meaning or expectations of mothering / motherhood. Implicitly, I look at the maternal as a lens through which to contemplate and interrogate the myriad facets of black women's experiences of cultural practice, voice, resistance and acquiescence, racial politics, history, economics, and of course, gender roles. Briefly, this is illustrated in several occasions throughout the novels, many of which I have discussed in the various *maternal narratives*. For example, Callie Mae discusses racial politics in terms of allowing her daughter Alma to participate in the integration efforts of the 1960s; Cordelia references economic success and social status as she contemplates marriage and family life in choosing (and later reflecting on that choice); Reynalda mentions this in the personal narrative she shares with her daughter – recalling the effects of her dark skin as marking her as a target of her childhood peers

and teachers who perceived it as a negative. Through my examination of "mother's voice" with Earlene, who recalls the racism of Jim Crow that took both her father's land and his life, and in recovering this past memory, she notes that she has recovered her legacy that she can now pass on to her children.

Furthermore, I center mostly on the means by which the black women characters express their diaspora identity and resultant characteristics that have become visible *after* their navigating colonialism, slavery, and other oppressions more than how and in what ways such political, social, cultural, and historical events impacted the women's lives and subjectivity in the Diaspora. In some ways, this is a subtle difference, but it is an important one. I acknowledge the integral influence of the events, but I am interested in how (the techniques used by) black women have created, adapted, or retained their identities in light of such changes and what those narratives disclose.

The *maternal narratives*, which here include storytelling (through letters, quilts, collecting pieces of kin, conversations, for example) and voice, memory, movements, interactions, and relationships, are a significant part of understanding such revisions or evolutions. As my literary analysis suggests, like the construction of diaspora itself, black women's identity in the broader sense of African Diaspora, as well as in the more localized representations of the Diaspora, out of necessity and circumstance is fluid, multiple, fluctuating. It adjusts as it crosses borders, literally and figuratively. Thus, the process of formation hinges on how the women choose to remember their pasts or create their memories, their stories, and how they choose to pass them along (or not) to their descendents.

For characters like Jackson-Opoku's Big Momma, this involves quilting lessons, recalling the ancestry, and telling and passing on family stories (including her own). Yet, for Brand's Marie Ursule, it means sparing her daughter to create a family legacy. In addition, it necessitates her looking into the future of her descendents' lives to satisfy herself that her efforts of slave rebellion would benefit their lives. And for Condé's Reynalda, engaging intentional forgetting and/or reconstruction of the past, which she minimally shares with her daughter and, in fact, seems to negate through an absence of telling, gives her a sense of agency in forming her identity.

In navigating the African Diaspora and identity, this analytical perspective emphasizes Adiche's point about the "single story" mentioned earlier.[149] To engage only one perspective limits our understanding of others and even of ourselves, and here, of the African Diaspora. Interrogating the Diaspora, even if focusing on one theme or concept, requires attention to the multiple voices that speak and the multiple lives experienced within it. Consequently, a key characteristic of this dissertation involves the authors and texts examined and the ways they are situated here. Specifically, I place Sandra Jackson-Opoku and her novel as the focal points instead of making the more well-known novelists the central writers and text(s), and I juxtapose Jackson-Opoku's *The River Where Blood Is Born* with more familiar authors Maryse Condé and Dionne Brand, though not necessarily their more familiar diaspora works.

On one hand, I made this decision based on the level of author engagement with matrilineage, women characters' voices, and character movement across cultural locations: Jackson-Opoku's text provides the more elaborate depictions. On the other hand, such positioning highlights the importance of Jackson-Opoku's contribution to

the growing fiction on and critical discussion of the black diaspora. Furthermore, I focus on Jackson-Opoku's novelistic engagement with the African Diaspora as a means of emphasizing the significance of this literary analysis as the *first* in-depth critical scholarly engagement with her fictionalized contribution to diaspora literature and critical scholarship. At the time of writing this thesis, no other such critical analysis has been provided. My expectation is that this work, in addressing the multiplicity of viewpoints and representations of black women and the experiences with(in) Diaspora, counters potential charges of essentialism while also expressing both similarities and differences among black women's diaspora identity.

Continuing the Maternal Discourse

In considering ways to develop or extend this research, at least three specific directions have become evident through my readings and analysis and through discussions with colleagues on black diaspora literature. First, expanding the number of black women authors and their contemporary diaspora fiction in further research would provide me with an opportunity to examine my theories among a more diverse group of black women's writings; additionally, it is a way to broaden my examination of *maternal narratives* as a collective site through which black women writers themselves explore and theorize black women's diaspora identities. For example, Marie-Elena John's *Unburnable* and Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* would provide a significant juxtaposition to Condé's *Desirada* through an emphasis on each novelist's treatment of matrilineage, movement, and identity within a specific three-generation grandmother-mother-daughter triad.

Second, broadening the *maternal narratives* to include, for instance, such tropes as mother-as-place and "mother tongue" means an extended and continued interrogation of the form and function of the maternal in black women's fiction of the Diaspora. Moreover, through such expansion, I make way for my dissertation to enter into conversation with current and budding scholarship of the maternal discourse constructed through cross-cultural studies of mothering / motherhood in the African Diaspora.

And third, including a comparative analysis of black men's diaspora fiction, such as with Caryl Philips's *Crossing the River* or *The Atlantic Sound*, would allow me to explicate similarities and differences with regard to gender in the authors' use of the maternal in creating and critiquing Diaspora and diaspora identity. In addition, mentioning Philips reminds me that my featured novels focus on the Diaspora in regards to North America and the Caribbean, with minor nods to South America and Europe. Potentially expanding the range with a few authors from these latter locations and would contribute to discussions of the ways we think about the African Diaspora, the places covered, and the extent to which matrilineage and voice play a part in black women's identity formation.

In closing her "study and narrative" (172) on "mothering across cultures," Angelita Reyes writes, "Our diversities, our ways of knowing and mothering continue. There are no conclusions – the dialogues continue" (172). I would add to this that our interrogations and engagements with diaspora and the maternal follow a similar path: Our use and understandings of these concepts, of these realities of experiencing and constructing diasporas and re-defining the maternal, as well as our imagined

associations as part of diasporan groups or communities and as part of maternal connections are ever evolving, moving, crossing borders, and re-forming as our needs for them and for understanding them do so as well. Thus, our efforts to understand and to explain and to imagine the links or intersections between diaspora and the maternal continue.

Taking additional cues from Reyes, Hartman, and Condé, I end with a personal connection to this project: In her analysis of mothering, Reyes explains how she came to understand more about and connect more with her own mother and her own sense of being a mothering-woman. Hartman begins *Lose Your Mother* by revealing that she went to Ghana in search of a sense of self and belonging that she hadn't necessarily encountered in the United States as a diasporan being. The expectation: that "returning" to the diasporic origin would bring her peace, understanding, and identity. The reality: those things will come, but not necessarily in the ways she expected or wanted. Hartman's return to "the maternal" in a diasporan sense raised additional questions of belonging, of self-understanding, of diasporan consciousness.

In beginning this dissertation, my goal was to engage with black women fiction writers in ways that I had never been able to do before, to explicate the ways that I believed black women's fiction speaks *of* and *to* the realities of black women's lives. I grew up with this sense of being part of a larger black community and, in that, an expansive woman-centered community. I have always been aware of and respectfully claimed an identity as a black woman, an identity that in various ways linked me to other black women. In my encountering and reading of black women's literature, I sought me – as part of a diasporan group. I continue to find her in her many shades,

sizes, ages, beliefs, backgrounds, experiences, families, and so forth. I connect across similarities and across differences. In doing so, I have experienced a renewed interest in my own family history and maternal relationships, of hearing the stories and the voices of my ancestors and mother figures, in learning about who I am and from whence (and whom) I have come. And as does Alma in Jackson-Opoku's novel, Marie-Noëlle in Condé's narrative, and Eula in Brand's text, I continue my quest into the African Diaspora, into black women's identity, and into maternal narratives as sites of investigation of black women's diaspora identity.

During an interview with Françoise Pfaff, Maryse Condé states, "To seek one's ancestors is to search for oneself. You seek an ancestor because you want to know yourself. Any literature is a search and an expression of self that always implies the knowledge of one's ancestors. Any literature is an attempt to portray yourself, to situate yourself in the world, to define yourself in relationship to others and to yourself" (73) – basically to place the self within a larger sense of community and history. In great part, this has been my goal with *Bodied Knowledges*, both for myself and for the interrogation and appreciation of the value of black women's literature. As a black woman of the African Diaspora, I seek a continued exploration of our lives as diasporan beings, thus a greater understanding of myself in terms of a larger and diverse community. Because of my exploration of black women's generational narratives and recreations of the Diaspora, I have been encouraged to learn more about my own family's genealogies and expanding my relationships with my women kin, to know more about myself.

NOTES

Preface

[1] Note: At this time, while I had read the works of various women writers, I was identifying and beginning to read the fiction of various women of color, especially black women writers. In previous academic settings, I had encountered works of Toni Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston, Margaret Walker Alexander, Alice Walker, and Maya Angelou, mainly; still, women of color / black women were in the minority. Although I had heard of Paule Marshall, Jamaica Kincaid, Octavia Butler, Michelle Cliff, and Gloria Naylor, to name a few, whose works explore black women's lives and the African Diaspora, I am just now beginning to read and analyze their novels, especially as diaspora works.

[2] See Trin T. Min-ha, "Mother's Talk," 26-32, specifically her reference to "mother's talk" as a "gendered construction of wisdom" (28).

[3] "Jennie Ruth Crump Award (of Meridian High School) – This award is presented to a senior girl who exhibits the qualities of scholarship, leadership, and good citizenship. Special consideration is given to students who plan to enter the field of education." http://www.mpsd.k12.ms.us/mh/cwp/view.asp?A=3&Q=277322

[4] Angelita Reyes uses this term too in her book *Mothering Across Cultures: Postcolonial Representations.*

[5] Similar to Alice Walker's discussion in "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens."

[6] See Martha Cobb's essay "Images of Black Women in New World Literature: A Comparative Approach" in Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, et al. *Women in Africa and the African Diaspora*.

Introduction

[7] See "Images of Black Women in New World Literature: A Comparative Approach." *Women in African and the African Diaspora*. Ed. Terborg-Penn, Rosalyn, Sharon Harley, and Andrea Benton Rushing.

[8] *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, 2007.

[9] See Nayana P. Abeysinghe, "Shattered Pasts, Fractured Selves: Trauma and Memory in *Desirada*," for a discussion of the interconnection between memory and trauma.

[10] In this study, my reference here to "across generations and cultural influences and geographical locations is meant to imply not only a bodied text that carries through a particular lineage, but also to suggest that experiential knowledge moves through those "marked" as part of the African Diaspora.

[11] Although I use "that body" in the singular, my intention is not to suggest a singular black body or black identity or a monolithic expression of black identity or blackness.

[12] Note: I vacillate at times between specific uses of African Diaspora, Diaspora, and diaspora; however, my references are to the African Diaspora, whether referencing a concept, an event, a place, or an identity.

[13] See Kim Butler's article "Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse" for an elaborate exploration of some of the multiple meanings, categories, typologies, and histories of diaspora. Butler explores these variations in her attempt to suggest a theoretical

framework for comparatively analyzing diasporas. In her text, she considers the impact of various historical, geographical, cultural, social, political, economic, and migratory events, as well as of identity categories like gender, sexual identity and race.

[14] Such black feminist writers include Hazel V. Carby, Barbara Christian, Deborah McDowell, Barbara Smith, Hortense Spillers, Mary Helen Washington, and Alice Walker. Feminist epistemology itself defines this practice of valuing women's experiences as sites of situated knowledge; I would argue that the diaspora fiction writers do this, in part, by virtue of the woman-centered nature of their narratives.

[15] At this point, there are numerous scholars and texts, published since the 1970s, that are examples of established critical scholarship that has contributed to this recovery and reclaiming of black women's writing, voices, and experiences. For example, see the work of Christian, Barbara Smith, Valerie Smith, Spillers, Carby, Cheryl Wall, Carole Boyce Davies, Simone A. James Alexander, Karla Holloway, McDowell, Gay Wilentz, Angeletta K. M. Gourdine, Angelita Reyes, Arlene Keizer, Patricia Hill Collins, including collected editions like Braxton and McLaughlin's *Wild Women in the Whirlwind* and Beverly Guy-Sheftall's *Words of Fire*. Again, fiction writers like Maryse Condé, Dionne Brand, Alice Walker, and Toni Morrison, to name a few, are included as both critics and fiction writers and poets.

[16] See Collins' *Black Feminist Thought*, specifically Ch. 4: "Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images," pp. 69-96, for a discussion of these stereotypes.

[17] I thank Dr. Amy Kaminsky, professor of Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies at the University of Minnesota and author of *After Exile: Writing The Latin American Diaspora*, for posing the question of whether concepts can have "the materiality of space" and prompting me to explain my use of "space" here.

[18] Although I explain this later, I will note here for clarification that Lola is a character from Sandra Jackson-Opoku's *The River Where Blood Is Born*, and Bola is a character from Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, both of which are novels analyzed in this study.

[19] See Barbara Christian's "'Somebody Forgot to Tell Somebody Something': African-American Women's Historical Novels." Also see Arlene R. Keizer's *Black Subjects: Identity Formation in the Contemporary Narrative of Slavery*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2004.

[20] References to "Diaspora" are to the African Diaspora; typically, references to "diaspora" mean it as a concept or idea rather than a particular geographical location or historical event.

[21] See "Introduction: Migratory Subjectivities – Black Women's Writing and the Re-Negotiation of Identities" in *Black Women, Writing and Identity*.

[22] Although speaking of Caribbean women specifically, Simone A. James Alexander indicates that it is a goal of women of the African Diaspora "to redefine themselves" (2). She explores this redefining through a discussion of the use and meaning of "mother imagery" in Afro-Caribbean women's writing. Specifically, Alexander focuses on differences of motherhood and mother-daughter relationships in terms of mother, motherland, mother country and between black women's real, lived experiences and those they depict in their writing.

[23] See Brent Hayes Edwards, "The Uses of Diaspora." Karla Holloway echoes this sentiment in *Moorings and Metaphors: Figures of Culture and Gender in Black Women's Fiction*.

[24] Similarly, Cohen and Butler indicate, in their typologies (or suggestions for creating typology) ways of delineating separate categories. But the categories – e.g. Cohen's list of cultural, labor, trade, imperial, and victim – are included in the features of the African Diaspora. See Robin Cohen's *Global Diasporas* (1994) and Kim Butler's discussion of Cohen and others in her consideration of diaspora and creating a theoretical approach to analyzing diaspora in "Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse" (2001).

[25] Condé's novel was published initially in French in 1997.

[26] This is Pius Adesanmi's term, which I explain later in the dissertation.

[27] Wilentz's description of "diaspora literature" resonates with Gourdine's explanation of "critical cultural fiction," both of which center and examine black women's fictions across the African Diaspora and which address the significance of gender and identity in diaspora narratives.

[28] Although I had already determined the texts to analyze for this dissertation, a later search around similar terms / topics resulted in the following titles: novels like *Stigmata* (1999) by Phyllis Alessia Perry, *Sapphire's Grave* (2003) by Hilda Gurley-Highgate, and *Unburnable* (2007) by Marie-Elena John and nonfiction like Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2008) and Stephanie Smallwood's *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (2008).

[29] In addition to works published in temporal proximity to Jackson-Opoku's novel, I looked for novels produced around the same time as Jerry Rawlings' 1999 call for and the subsequent rejection of dual-citizenship in Ghana for African Diasporans, which I mention briefly. Too, for accessibility, I chose texts that were available in English, even if a translation, as with Condé's novel.

[30] This idea of re-location includes Back-to-Africa Movements in the United States in the 19th century, reaching a high point of interest in the 1920s with both Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. DuBois; then, in the 1950s and 60s, the idea emerged again, contributing to a significant population of diasporan blacks emigrating to Ghana, Liberia, and other parts of Africa today, in search of what Saidiya Hartman and others refer to as something of an imagined homeland or motherland. It suggests attempts at a return across time and space, of sorts, to a place of origins, a mythical place where blacks of the diaspora might recover a lost or disrupted part of their identity. Also, Hishaam Aidi, Lecturer in Discipline of International and Public Affairs at Columbia, states, "Ever since Ghana became the first African colony to gain independence in 1957, it has held special appeal to African Americans as a leading destination for tourism and settlement. […] Nkrumah was a great proponent of pan-Africanism and African American emigration to Africa, and the trend became less popular when he was deposed in 1966." See Hishaam Aidi, "Ghana's 'Law of Return'" in *Planète Afrique: Articles on Africa and the African Diaspora Written by Hishaam Aidi for Various Magazines* Columbia U. 13 January 2000. Web. 21 August 2010.

[31] According to Doreen Lwanga, a Pan-Africanist and a Scholar of Citizenship and Security in Africa, "Ghana is the first African nation to provide the right to return and indefinite stay for Africans in the Diaspora. Under Section 17(1)(b) of the Immigration Law, Act 573 of 2000, the Minister may grant the 'right to abode' to a person of African descent in the diaspora with the approval of the President." See "Ghana upholds the spirit of pan-African citizenship" by Doreen Lwanga. *Pambazuka News: Pan African Voices for Freedom and Justice* n.p. 07 March 2007. Web. 21 August 2010. Additional efforts toward legislation and debate regarding this topic of dual citizenship continue.

[32] "Return" used here refers to the sense of feeling "at home" on the African continent in a way that is in opposition to diasporan peoples' feelings of often being ancillary and "added on" in certain "hostlands," in North America and Europe.

[33] I employed a bit of personal choice in determining the novels that fit the research criteria. While I identified authors like Walker, Toni Morrison, Paule Marshall, Gayl Jones, Buchi Emecheta, Edwidge Danticat, Condé, Michelle Cliff, Brand, Ama Ata Aidoo, and, of course, Jackson-Opoku whose fiction could be considered diaspora literature. These authors are from diverse regions within the African Diaspora, including the continent itself; however, I wanted to focus on Diasporan writers related to yet not centrally located in Africa, which meant not using Emecheta or Aidoo at this time.[33] Also, several authors were eliminated because their relevant novels were published several years prior to or after the most central text of this study and therefore outside of the time frame used to link the novels.

[34] To my knowledge, at the time of this writing, no other full critical scholarly work exists regarding Jackson-Opoku's novels. Book reviews, interviews, and a page on the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities Voices from the Gap website provide some critical discussion of her novel *Hot Johnny (And the Women Who Loved Him)*; the author page is located at http://voices.cla.umn.edu/artistpages/jacksonopokuSandra.php.

[35] Here, I intend to suggest that the migrations of diaspora can be past *or* present or past *and* present, or associated with *both* past *and* present at the same time.

[36] Occasionally, I shift between using the phrase or term "woman-centered diaspora narrative" and "diaspora narrative." In this work, the terms are synonymous, significantly because the focus is on women's narratives that highlight the point-of-view of black women's voices and experiences. However, in a broader project on diaspora fictions by black men and women, the attention to a "woman-centered" narrative would be used to delineate a difference from a "man-centered" narrative, thus pointing to the impact of gender in defining and examining the narrative structure of the works.

[37] William Safran's distinctive characteristics for identifying diasporas include the following, which Butler re-works a bit in forming her theoretical lens: 1) dispersal from the homeland to two or more locations; 2) collective memory / myth about the homeland; 3) people's belief that they are never fully accepted by the hostland; 4) an idealized notion of an ancestral home with hopes of a return (physically or metaphorically); 5) responsibility to the maintenance of the homeland; and 6) a strong ethnic group community (Butler 191).

[38] This is Gourdine's term, initially referenced on page 3.
[2] I explore the mother-daughter dyad as a maternal narrative, specifically through analysis of the mother-daughter relationship, matrophobia, and motherless, all of which I situate as categories within the dyad.
[40] As already indicated, the novels used here have significantly influenced my choice and use of this term and its meaning in this document. In addition, the diaspora focused literary analyses performed by Gourdine in *The Difference Place Makes*, Wilentz in *Binding Cultures*, and Angelita Reyes's *Mothering Across Cultures* and to some extent Lean'tin Bracks' *Writings on Black Women of the African Diaspora*. This is in terms of determining relevant characteristics and figuring out how to limit the focus of the analysis.
[41] This is Chinosole's term; see citation information in Endnote 15.
[42] Note: These references are often to provide context to the characters' lives, to mark time and place rather than to provide prominent plot descriptions or events. The historical rememberings provide background to the various characters' narrative experiences rather than serving as prominent events emphasized throughout the novels.
[43] Again, similar engagements with the maternal can be found in the novels of authors like Edwidge Danticat, Marie-Elena John, Walker, Morrison, and Paule Marshall.
[44] I borrow this term from Chinosole's "Audre Lorde and Matrilineal Diaspora: 'moving history beyond nightmare into structures for the future …'," in *Wild Women in the Whirlwind: Afra-American Culture and the Contemporary Literary Renaissance*, edited by Joanne M. Braxton and Andrée Nicola McLaughlin, Rutgers University Press, 1990, pp. 379-94.
[45] Nasta's use of "black women" here extends beyond the typical reference to women of African descent, thus suggesting the complexity of racial and cultural engagements associated with the category of "black women."
[46] For Collins's discussion, see her essay titled "The Meaning of Motherhood in Black Culture and Black Mother-Daughter Relationships" in Bell-Scott, et al.
[47] Discussing the importance of motherhood, of being able to have children, Gay Wilentz emphasizes this as key to identity for women in one respect or another in various African cultures. Jackson-Opoku points to this role-identity connection in *The River Where Blood* through the First Wife character whose value to her husband and to the village community is questioned because she hasn't been able to bear children. In the ways that women are viewed in these African and diasporic cultures, it is understandable that women might question their contribution to their communities. However, as Wilentz, Reyes, Collins, and even Edwidge Danticat in her novel *The Farming of Bones* argue and demonstrate, the role of other mother allows women to tap into that value of the maternal for those who desire it *or* to opt out for those who prefer not to take on the role of mother.
[48] The reference to West African philosophies and societies is important here, specifically in relation to *The River ...Born*, which originates and concludes in West Africa.
[49] See Reyes, Nasta, and Wilentz for an elaboration on this topic from a cross-cultural perspective.

[50] Essay titled "Images of Motherhood in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," published in *Double Stitch*, edited by Bell-Scott, et. Al., 32-41.
[51] See compilations such as Patricia Bell-Scott, et al.'s *Double Stitch: Black Women Write About Mothers & Daughters*, Cecile S. Berry's *Rise Up Singing: Black Women Writers on Motherhood*, and Susheila Nasta's *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean, and South Asia*.
[52] Carole Boyce Davies and Hazel V. Carby, as well as Alice Walker, write about the tradition of black women writers.
[53] For additional examples of such texts, especially in terms of the African Diaspora, see Sandra Jackson-Opoku's *Hot Johnny (And the Women Who Loved Him),* Hilda Gurley-Highgate's *Sapphire's Grave*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Marie-Elena John's *Unburnable*, Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and *The Family*, Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* and *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, and Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*.
[54] See Jürgen Reulecke's "Generation/Generationality, Generativity and Memory" in *Cultural Memory Studies An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* Edited by Erll, Astrid, et al. New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008, for a fuller discussion of "generations" and "generationality" indicated here.
[55] For instance, consider the way that issues with race / racism have limited and oppressed blacks in the U.S. from forced labor under slavery, segregation and subjugation during Reconstruction and Jim Crow, prompting the Civil Rights Movement, and more.
[56] I borrow this term from Pius Adesanmi's "Redefining Paris: Trans-Modernity and Francophone African Migritude Fiction."
[57] Adesanmi refers to fictional representations of colonialism in Paris and the contemporary impact of it on persons of African descent.
[58] References to this text are to the 2000 English translation by Richard Philcox. Also, for further demonstration of the significance of matrilineage and the maternal diasporic, see diaspora novels of other black women writers like Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow* (1984) (which, along with Condé's *Heremakhonon*, is one of the first and more well-known diaspora texts), Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* (1996), and Hilda Gurley-Highgate's *Sapphire's Grave* (2003).

Chapter 1

[59] Amy Kaminsky suggested this term.
[60] Note: The Cornell University John Henrik Clarke Africana Studies and Research Center Library (Africana Library) website (http://www.library.cornell.edu/africana/newsletter/feb2003.htm) explains *Sankofa*, which is the title of its newsletter, in its mission: "The word *sankofa* comes from the Akan people of Ghana (West Africa). It is derived from the words SAN (return), KO (go), FA (look, seek and take). This can be translated as meaning, 'one must return to the past in order to move forward.' The *sankofa* symbol is often depicted as a bird flying forward, with its head turned backwards. This is based on the Akan belief that the past serves as a guide when looking or moving into the future. *Sankofa* symbolizes the

mission of the Africana Library which in part is to provide a specialized collection which allows library patrons to study the history, culture, and social/political dimensions of peoples of African descent."

[61] The First Wife is a character in Jackson-Opoku's novel; she is the ancestor who begins the matrilineage explored throughout the text.

[62] Jackson-Opoku's narrative centers on West Africa as a place of origin for the matrilineage discussed in her novel.

[63] See Alexander's *Mother Imagery* and Nasta's *Motherlands* for more elaborate discussions of the differences between these terms. Also of note, in the last few years, numerous African Americans, including Oprah Winfrey, Chris Rock, and Don Cheadle, have connected with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in order to trace their ancestral heritage back to Africa, demonstrating a desire "to know from whence we come" that is re-surfacing once again in very particular ways among blacks in the United States.

[64] This refers to the incorporation of the maternal in the textual depiction and discussion of diaspora, specifically as maternal narratives that help to articulate or theorize diaspora.

[65] A similar philosophy for living has been espoused over the years by numerous persons with sayings similar to the following: those who forget the past are destined to repeat it; take heed the path of history lest it become the journey of today; we learn – by example, from our mistakes, from what others have done – and we seek to improve upon it. Thus, diasporans have long recognized the value of their pasts / their history on the present and future.

[66] As read here, the constructed notion of what Africa is and of African descendents connections to Africa were established initially to confirm the cultural value of people of African descent.

[67] Saidiya Hartman raises the issue of the difficulty of belonging and fitting in as part of her narrative in *Losing Your Mother.*

[68] Big Momma's current legal name is Bohema Bullocks.

[69] Name changes take place often in the diasporic novels used in this work. For clarity and continuity, I will use the names that the characters claim for themselves, except when the names are included in direct quotes. Therefore, Alma will be used in place of Allie Mae, Cinnamon will be used in place of Pat, Ama Krah will be used for Proud Mary, and Emilene will be used for Diaspora – even though this character initially named herself Diaspora, she maintains the name Emilene in the afterlife with the ancestors.

[70] Ama Krah escaped from slavery, connecting and living with diverse groups along the way, eventually finding her way to Illinois. Later, Alma's desire to know Africa is inspired by her relationship with Trevor Barrett, her lover and former professor, who has his own intense affection and interest in Africa – as an academic, government liaison, and personal interest.

[71] It's the unknown part of her own identity for which Alma must search in order to reconcile herself, the searching for "otherness" that she has often sought in lovers from other locations outside of the US.

[72]Brand indicates the movements of Bola's children, the ones who left the island, through the family tree provided at the beginning of the novel, as well as in the narrative itself.
[73] See *Reclaiming Home, Remembering Motherhood, Rewriting History*, 164-86.
[74] These narratives involve such circumstances as Africans assisting with the capture of others on the continent and their being sold to slavers, transported across the Atlantic to work and reproduce as slaves and creating multiple diasporan beings with each movement and cross- / trans-cultural interaction.
[75]This reference to generations includes the last two centuries or so.
[76] A similar challenge to the notion of "diaspora" and Africa as "motherland": "Nowadays, the word family no longer had any meaning. Neither did the word 'tribe.' Or 'village.' Or 'community.' Or 'Africa,' come to that. For Africa was no longer Africa. It had become the realm of darkness and vultures" (Condé 244).

Chapter 2

[77]For an in-depth discussion of "literary quilting" in reading the diaspora in black women's literature, specifically in regards to demonstrating intertexuality among black women's diaspora texts, see Lean'tin Bracks' "Chapter 1 – Literary Quilting: History, Language, and Identity in Women's Diasporic Texts," 3-28.
[78]In addition, it reflects the passage provided earlier in the novel (see page 16) that describes the fluctuation of the diaspora. I use parts of the passage in "Ch. 1 – Matrilineal Diaspora" of this dissertation as well.
[79]As mentioned in the previous chapter, I borrowed this term from Pius Adesanmi, who uses it to analyze diaspora in black men's fictions about Paris, and re-vamped it to address discussions of diaspora in black women's fiction.
[80] Carole Boyce Davies references this in her introduction to *Black Women, Writing, and Identity* (17).
[81] Examples in Jackson-Opoku's work that would fit her, though most are discussed in other chapters, include mother-daughter relationships of Lola and Cinnamon, Callie Mae and Alma, and Abena Anim and Ama Krah.
[82]Cordelia comes from humble beginnings; she aborts her first pregnancy and leaves home to achieve a better life than that of her own mother.
[83] See McDowell, *"The Changing Same": Black Women's Literature, Criticism, and Theory*, chapter 9.
[84] Ranélise saved Reynalda, at the time a pregnant teenager, from drowning herself over her situation.
[85]Nina's mother died, leaving her to live with her cousins, one of whom raped her; Reynalda was the result of that rape, and as a result, the mother-daughter relationship is strained, yet when Reynalda accuses her mother's lover of raping her and accuses her mother, Nina, of being complicit in this attack, the mother-daughter relationship is severed. (Note: In Nina's version of the story, she claims that Reynalda was jealous of her mother's relationship and was a devious girl who made the accusations, hoping to benefit herself and to cover up her own sexual relationship with someone else.)

[86]See Jackson-Opoku's *The River Where Blood Is Born*. This severing is notable when Ama Krah meets her daughters in the Afterlife. Emilene doesn't know her birth mother because she was taken from Ama Krah as they exited the Sable Venus, the slave ship that brought them from the shores of West Africa to the shores of the New World. Zubena Creek, Ama Krah's second daughter who was born in America and who died at a young age while giving birth to her own child, doesn't recognize Ama Krah as her mother because she never heard her mother speak – Ama Krah's tongue was split as punishment for attempting to run away from a slave owner.

[87]This example holds for the relationship between Earlene and her father in *River Where Blood*; he becomes the sole caregiver for Earlene after his wife, her mother (Big Momma), abandons them, choosing not to follow them to a new city.

[88]The translation I have for this French phrase states, "which may pose a pinch of salt on (his) language," which I understand to mean, "someone to put a pinch of salt on her tongue," thus to ease the bitter taste in her mouth, to ease the pain of loss and betrayal, the negative experiences.

[89]"*Issei* Mothers' Silence, *Nisei* Daughters' Stories: The Short Fiction of Hisaye Yamamoto." Although referring to Asian American women, the idea applies here to black women's interactions and / with defining matrophobia.

[90]Several authors analyzing black or African Diasporan mother-daughter relationships, including Alexander, Davies, Christian, Chinosole, Collins, Fultz and Wilentz, discuss this idea of the mother as the model and/or first teacher for her children. Through the mother, children are socialized to their national, cultural, and faith-based behaviors. Consequently, this puts a substantial pressure on mothers / mother figures to make sure that they impart the proper information to their children, for the benefit of the family and the community.

[91]For more discussion on this topic of matrophobia, see Sugiyama, Helena Grice, and Lisa D. McGill.

[92]Also, this is defined as "matrophobia" and referenced in Rich's *Of Woman Born*.

[93] Kaminsky makes this observation in regards to her analysis of Maria Lugones's discussion of motherhood, specifically her relationship with and perception of her own mother in "Playfulness, 'World'-Traveling, and Loving Perception." See Amy K. Kaminsky, *After Exile: Writing The Latin American Diaspora*.

[94]This reference is to the difficult cross-cultural connections between Asian (American) mothers and their Asian American daughters.

[95]Since I discuss Marie-Noëlle earlier, I do not discuss her as one of the additional examples of matrophobia.

[96]Kwesi is the boy-turned-young man who assists Ama Krah and Abena Anim in acquiring food. Like Abena and her daughter, Kwesi's mother and her children have been banished from their village. Despite living in proximity to one another and experiencing the same isolation from the community, neither woman wants or attempts to form a community with the other. Instead, the two families live on opposite sides of the river, and the mothers remain antagonistic toward one another.

Chapter 3

[97] From mother-daughter relationships and conflicts, to grandmothers and adoptive mothers as role models and teachers, older sisters as maternal beings to young, teen mothers and older mother figures, and living and non-living mothers to lands / places referred to as "motherlands" or "mother countries." the literary images are vast.

[98] Reyes discusses this phrase in reference to Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*.

[99] Read white.

[100] See Karla F.C. Holloway, *Moorings & Metaphors: Figures of Culture and Gender in Black Women's Literature*, 1992.

[101] This is Patricia Hill Collins' term to explain the labeling of black women who engaged in multiple tasks of caregiving, providing for, etc. in ways that seemed above and beyond the "normal" or typical abilities of women. She states, "The controlling image of the 'superstrong Black mother' praises Black women's resiliency in a society that routinely paints us as bad mothers. Yet, in order to remain on their pedestal, these same superstrong Black mothers must continue to place their needs behind those of everyone else, especially their sons" (Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* 174).

[102] Note that these particular images are ones associated with stereotypical representations of motherhood, most specifically related to African American women. However, in areas that engage race and/or racial labels in identifying persons, these references can extend to a more diversified notion of "black women." In addition, there are other negative images that tend to focus on (black) women's sexuality, such as the jezebel or whore, project or ghetto girl, for example. In most cases, class is also a factor.

[103] See *Black Feminist Thought*.

[104] Of course, this doesn't include contemporary scholarship into the MILF (Mother I'd Like to Fuck) character that particularly positions the mother (a particularly looking kind of mother who is visible as a sexual being outside of or, in some cases, because of her role as mother. And it is often her physical appearance (which doesn't necessarily read as maternal or as having given birth) that positions her to be taken up in this way. It appears she is sexualized first and then maternalized.

[105] See Kubitschek and James, as well as Collins and Reyes.

[106] Similarly, knowing the circumstances under which Earlene's birth mother (Big Momma) chose not to follow her husband and daughter, readers are better able to view her as an agent in her decisions about mothering.

[107] Another example here might be that, potentially following in her mother's example, Cinnamon implies that she might not be the mothering type either, commenting, "'After all, I am my mother's daughter'" (308), meaning that she's "not made to mother."

[108] Menopause is understood as a time when a woman is past the age of procreation and therefore, as celebrated here, as a time when women are empowered.

[109] Later, in confirming her lack of a desire to have children, Marie-Noelle exemplifies this feeling as well. Neither Reynalda nor Marie-Noëlle had positive influences to teach them about motherhood, and therefore, they do not believe themselves capable of carrying out the gendered role.

[110] Black feminist scholars Alexander, Bell-Scott, Berry, Collins, James, Reyes, for example, point to this modeling, often referencing the diversity of mothers or mother

figures (also called mothering-women or other mothers / othermothers, and othermother communities) that provide valuable gender socialization within their communities and families.

[111] Simon Winfield becomes the sole caregiver for his daughter Earlene when his wife, Bohema / Big Momma, decides not to go with or follow them when they move away from Cairo, IL.

[112] See Missy Dehn Kubitschek, *Claiming the Heritage: African American Women Novelists and History*, 1991.

[113] I discuss this idea of "sankofa" in Ch. 1 – Matrilineal Diaspora.

[114] Ultimately, mothers' expression of sexual desire requires that they separate themselves in some way from their children (especially daughters who, in the Diaspora narrative context expressed throughout this dissertation, more readily view themselves in relation to their mothers, using mothers as a guide by which to create their own identities – as similar to or different from). What does it mean that these women must be positioned as one or the other but never (completely) both?

[115] Earlene's story is provided between pages 96-109.

[116] Emilene recounts this experience on page 74.

[117] Kubitschek also suggests that a "tribal historical experience" (7) is influential to black women's identities.

Chapter 4

[118] By "memoried text," I mean simply that the texts, the speakers' stories, draw from their memories or that the memories inform the stories and their telling.

[119] Another example, this woman-centered generational history lesson, of sorts, is visible in "Nina's Tale" in *Desirada*, a chapter in which Nina indicates a matrilineage that extends beyond Nina, Reynalda, and Marie-Noëlle – the three characters emphasized in the novel.

[120] Generally, I borrow the term mothering-women from Reyes; however, my use of the term is intended to highlight the complexity of mother's / othermothers' lives, thus having identities as women as well as identities as mothers. While the two often intersect, they are not synonymous.

[121] Interestingly, in a way, the "mothers" still speak through their daughters in the sense that the authors themselves act as both/and the literary and Diaspora daughters, while also being positioned as mothers / maternal figures telling the stories of d/Diaspora that readers encounter in the novels.

[122] Earlene's father created a little river for her on their property to give her access to the water and to discourage her from going near the bigger river that posed a bigger risk of drowning for the little girl.

[123] See the "Introduction" to Joseph E. Holloway, ed. *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: IU Press, 1990. Holloway defines "Africanisms" as "those elements of culture found in the New World that are traceable to an African origin" (ix); also referred to as "African survivals" (x). Essays in the overall text examine Africanisms present and visible in the Americas in history, religion, culture, the arts, and language.

[124] We see the idea of memory as tactile or tactile elements as inspiring memory during the quilting lessons and discussions between Alma and Big Momma. Specifically, Big Momma indicates the pieces of cloth and things she uses in quilting that point to the experiences of different family members. Additionally, she recalls that her great grandmother Proud Mary (née Ama Krah) used to keep pieces (buttons, cloth scraps, baby teeth, etc.) of things to remind her of the various family members (Jackson-Opoku 152).

[125] Note: Ananse does the same with the threads he uses to create a garment for the Queen Mother; however, since he is not positioned as one of the mother figures, I do not include him here.

[126] For the full letter, see pages 66-76 in Jackson-Opoku's novel.

[127] Although the entire novel is based on the idea of telling the stories of the nine daughters, the stories and storytelling that's relevant to this chapter emphasize mothers having and using their voices, speaking for themselves.

[128] See Jackson-Opoku, pp. 96-109 for Earlene's story about her family, her little river, and her re-encounter with her past.

[129] The slave narratives or acknowledgement discoveries of by Africans and African descendents around the world are evidence of this.

[130] Callie Mae's letter to Alma is given on pages 206-13 in Jackson-Opoku's novel.

[131] The differences are detailed more specifically throughout the letter in which Emilene, still speaking as Mother Mercy, writes of the lowly, sexualized, and uncultured character of the workers. On one hand, Emilene does this in convincing Eleanor not to journey to Barbados; however, on the other hand, the comments seem not too different from Emilene's own thinking, a result of having been raised away from those on the plantation that more closely mirrored her in complexion and ancestry. As I've indicated already in this dissertation, Emilene appears situated somewhere between both groups yet never able to find clear acceptance with either group.

[132] While Emilene may not know of or make the distinction herself of the Queen Mother, the River Where Blood Is Born, and Africa as somewhat synonymous in this novel and so to her heritage, thanks to Nanny Griggs, she is aware not only of her African heritage, but also of the fact that she comes from a particular matrilineage, one represented by the faded *kente* cloth she is given as a reminder of her birth mother from whose arms she was taken as a baby.

[133] See pages 62-64.

[134] Interestingly, the idea of naming and identity is prevalent throughout Jackson-Opoku's text; Ama Krah mentions losing herself through not being able to name herself; other's refer to her as Proud Mary, Saltwater woman, etc. because she is unable to tell them her name. However, when Allie Mae changes her name to Alma, Pat changes her name to Cinnamon, and Lula Mae changes her name to Lola, the alterations are about chosen expressions of self; the women choose names that they believe better reflect their personalities and overall identities, thus demonstrating agency in how they wish to be identified and voice in expressing themselves (even in the reasons for choosing to change their names).

[135] See pages 86-90, 182-83 in Jackson-Opoku's novel for discussions of Ama Krah's lost voice and its effect on her.
[136] For examples, see Jackson-Opoku, pages 164 and 275.
[137] The "momma jones" refers to having a yearning for something, particularly to mother others and be a mother (123).
[138] The letter that Eula writes to her mother is located on pages 227-58.
[139] Although Callie Mae's letter is from mother to daughter, the disclosing that takes place in the letter is somewhat similar to the way that Callie Mae is able to share diverse aspects of her life with Alma that she might not have done otherwise.
[140] I discuss this in chapter one on "Matrilineal Diaspora."
[141] See pages 166 -67 in Condé's novel.
[142] While the first two novels demonstrate more of an intentional passing on of information between generations, especially Jackson-Opoku's novel, in Condé's text, the sharing of family history seems to serve a different purpose than that associated with the mother-daughter dyad / grandmother-mother-daughter triad. Yes, Nina passes on to Marie-Noëlle family history, a history that goes back to Marie-Noëlle's great-great grandmother and one that she had not and probably would not have gotten from her mother Reynalda – it's not even clear whether Reynalda knows this information for herself. However, Nina's intent with telling her story seems directed more toward contradicting her daughter, providing an "accurate" account of Reynalda's personality and childhood, and so "clearing" her own name rather than sharing family heritage and thus contributing to Marie-Noëlle's self-development. Nevertheless, hearing "Nina's Story" in addition to Reynalda's allows Marie-Noëlle to understand her heritage, her mother, and herself and to realize that the "truth" about her paternity and her parentage overall has become somewhat subjective, based on the point-of-view of the person telling the tale.

Postscript

[143] The fictional and personal narratives refer to the fictions of Kincaid, Danticat, Brand, and Jackson-Opoku and the personal writings of Walker and McClaurin, which include works analyzed in the dissertation and those merely referenced.
[144] See "'Somebody Forgot to Tell Somebody Something': African American Women's Historical Novels", 326-46 in *Wild Women in the Whirlwind: Afra-American Culture and the Contemporary Literary Renaissance*, Joanne M. Braxton and André Nicola McLaughlin, eds., and *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*, respectively.
[145] See Reyes, *Mothering Across Cultures: Postcolonial Representations* (2001), and Alexander, *Mother Imagery in the Novels of Afro-Caribbean Women* (2001).
[146] For examples of critical literary analyses of black women's fiction, specifically texts that employ black women's fiction as providing critical cultural fiction that provides specific insights into black women's lives and experiences from historical, political, and cultural perspectives, see, for example, Carby, Christian, Gourdine, Keizer, and Reyes, Wall, and Wilentz. See Elizabeth Brown-Guillory's *Women of Color: Mother-Daughter Relationships in 20th-Century Literature* (1996) and Reyes texts and Caroline Rody's

The Daughters Return, all of which provide cross-cultural analyses, and Alexander's work, which focuses on Afro-Caribbean women, for more elaborated contemporary discussions of black women's mother-daughter relationships and the construction of identity.

[147] See Verena Theile and Marie Drews' "Introduction – African American and Afro-Caribbean Women Writers: Writing, Remembering, and 'Being Human in the World'" in their edited collection of essays titled *Reclaiming Home, Remembering Motherhood, Rewriting History: African American and Afro-Caribbean Literature in the Twentieth Century*, 164-86. Using Toni Morrison's *Paradise* as a point of entry and framework for discussing the interconnections of home, motherhood, and history and black women's identity. Relevant to this point of my discussion, the authors address the intentional amnesia or forgetfulness often used in black women's storytelling (of the past and of the present); they contend that the women as mothers in their own homes and of their communities tended to censor the narratives told to their children about the days of slavery, preferring not to burden the children with such oppressive histories. In other words, the women perceived such historical tragedies of African Americans and African Caribbeans as having the potential to limit the children's sense of self and personal development rather than seeing it as a testament to the agency and progress of blacks in the diaspora.

[148] The 1990s and early 2000s witnessed an affluence of publications written mostly by black women writers and focusing on black women's literature, many of which involve analyses with an eye toward the African Diaspora or an aspect of it. See texts such as Karla Holloway's *Moorings and Metaphors: Figures of Culture and Gender in Black Women's Literature* (1992), Gay Wilentz's *Binding Cultures: Black Women Writers in Africa and the African Diaspora* (1992), Margaret Busby's edited collection *Daughters of Africa: An International Anthology of Words and Writings* (1992) by Women of African Descent, Stelamaris Coser published *Bridging the Americas: The Literature of Paule Marshal, Toni Morrison, and Gayle Jones* (1995), Susheila Nasta's edited text entitled *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean, and South Asia* (1992), Carole Boyce Davies' *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (1994), Lean'tin Bracks' *Writings on Black Women of the Diaspora* (1997), Caroline Rody's *The Daughter's Return: African-American and Caribbean Women's Fictions of History* (2001), Angeletta KM Gourdine's *The Difference Place Makes: Gender, Sexuality, and Diaspora Identity* (2002), Angelita Reyes' *Mothering Across Cultures: Postcolonial Representations* (2002), Arlene R. Keizer's *Black Subjects: Identity Formation in the Contemporary Narrative of Slavery* (2004), Cheryl A. Wall's *Worrying the Line: Black Women Writers, Lineage, and Literary Tradition* (2005).

[149] See the talk "Chimamanda Adichee: 'The danger of the single story'" for TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) available on YouTube.com.

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