Emotion, Race, and Space in Contemporary African American Literature

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Contents

Introduction

Abstract This chapter brings an emotion-race-space framework to the study of contemporary African American literature. It argues that the framework can, on the one hand, be applied to interrogate the structural production of emotional pain at the confluence of racial and spatial discrimination. On the other hand, it can be used to articulate subversive intersections between Black emotions and Black geographies. The chapter situates the proposed framework within the different research fields that it draws on. First, it considers scholarship at the intersection of narrative theory and race and ethnic studies, paying particular attention to cognitive narratological research that explores emotion and empathy in relation to politically oriented questions. Second, it turns to a discussion of African American literature in the twenty-first century, the sociopolitical and affective contexts that it reflects and responds to, its readerships, and the uses of empathy for Black and non-Black readers in the present era. Third, it surveys geographic scholarship, the relationships between race and space, and the Black geographic imagination. In doing so, it explicates how crossing disciplinary boundaries opens up new ways of understanding African American literature, while simultaneously foregrounding the potential that the Black literary imagination offers for various areas of inquiry.

The only place that the Black female protagonist in Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* (2016) has ever known is a geography of unspeakable trauma that enforces racial terror, sexual abuse, and family separation. After escaping the plantation, the brutalities of racism take a different shape in each new state that the protagonist encounters, but they consistently trigger visceral fear experiences while crushing her hopes for freedom and dignity. Set some one hundred years later, Toni Morrison's *Home* (2012) follows a Black male veteran who struggles with ugly feelings of shame and guilt caused by racial as well as war trauma. The strictures of Jim Crow America make the protagonist enlist in the army in the first place, but his emotional pain is only exacerbated upon returning to the racially denigrating geographies of the country for which he fought. In Maurice Carlos Ruffin's near-future storyworld *We Cast a Shadow* (2019) the enforcement of racial ideology through spatial constraint, surveillance, and incarceration not only produces fear and grief, it also strategically incapacitates outrage. The novel's protagonist traumatically experiences at a young age already how dangerous it is to express outrage as a Black man in white public space, which makes him reject the emotion of anger altogether in order to safely navigate white supremacist terrain. Each of these storyworlds provides a window into Black emotional experience in the context of geographies of anti-Blackness and, in doing so, interrogates the structural production of emotional pain and emotional confinement at the confluence of racial and spatial forms of discrimination.

But much like earlier African American literature, these twenty-first-century narratives do not merely depict their characters as psychologically traumatized and scarred victims. Instead, they channel the tension between oppression and resistance, burden and beauty, pain and possibility, that is at the core of the African American literary tradition. *The Underground Railroad*'s description of the protagonist's care of a garden plot that once belonged to her mother and grandmother reveals that Black women have always practiced hope by reimagining the meaning and function of space. *Home* foregrounds how a group of Black women create an alternative kind of affective space that is free from any shame brought on by race segregation. In Sherri L. Smith's *Orleans* (2013) and N.K. Jemisin's Broken Earth

trilogy (2015–2017), the Black female protagonists mobilize their grief—caused by multiple intersecting forms of socio-spatial subjugation—as an impetus for acts of rebellion that push back against a world which structurally renders human Others as well as more-than-human forms of life ungrievable. These storyworlds reveal the emotionally liberating possibilities of Black place- and worldmaking as well as the revolutionary potential of emotions themselves as motors of transformation and opposition.

The central argument of the book is that an emotion-race-space framework, on the one hand, enables us to inspect the emotional harm produced by racial-spatial forms of oppression, while, on the other hand, offering possibilities for articulating subversive intersections between Black emotions and Black geographies. In the following pages, I will analyze how a variety of novels published in the twenty-first century index the violent link between race and geography through their characters' negative emotional experiences of fear, shame, guilt, anger, and grief. While these emotions are universal insofar as all readers, regardless of the particularities of their identity, can empathically understand what it is *like* to feel afraid, ashamed, guilty, angry, or bereaved, African American authors also entreat readers to critique the social, political, and historical conditions that have birthed the characters and their emotions. The close readings will examine how the texts use subject matter and narrative form to cue both empathy and systemic critique in readers. Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* (2020), for example, employs multifocal narration to invite empathetic engagement with different characters who wrestle with shame and guilt experiences that are produced by racial, spatial, as well as gendered forms of constraint, thereby prompting readers to contest the fixity of arbitrary in- and outgroup boundaries. However, the novel's passing protagonist also resorts to the shaming power of racism by enforcing an exclusionary white geographic imaginary and chasing an African American family out of her neighborhood. Even as this complicates readers' emotional and empathetic responses, the portrayal of an individual who perpetuates the violence of the very system that has traumatized them also reveals the insidiousness of white supremacy. Texts such as Bennett's *The Vanishing Half*, Ruffin's *We Cast a Shadow*, Percival Everett's *Erasure* (2001), and Edward P. Jones's *The Known World* (2003) demand that their readers engage with protagonists whose choices and affective orientations are morally ambiguous or even reprehensible in order to expose and critique the pernicious emotional power of the white racial and spatial imaginary.

Just as importantly, African American narratives in the twenty-first century illuminate radical entanglements between the Black geographic and affective imagination. In her 1997 essay "Home," Morrison asks "[h]ow to be both free and situated; how to convert a racist house into a race-specific yet nonracist home" (5). These questions are at the heart of the Black geographic project, which, as Katherine McKittrick argues in *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (2006), traces the tension between "[p]ractices and locations of racial domination (for example, slave ships, racial-sexual violences) and practices of resistance (for example, ship coups, escape routes, imaginary and real respatializations)" (xiv). McKittrick asserts that a dialogue between Black studies and human geographies "opens up a conceptual arena through which more humanly workable geographies can be and are imagined" (xii). In this book, I will read Black geographic practices *as* practices of emotional resistance and liberation. Directing analytical attention to the affective possibilities engendered by Black geographic imagination and practice, I argue, provides a lens through which to view the different ways in which Black place-, community-, and home-making facilitate surviving, healing, and thriving. The readings in the book will simultaneously interrogate how experiences of emotional pain act as catalysts for transforming spaces of exclusion into spaces of inclusion across identity categories of race as well as gender and sexuality. While emotions such as grief and outrage can push individuals to contest the very conditions that produced their suffering, I will also consider how hope serves as an imaginative affective resource for mapping ways out of domination and, vice versa, how alternative placemaking signifies an act of hope.

By investigating emotions as varied as fear, hope, shame, guilt, anger, and grief in African American texts that explore questions of race, identity, and geography, the book aims to contribute to research at the intersection of cognitive narratology and race and ethnic studies. Scholars such as Patrick Colm Hogan, Sue J. Kim, Alexa Weik von Mossner, and Stephanie Fetta have not only illuminated how affective and political imaginaries are interlinked in literatures by ethnic and postcolonial writers, but their work also helped explain why literary fiction plays an important role for our understanding of emotions. *Emotion, Race, and Space in Contemporary African American Literature* both builds on and expands this conversation by drawing on cognitive affective research, narrative theory, affect theory, African American studies, and Black Geographies. Using and combining insights from these fields, the book examines the diverging

narrative functions of emotion and empathy in relation to characters who navigate, suffer from, oppose, and reproduce white supremacist geographies, while simultaneously seeking to offer a deeper understanding of the complexities of Black affective experience in the context of historical and contemporary racial and geographic formations.

The remainder of the introduction will outline the different research fields and approaches at the foundation of the book. First, I will discuss research at the intersection of narrative theory and race and ethnic studies, paying particular attention to cognitive narratological research that explores emotion and empathy in relation to politically oriented questions. Second, I will discuss African American literature in the twenty-first century, the sociopolitical and affective contexts that it reflects and responds to, its readerships, and the uses of empathy for Black and non-Black readers in the present era. Third, I will survey geographic scholarship that addresses the importance of space to human social life and individual lived experience, the relationships between race and space, and the Black geographic imagination. In so doing, I will explicate how crossing disciplinary boundaries opens up new ways of understanding African American literature, while simultaneously foregrounding the potential that the Black literary imagination offers for various areas of inquiry.

African American Literary Studies and Narrative Theory

African American literary studies and narrative theory have long had little to say to each other. As a discipline emerging from and embedded in white Western academic thought, classical narratology worked toward generalizable explanations about the nature of narrative. Narratologists posited their claims as universal and universally applicable, even as their insights were drawn from a narrow corpus of Euro-American texts. Madhu Dubey explains that, in the United States, "intricate formal analysis … [was] usually reserved for the 'masterpieces' of the American literary canon," whereas "black literary texts have been historically considered deficient when judged by the aesthetic criterion of universality" (1994, 9). This is also why, save for a few exceptions, Black formalist scholarship did not engage the framework of narratology.[1] Instead of using theories that were gleaned from narratives predominantly written by white men, scholars including Houston A. Baker, Jr., Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Karla F.C. Holloway, Madhu Dubey, Deborah McDowell, Hortense J. Spillers,

Cheryl A. Wall, Aida Levy-Hussen, Mecca Jamilah Sullivan, and Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman have theorized form, and the ideologies of form, by engaging Black fiction, and in many cases Black women's fiction.[2]

However, postclassical incarnations of narratology have expanded both theory and praxis by reconsidering foundational concepts and moving beyond an exclusionary focus on literatures by and about white, cismale, heterosexual subjects. Whereas postclassical narratology still draws on the work of classical narratologists such as Gérard Genette, Rolande Barthes, Tzvetan Todorov, and Wayne Booth, it revises and stretches the meaning and function of narratological categories by bringing narrative theory into dialogue with insights outside of formalist studies. According to John Pier, "the integration of *context* into narrative theory and analysis" is the "single most decisive factor in the rise of the new paradigms" (2015, 338), and thus in the shift from classical to postclassical. Prominent postclassical narratological strands include feminist and queer narratology, championed by Robyn Warhol and Susan S. Lanser (e.g., 2015), Erin James's econarratology (2015, 2022), and most recently, critical race narratology.

In her introduction to the 2012 special issue of *JNT*, Kim first called for a "decolonizing" of narrative theory by asking the following questions: "How do minority and postcolonial texts challenge and change the shape of narrative theory? How can the engagement of the fields of ethnic and postcolonial studies transform narrative theory?" (237). Following this call, James J. Donahue, Jennifer Ho, and Shaun Morgan introduced critical race narratology as a scholarly project that seeks to "explore how race and ethnicity operate as foundational components of narrative" (Donahue 2017, 3–5). According to Donahue, narratologists need to take seriously Toni Morrison's critique of the notion that "American literature is free of, uninformed, and unshaped by the four-hundred-year-old presence of, first, Africans and then African-Americans in the United States" (Morrison 1993, 4–5). Narrative theory, then, has yet to examine more fully "issues of race and ethnicity, either as a subject in its own right or as a means by which to challenge [its own] methodological assumptions" (Donahue 2017, 2). The essays in Donahue, Ho, and Morgan's collection *Narrative, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States* set out to do this important work by analyzing race and ethnicity as constitutive of narrative form in a variety of texts by Oscar "Zeta" Acosta, Leslie Marmon Silko, Jhumpa Lahiri, James Baldwin, Percival Everett, and others.

Critical race narratology enables new ways of approaching race in fiction as well as new ways of doing narrative theory. Such scholarship can

also help the "enterprise of narratology to de-narrow itself and become more critical about the social, political and geographical situatedness of the positions from which it has previously analysed textual narrative forms" (2016, 218), as Greta Olson and Sarah Copland argue. Analyses of ethnic literatures that are interested in both form and sociohistorical context therefore create a useful bridge between narratology and the political concerns of race and ethnicity studies. This is exemplified by Brandon Manning's 2014 essay that uses a "black feminist narratology" to examine and highlight "the way contemporary African American women writers engage in wide-ranging community building in the midst of a text that still performs the satirical function of ethical and moral critique" (126). More recent examples in this line of scholarship include Donahue's *Contemporary Native Fiction: Toward a Narrative Poetics of Survivance* (2019), Jean Wyatt and Sheldon George's *Reading Contemporary Black British and African American Women Writers: Race, Ethics, Narrative Form* (2020), Esther Álvarez-López and Andrea Fernández-García's *Cosmopolitan Strangers in US Latinx Literature and Culture: Building Bridges, Not Walls* (2023), and Alexa Weik von Mossner, Mario Grill's, and my own collection *Ethnic American Literatures and Critical Race Narratology* (2022). The latter continues the project of critical race narratology in a variety of ways, but especially relevant for my purposes here is the scholarly work that combines a critical race and cognitive narratological approach with a focus on the emotional aspects of literary texts.

LITERATURE AND EMOTION

Since its emergence in the 1990s, cognitive literary and cultural criticism has steadily expanded. The interdisciplinarity of cognitive cultural studies—which seeks to "wipe out that erstwhile line that was drawn in the sand that artificially separates the sciences from the humanities" (Aldama 2010, 1)—has created new possibilities for the exchange of knowledge between scholars of literature and culture and researchers in the cognitive sciences, especially those working in psychology and neuroscience. The groundbreaking collections *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies* (2010) and *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies* (2015), edited by Lisa Zunshine, showcase the variety of approaches and subdisciplines that have emerged at the intersection of cognitive and cultural research, including cognitive historicism, cognitive queer studies, cognitive ecocriticism, cognitive postcolonial studies, cognitive disability

studies, and cognitive narratology. The field of cognitive narratology, which the book engages, has grappled with the relationships between universality and culture by using a host of different approaches and research foci to gain a deeper understanding of the relationships between narrative and cognition.

Of particular relevance for this project is scholarship at the intersection of cognitive narratology and ethnic and postcolonial studies, including pioneering work by Frederick Luis Aldama and Patrick Colm Hogan. Aldama's *A User's Guide to Postcolonial and Latino Borderland Fiction* (2009), for instance, explores how the fiction of authors such as Zadie Smith and Hari Kunzru "gives texture to specifics of time and place that nicely balance the particular (ethnicity, race, gender, and postcoloniality) with the general (English-language fiction) and the universal (our evolved and cross-culturally shared cognitive and emotive capacities as authors, readers, and all others)" (96). In *The Mind and Its Stories* (2003), Hogan takes in some ways a similar approach that identifies several universal narrative patterns that "are instantiated variously, particularized in specific circumstances" (10). Specifically, Hogan argues that what he calls "proto-emotions"—emotions that have developed for functional, evolutionary purposes and are thus biologically given (e.g., fear, anger, and attachment)—determine reoccurring narrative patterns cross-culturally. Beyond theories about universals of narrative and emotion, a general contention that guides Hogan's research is that emotions are central to understanding narrative, and, vice versa, that narrative is central to understanding emotions.

Hogan is not alone in this view, as evidenced by a host of publications that explore emotion in literary narratives as well as readers' empathetic responses to these narratives. Suzanne Keen's *Empathy and the Novel* (2007), for instance, uses insights from both narrative theory and the cognitive sciences to examine "fine-grained questions about empathetic responses to novels" (x–xi). Further scholarship that combines cognitive narrative analysis of ethnic fiction with a focus on the affective dimensions of texts includes, for example, Weik von Mossner's *Cosmopolitan Minds: Literature, Emotion, and the Transnational Imagination* (2014) and *Affective Ecologies: Empathy, Emotion, and Environmental Narrative* (2017), and Hyesu Park's *Alterity and Empathy in Post-1945 Asian American Narratives: Narrating Other Minds* (2022). The primary goal of these works is to enrich the study of narrative by drawing on emotion research in the cognitive sciences.

The interdisciplinary conversation also happens the other way around, though, that is, literary and cultural scholars who use a cognitive approach in their work often also seek to contribute to the study of emotion itself. This is the primary aim in much of Hogan's research on "what literature teaches us about emotion," as he puts it in his 2011 book of the same name. Using a similar approach, Stephanie Fetta's *Shaming into Brown: Somatic Transactions of Race in Latino/a Literature* (2018) analyzes the "problem of the soma and shame through Latin@/x literature" (xvi). Kim's *On Anger: Race, Cognition, Narrative* (2013) goes one step further, claiming that cultural and ethnic approaches to emotion are, in fact, necessary to counter long-standing trends in psychology concerning the systematic exclusion of both non-white people and racial concerns.[3]

Since the so-called affective turn in the 1990s, research in cognitive psychology and neuroscience has enabled an unprecedented understanding of how emotions operate in dialogue with both the body and the environment. Antonio Damasio's notion of "embodiment," which suggests that the human mind and body are inextricably linked, has been especially influential. Moreover, the mind and body's "embeddedness" in a physical environment centrally informs current views cognition and emotion. As Damasio argues, "mental phenomena can be fully understood only in the context of an organism's interacting in an environment" (1994, xxvii). Hogan usefully subsumes both notions (embodied and embedded) in his definition of cognition as "situated," which posits "that human mental operation can only be understood as manifest in bodily action and experience ('embodied') embedded in a social and physical context and distributed across a social network" (2018, 184). This makes clear that whatever is universal and preconditioned is always also externally determined by social and material contexts.

Psychological research would therefore ideally use diverse participant samples, while also contextualizing cognitive and emotional phenomena in relation to social factors, such as race and ethnicity. The reality, however, is very different. Joseph Henrich and colleagues' influential 2010 review states that "scientists routinely publish broad claims about human psychology and behavior in the world's top journals based on samples drawn entirely from Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) societies" (61).[4] In other words, while the universality of cognition and emotion is a crucial appeal of psychological science, broad claims about cognition and emotion are routinely based on a

limited group of WEIRD study subjects. In their 2020 query of approximately 26,000 research articles in psychology, Steven O. Roberts et al. further report that "only 5% of publications highlighted race" (1298). A central consequence of such practices is that the social factors that impact psychological constructs are systematically neglected and insufficiently analyzed.

An example of a study that addresses these shortcomings is Paul C. Rosenblatt and Beverly R. Wallace's *African American Grief*, which was first published in 2005 and reissued in 2022. The comparison between what they call Euro-American and African American grief reveals important convergences, suggesting that the existing scholarship *is* to a great extent universal even as human diversity is not often reflected in the study samples. However, as they work toward "an approximation to what will some day be that comprehensive picture of African American bereavement" (xvi), they call for a substantial engagement with Black subjects and their emotions. Such research not only accounts for the manifold consequences of systemic racism that produce grief in African Americans, but it also discusses how experiences of anti-Black racism have produced specific ways of coping with grief that are decidedly communal. In my analysis of grief in Smith's *Orleans* (2013) and Jemisin's Broken Earth trilogy, I will examine how intersecting forces of environmental and racial injustice evoke grief in Black female characters and how these characters create grieving collectives that enable individual healing and a contestation of ecosocial harm.

African American literature, as I argue throughout the book, offers fertile ground for investigating the ways in which emotions interact with broader sociopolitical contexts. Analyses of Black narrative subjects and their affective experiences not only contribute to and enrich conversations about human emotions, but they can also bring into focus the relationships between the universal and socially structured as well as the individual and communal. As the readings in *Emotion, Race, and Space* demonstrate, aspects that psychological research has identified with regard to different emotions, such as hope theory's agency and pathways thinking and anger theory's coping potential, are well suited for analyzing the operation of emotions in African American literature. The mechanisms underlying different emotions as well as some of the typical responses to them—for example, the fight-flight-freeze reaction to fear and the desire to hide produced by shame—therefore might be said to be by and large universal.

At the same time, a contextualized cognitive approach demands us to register that unjust racial and spatial practices unevenly subject African Americans and other minoritized groups to negative emotions such as fear, shame, and grief. These individuals and communities bear the *emotional* brunt of structural racism and inequality, which necessarily also shapes how they experience and respond to emotions. One aspect that the study of contemporary African American narratives illuminates is that placemaking is a central strategy for unmaking negative and painful emotions. Morrison's *Home*, for example, unearths how a group of Southern Black women create communal geographies that are free from any emotional pain brought on by racism and sexism. Since the traumatic consequences of anti-Black violence are both individual and collective, acts of placemaking that contest violence and transform pain into possibility are often also communal. Crucially, such narratives bring into focus the significance of both place and community for mitigating the effects of negative emotions and practicing emotional liberation. Therefore, they are key sources for an understanding of emotions that goes beyond the primarily individualistic theoretical models that we find in psychology in favor of a more contextually and collectively oriented approach.

While my discussion of emotions has focused on the interdisciplinary field of cognitive cultural studies, it is important to also consider the other strand of scholarship that investigates emotions in literature and culture: affect theory. Scholars such as Eve Sedgwick, Brian Massumi, Sianne Ngai, Lauren Berlant, Sara Ahmed, Judith Butler, and many others have produced a range of different theories of affect, broadly connected by a shared focus on affect as "*less* formed and structured than emotions" (Ngai 2005, 27, emphasis in original).[5] This stands in contrast to cognitive narratology's approach to both emotion and narrative as consisting of recurring, generalizable elements and patterns. Although some overlaps and conversations exist, scholarship tends to be situated in either one camp or the other. This book, however, suggests that cognitive approaches can benefit from an engagement with affect theory and its examination of emotion in relation to social power relations.[6]

Since the aim of this book is to contextualize cognitive and psychological understandings of several different emotions, mostly negative but also positive, and explore them in relation to the social production of race and space, affect theory's explicit interrogation of ethical and political questions is a valuable addition. Ann Cvetkovich's *An Archive of Feelings:*

Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures (2003) and *Depression: A Public Feeling* (2012), for instance, are important predecessors to my own book and others like it. Cvetkovich argues for a sociocultural rather than a medical approach to trauma and depression, which is related to cognitive cultural studies scholarship that investigates emotions as profoundly ideological constructs and, in doing so, speaks back to the structural neglect of race and history in psychological studies (e.g., Kim 2013). In *An Archive of Feelings*, Cvetkovich contends that "individual stories must be taken seriously as social stories" (2003, 124). Likewise, I argue that contemporary African American narratives must be taken seriously as social and historical as well as emotional and geographic stories. They are central to "the work of historicizing" (Cvetkovich 2003, 10), because they make possible an interdisciplinary project of charting affective experiences, racial formations, and geographic practices from slavery to the present.

By representing how historical and ongoing structures of race and space produce affective experiences, the novels that I examine not only challenge the presumptively private nature of emotions, but they also provide a felt experience of the ongoing affective legacies of the past. On the one hand, they demand readers to bear witness to the utterly devastating emotional consequences of oppression. On the other hand, they demand readers to witness also that, as Cvetkovich suggests, "[f]eeling bad might, in fact, be the ground for transformation" (2012, 3). The novels interrogate how Black characters mobilize emotions such as grief, fear, shame, and outrage to conjure and realize what Saidiya Hartman describes as "a dream of an elsewhere, with all its promises and dangers, where the stateless might, at last, thrive" (2007, 234). McKittrick has argued that "the ongoing geographic struggle of and by black women is not simply indicative of the adverse effects of geographic domination, but that geography is entwined with strategic and meaningful languages, acts, expressions, and experiences" (2006, xxxi). In the same way, the ongoing Black emotional struggle is not simply indicative of trauma, but Black emotional experiences are entwined with meaningful, empowering, and liberating place- and homemaking practices. While Cvetkovich points out that depression, melancholia, and grief may serve "as the foundation for new kinds of attachment or affiliation," she is careful to not engage in "pastoralizing or redemptive accounts of negative feeling that seek to convert it into something useful or positive" (2012, 5–6). This also crucially informs my argument about the ways in which Black characters, out of necessity, transform

pain into possibility to find ways to survive and "move forward by coming together around violence and despair" (132). As I identify and discuss how African American literary texts represent a range of different emotions as bound up with racial-spatial practices, I will therefore draw on affect theories proposed by Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, Judith Butler, Ann Cvetkovich, and Lisa M. Corrigan. Moving from a general discussion of narrative and emotion to a consideration of key terminology, the following section will introduce the concept of the storyworld that is central to my analysis of how African American authors construct fictional worlds that prompt readers' engagement with their characters and the broader racial geographies in which they are embedded.

AFRICAN AMERICAN STORYWORLDS

Many practitioners of cognitive narrative theory (and beyond) use the term storyworld for discussing matters of narrative interpretation and reader engagement. In *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative* (2002), David Herman first introduced the concept, defining storyworlds as "mental models of who did what to and with whom, when, where, why, and in what fashion in the world to which recipients relocate – or make a deictic shift – as they work to comprehend a narrative" (5). In contrast to terms such as story, text, and narrative, story*world* better captures that "[i]n trying to make sense of a narrative, interpreters attempt to reconstruct not just what happened … but also the surrounding context or environment embedding existents, their attributes, and the actions and events in which they take place" (13–14). Readers' mental modeling of the space in which characters and their actions are embedded, then, is central to their comprehension of and engagement with narrative.

When the narrated social space is explicitly racialized—as is the case in the storyworlds I will discuss—the different ways and contexts in which racism takes place centrally shape the mental models that these stories cue in their readers. Specifically, the narratives bring into focus the complex relations between characters' emotional experiences and the racialized worlds they inhabit. They do not only critique the violent nexus between emotion, race, and geography, but they consistently also foreground its alterability and point toward alternative Black geographies that provide space for Black emotional complexity, healing, and liberation. In addition to examining how the narratives prompt readers to mentally model

fictional worlds that critique the emotional consequences of racial-geographic oppression, another concern throughout the book is reading African American storyworlds *as* aesthetic models, that is, paying attention to how the texts model ways of being in the world, ways of occupying space, and ways of relating to in- and outgroup others.

Again, Herman's work on storyworlds is instructive. In *Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind* (2013), Herman argues that narrative engagement is based on two interconnected processes of "worlding the story" and "storying the world" (7). He describes worlding the story as the process by which readers understand, imagine, and immerse themselves in storyworlds as "mentally and emotionally projected environments in which interpreters are called upon to live out complex blends of cognitive and imaginative response" (Herman 2005, 570). Storying the world, on the other hand, refers to the process by which readers use fictional narratives to reflect upon their own world. Indeed, thinking about worldmaking has the possibility to connect narratology and African American studies more deeply. In *Black Aliveness, or A Poetics of Being* (2021), Kevin Quashie writes:

> What makes "imagine a black world" so necessary is the exemption of black humanity from our commonsense understanding, the world's lack of imagination for black being that is also its brutal enactments against such being. There is no outright assumption of black humanity in the world (the potency of "Black Lives Matter" as an emblem confirms this), and indeed black humanity has to be argued over and again. And yet we might suppose that every black text rests on a quiet premise of black humanity—that the text and its aesthetics *assume* being. (2, emphasis in original)

While Quashie contends that "there is no end to the condition of coloniality and captivity," his study of the worldmaking aesthetics of Black poems and essays emphasizes that "there is life in the midst and aftermath of those interminable conditions" (8). Building on work by Sylvia Wynter, Christina Sharpe, and Saidiya Hartman, Quashie argues that "black worldmaking" is important to Black studies' intellectual project to "reject the world of antiblackness and to organize, instead, ideologies of and for a world that could embrace blackness" (5). He proposes the term "black world" to describe an aesthetic imaginary in which "loss, pain, belonging" and "love, grace, healing" coexist (10). Drawing on both Herman and Quashie, my readings will explicate how contemporary African American storyworlds prompt a worlding and a storying of the emotional suffering

wrought by anti-Black racial and geographic projects, while also demanding a worlding and a storying of the heterogeneous and capacious Black emotional and geographic experiences that have always existed in and despite adverse conditions.

Given the turn toward history in African American literature in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, contemporary African American storyworlds have taken on an especially important cultural role as models for worlding the past and storying the present that has grown out of it. Reckonings with the history of slavery, in particular, have helped to initiate a broader acceptance that the wounds and unfulfilled hopes of the past cannot be ignored but must be part of contemporary storying projects. Jesmyn Ward, for instance, emphasizes that it is crucial to understand

> how inextricably interwoven the past is in the present, how heavily that past bears on the future; we cannot talk about black lives mattering or police brutality without reckoning with the very foundation of this country. We must acknowledge the plantation, must unfold white sheets, must recall the black diaspora to understand what is happening now. (2016, 9)

In *What is African American Literature?* (2021), Margo Natalie Crawford describes African American literature as "an archive of feelings, the tradition of a tension between individual affect and historical structure" (69).[7] As such, I argue, it is well suited for revealing the ways in which fear, hope, shame, guilt, anger, and grief are bound up with historically specific and yet transhistorically continuous racial-spatial formations. Both the ongoing systemic production of Black fear, grief, shame, and guilt—and the simultaneous expression of Black hope and outrage—influence African American literary production in the twenty-first century. It is therefore important to understand also the contemporary politics of emotion, race, and geography to which African American storyworlds are responding.

Twenty-First-Century Affective Landscapes and African American Literature

The emotions that are at the center of much contemporary African American writing—hope, fear, shame, guilt, anger, and grief—have also been politically central over the past two-and-a-half decades. The 2008 election of Barack Obama as first Black president inspired great hope and proclamations of the dawn of a postracial era. At the same time, the murders of unarmed Black citizens by white police officers and vigilantes

produced an epidemic of Black fear, loss, grief, and outrage. The killings of Black citizens—Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, Philando Castille, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and too many others—became strikingly visible on social media platforms. While concerns have been raised that the endless resharing of such videos only turns Black trauma into viral content, without serving the ends of social justice, social media has also provided a space for Black people and activists to express their grief and outrage, and to find new hope in community and organizing. Jelani Cobb (2016), Jenna Wortham (2016), Marisa Parham (2024), and others have argued that social media, and in particular Black Twitter, "has proven as vital a tool for Black protest as television was to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s" (Parham 284). The Black Lives Matter movement arose, following the highly publicized 2012 killing of Trayvon Martin. While the organizing happened in direct response to contemporary anti-Black police violence, it was simultaneously a response to "the gathered grief of centuries" (Goyal 2024, 16) and the historical denial of Black "grievability" (Butler 2009).

The public expression of grief and outrage was also a critical intervention in the Obama-era discourse around hope. The increased visibility of systemic violence against Black people, and the activism mobilized by it, posed a challenge to Obama's brand of romanticized hope, which seized the space opened up by the not-yet-fulfilled promises and hopes of the Civil Rights Movement. As Lisa M. Corrigan argues in *Black Feelings: Race and Affect in the Long Sixties* (2020), Obama's language of hope and possibility offered only "foolish optimism, grounded in the endurance of liberal tropes like the American Dream that mystify structural negligence and antiblack violence" (144). The ongoing systemic production of Black grief as well as the 2016 election of Donald Trump, which was widely discussed as a result of white fear and white rage in response to the election of the first Black president (e.g., Anderson 2020, Corrigan 2020), revealed the Obama-era hope as what affect theorist Lauren Berlant has called "cruel optimism" (2011). In the context of relentless anti-Blackness, an attachment to a fantasy of postracial harmony is cruel precisely because it is an obstacle to meaningfully addressing racial issues.

While the Obama administration peddled a message of hope, color-blindness, and unity, Trumpian politics have been defined by relentlessly stoking racial fears, shaming marginalized people, and casting them as always already guilty. As Vanessa Wills argued in relation to Trayvon Martin's death, white violence against Black people follows "'the logic of

black guilt,' a form of thought that erases the possibility of innocent black persons, so that any black person and especially any black man is read as an imminent threat, and furthermore, ultimately bears the responsibility for whatever harm might befall him at the hands of another" (2013, 227). The assumption of criminality suggests also that there is something inherently shameful about being Black. "When marginalized groups are constantly portrayed as dangerous and immoral," Koritha Mitchell argues, "anyone associated with them can hardly avoid feeling the shame that these characterizations are meant to impose, but shame is politically paralyzing, so targeted groups must equip themselves against" (2014, 143). The movement for Black lives, which reached unprecedented heights in the aftermath of George Floyd's killing in 2020 certainly also seeks to conquer the debilitating consequences of Black shame and guilt, as it fights to ensure that Black people can inhabit American and world geographies without apologizing, explaining themselves, and fearing that they could be killed simply for being Black.

Indeed, the Black Lives Matter movement has publicly reasserted the linkage between Black hope and Black geographic resistance, which goes back to slavery, and which has shaped Black struggles for justice in its aftermath. In *Black Feelings*, Corrigan discusses the geographical and affective politics of the marches and sit-ins during the Civil Rights Movement, which bears quoting at length:

> The civil rights marches, in particular, disrupted racialized time and functioned as both chronopolitical and spatial challenges to segregation. Watching huge columns of black civil rights activists and their white allies walk from Selma to Montgomery, for example, helped to demonstrate that black freedom participants could *move*, that is, *march* into the future with a new vision for American life. In fact, the march, as a movement tactic, put the *move* in *move*ment as a way of embodying a different kind of chronopolitics that moved from (white) nostalgia for a calcified past to a newly emergent, dynamic (black) future … While black pessimists railed against the political hope of civil rights to transform white feelings and practices connected to antiblackness, the optimism of the sit-ins and marches nonetheless focused on how they would disrupt and reshape racial politics and racial time, demonstrating "how patrolling the boundaries of affect can have authorizing functions in public discourse (Rand 2015, 174)". (Corrigan 2020 xxi, emphases in original)

Political hopes for racial justice were answered by the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, but "the fact that

the gains of legal citizenship alone have not ensured post-civil rights African Americans like Rodney King the benefits and protections of full citizenship" also caused what Salamishah Tillet calls "civic estrangement" (2012, 3). Tillet describes civic estrangement as "the paradox post-civil rights African American experience as simultaneous citizens and 'non-citizens,' who experience the feelings of disillusionment and melancholia of non-belonging and a yearning for civic membership" (3). This paradox was particularly pronounced during the Obama presidency, an unprecedented Black success story which inspired hope, and which was, at the same time, marked by an onslaught of stories about Black lives lost to racist police violence. Against this backdrop, the Black Lives Matter movement arose as a new chronopolitical and spatial challenge to the ostensibly postracial twenty-first-century U.S. American society. In taking up public space to express outrage against anti-Black violence, the BLM protests not only exposed the facileness of white liberal hope, but, through organizing and taking action, they demonstrated the power of Black hope as a *praxis* of struggle and resistance.

These political and affective contradictions have had a profound impact on African American storyworlds in the twenty-first century. In her chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary African American Literature* (2024), Margo Natalie Crawford contends that a "mood of melancholic hope emerges as both the privilege and pain of black middle-class subjects who feel that they are being invited into a space of citizenship even as they are constantly being reminded that white citizens police blackness" (33). Crawford describes melancholic hope as "the structure of feeling that may be the most apt way of understanding twenty-first-century African American citizenship" (32). This signals a rejection of liberalism's tropes of progress and equality, while capturing the simultaneity of pain and possibility which have always been intimately linked in African American literature. Yogita Goyal argues that

> African American literature in the era of the Movement for Black Lives would then perhaps display certain characteristics – fabulation, the search for transcendence, the reassertion of collectivity. In this vein, African American writers respond to the most urgent issues attending Black lives today – the search for sanctuary amid ongoing vulnerability to abuse, slow violence, and catastrophe. Powerful literary mediations on the power of hope, the possibilities of melancholy, loss, and pessimism, lead to renewed calls for new practices of mourning and care. (2024, 6)

Many twenty-first-century African American storyworlds document the emotions that drive practices of anti-Black violence, they interrogate the affective consequences of that violence, and they explore the possibilities for sanctuary and affective liberation provided by Black geographic interventions and communal ethics of care. These contemporary storyworlds are variously set in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, as well as in a distant future, but regardless of their particularities, they all emphasize the ways in which past, present, and future are interwoven, thereby prompting readers to engage in a multitemporal worlding of the story and storying of the world.

Emotion, Empathy, and Readership

What underlies the interconnected processes of worlding the story and storying the world is the emotional power of narrative: the emotions that literature represents and the emotional responses that these representations evoke in readers. As readers mentally model a storyworld, they imaginatively engage with events, spaces, characters, and, crucially, characters' emotions. This, in turn, prompts them to respond emotionally and to empathize with the experiences of a given character. Psychologist Martin L. Hoffman succinctly describes empathy as "feeling what another feels" (2011, 230). In other words, empathy denotes feeling *with* somebody.[8] It is a faculty that fundamentally shapes our engagement with real world as well as fictional others. The fictionality of storyworlds and their characters presents no obstacle for empathetic engagement. Narrative empathy even has additional benefits because literary devices, such as internal focalization, enable readers to inhabit other minds in ways that are ordinarily not possible. Moreover, empathetic and emotional engagement is not restricted to human characters but may include nonhuman environments as well (an aspect that is important for my discussion of N.K. Jemisin's Broken Earth trilogy).

As contemporary neuroscience has revolutionized our understanding of the human mind and emotion sharing processes, much speculation has focused on "human empathy's positive consequences" (Keen 2006, 207). Within the field of cognitive cultural studies, interest has been sparked especially by research on how mirror neurons, widely thought to be the neural basis of our capacity for empathy, are activated when we read a novel or watch a film. In "How Stories Make Us Feel: Toward an Embodied Narratology" (2011), neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese and

literary scholar Hannah Wojciehowski note that "[w]atching someone grasping a cup of coffee, biting an apple, or kicking a football activates the same cortical regions of our brain that would be activated if we were doing the same thing." That mechanism is also activated when we watch someone experiencing and expressing emotions, and when we read about the emotional experiences of others, real or fictional.[9] Such findings motivated a host of researchers to empirically test the power of stories to evoke empathy with and change attitudes toward marginalized groups. Dan R. Johnson et al. (2013), for instance, used an excerpt from Shaila Abdullah's 2009 novel *Saffron Dreams* to study its effects on readers. Their results suggest that "simulation while reading directly improved two forms of complex social cognition including empathy and prejudice" (2013, 594), that is, engagement with the text was found to evoke readers' empathy with and reduce their prejudice against Arab Muslims. Małecki, Weik von Mossner, and Dobrowolska (2020) used Alice Walker's "Am I Blue?" to examine readers' reception of the intersectional representation of human and animal oppression. Reddan et al. (2024) found that after watching the 2019 film *Just Mercy*—which follows a Black civil rights attorney's efforts to free wrongfully imprisoned Black men—participants demonstrated an enhanced ability to infer the emotions of formerly incarcerated individuals as well as increased support for criminal justice reform.

In contrast to this positive view of empathy, ethnic and postcolonial studies more broadly have questioned the notion of empathy as a beneficial concept. Keen, who has called upon cognitive cultural scholars to subject notions about empathy to criticism and empirical evaluation, sums up some of the central objections:

> To some feminist and postcolonial critics, empathy loses credence the moment it appears to depend on a notion of universal human emotions, a cost too great to bear even if basic human rights depend upon it. The fearful view of author's empathy as corrupting readers by offering them others' feelings for callous consumption leads in some quarters to the depiction of empathy itself as a quality that weakens humans and makes them vulnerable to others' cruelest manipulations. Narrative empathy becomes yet another example of the western imagination's imposition of its own values on cultures and peoples that it scarcely knows, but presumes to feel with, in a cultural imperialism of the emotions.[10] (2006, 223)

Such a negative assessment and rejection of empathy is a good example of the perceived incompatibility of cognitive studies and areas of inquiry that address questions of race and ethnicity.

In African American studies, specifically, discourses on empathy are closely linked to literary genres such as the slave narrative and the protest novel, which strategically used sentimentality to appeal to white readers. In his seminal 1949 essay "Everybody's Protest Novel," James Baldwin expresses suspicion toward the "wet eyes" produced by Harriet Beecher Stowe's anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) as well as Richard Wright's protest novel *Native Son* (1940). Baldwin indicts authors and readers alike: the former for creating Black characters who have little to do with complex human beings and the latter for their "self-righteous, virtuous sentimentality" (1955, 14). As I will discuss, Percival Everett's *Erasure* similarly critiques its Black writer-protagonist for reproducing stereotypical images of Blackness and Black rage as well as the readers and critics who celebrate his writing for its supposedly authentic portrayal of Black (emotional) life. In *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (1997), Saidiya V. Hartman further argues that "empathetic identification is as much due to [the reader's] good intentions and heartfelt opposition to slavery as to the fungibility of the captive body" (19). Empathy's fundamental problem, according to Hartman, is that it "fails to expand the space of the other but merely places the self in its stead" (20), thereby transforming the Black body into a "vehicle of white self-exploration" (26). Yogita Goyal sums up the above-mentioned critiques when she rejects empathy as one of those "Western constructs that are foisted on to the rest of the world in an instance of cultural imperialism" (2019, 66). Goyal highlights a problem that discourses on empathy, and modern human rights more broadly, need to confront, as she criticizes "the concern with the individual rather than with the creation of larger democratic and socially just institutions," which often "carries more risk than reward" (65). In short, many Black writers, critics, and scholars critique facile proclamations about the power of empathy, the epistemic violence of representations of Black suffering for the sake of (white) readers' moral education, the political erasure that can happen when, in the process of empathy, white subjects imagine themselves experiencing a Black subject's pain, the notion that empathy "means that we mean well," to use Ahmed's words (2015, 109), that meaning well is enough, and in relation to that, the fleetingness and political inefficacy of empathetic appeals in tackling structural problems.

From a cognitive cultural studies perspective, then, the task is to find ways to merge the individualism and universalism of empathy with a confrontation of larger social and political systems. In an article on fiction by Third World female writers, including Maxine Hong Kingston and Toni Morrison, Kim does exactly that when she introduces the term "double-layered empathic experience" to describe a form of empathy, which "is invoked not only through identification with the characters, but also through an exploration of the social systems producing yet limiting that character" (2015, 154). Kim identifies specific formal means that prompt readers to register the broader social structures and systems in which the characters with whom they empathize are embedded. This counteracts often-critiqued notions of shallow empathy with the Other, which insufficiently take into account the social, political, and historical conditions that produce the subjugation of marginalized individuals and fail to implicate readers themselves within these systems.

Such a contextualized understanding of empathy is central to the readings in this book. The African American storyworlds that I will discuss prompt readers to empathize with individual characters and to understand their emotional experiences as inextricably linked to racial and spatial formations. Crucially, these narratives set up a complex interiority for their Black characters. If we recall Baldwin's indictment of empathy, it clearly articulates the dangers of shallow, self-righteous forms of white empathy with Black characters who resemble a stereotype more than a full, complex human being. Baldwin's critique of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Native Son* can also be applied to popular contemporary narratives such as *The Blind Side* (2009), *The Help* (2011), and *Green Book* (2018), which are often invoked when the limits of reading for empathy in the context of race relations are discussed. In such films, and in the novels that *The Blind Side* and *The Help* are based on, white protagonists typically act as intermediaries who not only introduce readers and viewers to the plight of Black characters but who also protect them from racist harm. The central critique of these narratives is not *that* they cultivate empathy with Black characters, but that they do it *via* a white character. There is no reckoning with structural conditions. Instead, happy endings and moments of interracial harmony offer too easy and overly optimistic resolutions.

In contrast to that, the storyworlds at the center of this book open up space for engaging with heterogeneous and capacious Black emotional experiences, while also prompting an understanding of the systems of injustice in and despite which these experiences arise. Whereas most of the

novels that I will discuss invite readers to empathize with their Black characters, some also withhold and complicate possibilities for empathetic engagement, which is prompted, in no small part, by the unprecedented artistic freedom to portray complicated Black characters. Indeed, Edward P. Jones's *The Known World* actively disinvites empathy with his slaveholding Black protagonist who is invested in a form of white hope that violently precludes racial and spatial justice. Although Everett's *Erasure* intervenes in the discourse about Black writing, empathy, and mass readership, the novel itself is not particularly interested in eliciting empathic engagement with the protagonist. Goyal asserts that satirical literature by Everett, Paul Beatty, and Mat Johnson "acquires force in repelling rather than soliciting empathy" (2019, 33). By contrast, Black satirical writer Maurice Carlos Ruffin expresses quite a different view on empathy: "Fiction writing is an empathy generator. I've read so many books about experiences that are so alien to me, from literal aliens to Jane Austen. If I do my job well, people will read it, and they'll understand they're fellow women and boys and girls. At any given time, you have a duty to push for human rights, whatever those rights are" (Currey 2016). While satirical subversion is often more focused on disrupting unjust institutions, structures, and narratives than inviting empathy with individual characters, Ruffin's position suggests that empathetic engagement can also increase the affective charge of the dissent. In *We Cast a Shadow*, Ruffin both invites and deters empathy with a traumatized Black male protagonist who destroys his family in a desperate attempt to protect it. Crucially, these writers' diverging approaches to empathy are emblematic of the heterogeneity of twenty-first-century African American literature.

In the contemporary era, questions of empathy as well as readership are simultaneously connected to and unmoored from earlier traditions of writing for white readers *or* for Black readers. Historically, white readers were the primary intended audience of anti-slavery writing as well as protest writing, whereas Black readers were the primary audience of both Harlem Renaissance and Black Arts racial uplift writing. Toni Morrison, for instance, insisted on writing for African American readers specifically: "I'm writing for black people in the same way that Tolstoy was not writing for me, a 14-year-old coloured girl from Lorain, Ohio" (Hoby 2015). From a twenty-first-century point of view, as Sheri-Marie Harrison contends, Morrison "belongs to an earlier moment, related to the post-1965 Black Arts Movement, in which Black writers insisted on writing for Black audiences" (2024, 184). Since then, the unprecedented global reach of

African American popular culture, TV, music, and literature, alongside the rise of social media, has significantly "changed the dynamics of readership of Black texts" (Goyal 2024, 9). This is why, it is helpful to define the readership for twenty-first-century African American literature broadly, including both Black and non-Black as well as American and international readers.

In the face of the continuing assault on Black lives, white and non-Black readers' empathetic encounters with Black lives remain urgent. Although "there really is no mode of empathy that can replicate the daily strain of knowing that as a black person you can be killed for simply being black" (2015), as Claudia Rankine puts it, empathy does offer the possibility to engage both with the persistent dread and the systemic violence that produces it. Moreover, the growing exploration of the intersections between racial, gendered, and sexual identities has an essential role to play in providing a more capacious understanding of Blackness, which provides non-Black readers with possibilities to expand their "empathetic circle" (Keen 2006, 224). While white and non-Black readers have been the focus of discourses on empathy relative to African American literature, I wish to also call attention to the potential that empathy holds for Black readers of Black fiction.

Earlier, I mentioned several psychological studies which suggest that narrative empathy with Black characters has the potential to transform the attitudes of white and other non-Black people. Research in social psychology and neuroscience has also shown, though, that empathetic responses tend to be stronger with racial ingroup members than racial outgroup members (e.g., Xu et al. 2009; Avenanti et al. 2010; Gutsell and Inzlicht 2010). Indeed, the evidence for the so-called racial empathy gap has further supported arguments about the potential of literature and film as bridges of connection toward racialized Others. The higher levels of ingroup empathy also suggest, though, that African American readers, and Black diasporic readers, should be included in the discourse about empathy relative to African American literature. Empathizing on an ingroup level can provide Black readers with possibilities for understanding what it means to be human while Black—to understand that one's fear, grief, and shame are neither private nor personal, but that they are shared by many, because they are, on the one hand, profoundly human and, on the other hand, ideologically constructed. Moreover, empathetic engagement with fictional ancestors also makes legible the historical roots of present forms of Black grief, outrage, fear, as well as hope. However, since Blackness is

not a coherent and homogenous ingroup category, Black readers' engagements with Black writing cannot be limited to racial ingroup identification only. The more frequent inclusion of queer, transgender, and other nonnormative Black characters not only speaks to the diversity of Blackness, and the expanded intersectionality of contemporary African American literature, but it provides Black readers, alongside non-Black readers, with possibilities to expand their own empathetic radius.

While implied readership can vary from one text to the other, I argue that the novels considered in this book open up imaginative worlds that prompt the broadest possible audience of readers to engage empathically and critique systemically. I will consider how a variety of narrative strategies—including classical categories, such as narrative situation and focalization, Marie-Laure Ryan's cognitive approach toward reading space in narrative (2003), and Keen's theory of broadcast strategic empathy (2006)—are employed in service of the novels' political imagination. On the one hand, the various formal strategies used by African American authors are, as Donahue asserts in his study of narrative form in contemporary Native fiction, "universal and have been employed by a variety of authors, for a variety of purposes" (2019, 162). On the other hand, form itself can "enhance the cultural and political issues addressed by the narratives" (162). My readings will show that African American storyworlds are not only marked by thematic heterogeneity, but also by a wide variety of formal choices that contribute to the texts' interrogation of relationships between emotion, race, and different forms of geographic worldmaking.

Space, Race, and Black Geographies

Much like narrative itself, space is a construction. One that significantly impacts social life and lived experience. The work of Marxist geographers such as David Harvey, Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja, and Doreen Massey fundamentally challenged the idea of space as a mere background and container to life, arguing instead that space is socially, historically, and ideologically produced.[11] Such an understanding that space never just *is* raises a set of broader questions about spatial access and inequality: How does what Edward W. Said called "the struggle over geography" (1994, 6) play out? Who gets to occupy space and in what way? Who has a privileged literal and symbolic place in society and who is rendered placeless?

In contrast to these questions and concerns, scholars of human geography, such as Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph, focus on "experiential space"

(Tuan 1977, 7) and individual emotional relationships to place. Foundational concepts include, for instance, topophilia which is "the [positive] affective bond between people and place or setting" (Tuan 1990, 4) and its opposite, topophobia, which signifies a "repulsion by place" (Relph 1996, 912). This line of geographic inquiry thus emphasizes the need for "a more human-centered and empathetic understanding of the lived experience of place" (Hubbard 2007, 42) as opposed to a broader concern with the social politics of spatial production. The different foci of Marxist and humanistic geographic inquiry also reveal a general distinction between the analytical categories of space and place. Whereas the concept of space typically attends to broader social relations, structures, and systems, analyses of place tend to focus on individual and communal experience. It is useful to keep this differentiation in mind, while also acknowledging the ways in which space and place are inherently linked and difficult to keep apart. Throughout the book, I routinely use space as inclusive of place, reading individual place and placemaking as always already embedded in larger political structures.

These strands of geographic inquiry were undoubtedly foundational, but scholars working at the intersection of geography and race also critiqued their disproportionate centering in the geographical canon.[12] In "Reflections on a White Discipline" (2002), Laura Pulido calls out geography's insufficient attention to questions of race, which stems from "the overwhelming white composition of the discipline and its limited links to ethnic studies" (50). In their 2016 dialogue "Making Room for Black Feminist Praxis in Geography," Black female geographers Brittany Meché and Camilla A. Hawthorne emphasize that the historical whiteness of geography has limited "what counts as knowledge and … what types of research are considered rigorous and sound." As Hawthorne remarks about her time at the Department of Geography at UC Berkeley, "[i]t seemed to me that race represented the ugly underbelly of the 'geographical tradition' a dangerous concept to be cleansed from the discipline and replaced with more objective analyses of political economy." While such problems persist, crucial work is being done at the intersection of geography and race by Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Katherine McKittrick, George Lipsitz, Audrey Kobayashi, Carolyn Finney, Rashad Shabazz, Jovan Scott Lewis, Hawthorne, and others.[13]

One central concern is geography's significance for the production of racial hierarchy, confinement, and oppression. As Lipsitz notes in *How Racism Takes Place* (2011), "the racial projects of U.S. society have always

been spatial projects as well" (52). Black and other minoritized communities have historically been denied the spatial privileges conferred to whiteness: from the theft of Indigenous land, the forced migration of African peoples, and their enslavement on plantations, to compulsory racial segregation, mass incarceration, and environmental racism. The racialization of space through laws, discriminatory practices, and physical and discursive violence has routinely sought to keep some individuals and communities *in* place, while declaring them to be *out* of place. Today, race is still one of the most important factors determining both physical and social position in the United States, as Lipsitz explains:

> The racial imagination that relegates people of different races to different spaces produces grossly unequal access to education, employment, transportation, and shelter. It exposes communities of color disproportionately to environmental hazards and social nuisances while offering whites privileged access to economic opportunities, social amenities, and valuable personal networks. The lived experience of race takes place in actual spaces, while the lived experience of place draws its determinate logic from overt and covert understandings of race. (6)

By focusing on systemic racial oppression across different institutional spaces and its detrimental effects, Lipsitz's discussion addresses the relationship between race and the category of space.

In "Race and Place: Social Space in the Production of Human Kinds" (2003), Ronald R. Sundstrom focuses more on the intersection between race and place, as he describes the impact of racialized space/spatialized race on individual experience and cognition:

> It is almost too obvious to state, given the American experience, that race plays a role in the environmental and spatial cognition, as well as in mental maps of most Americans. Ghetto, barrio, slum, bad or dangerous neighborhoods, inner city, suburb, and so on are central ideas brimming over with social-spatial meaning. The dynamics of race and place shapes our everyday knowledge, understanding, and interaction with our environments and the other inhabitants of those environments. … Categories inhabit places, and those places come to inhabit the external and internal experiences of that group. Place is constitutive: when we sort people by categories, we do so spatially. Our system of race carries with it a spatial extension. With race come racialized spaces. And because our place comes to inhabit us, when we divide spatially we cannot help but to inscribe and produce categories associated with our spatial divisions. With racialized spaces come race. (92–93)

Race not only structures where people live, what kind of life chances they have, and how they can move through space, but racial meanings attached to both places and people inevitably inform individual cognition. Social psychological and neurocognitive research tells us, as Hogan explains, that ingroup-outgroup thinking is so ingrained in our cognitive architecture that "[m]erely being told that you, Jones, Smith, and so on, constitute Group A, while Doe, Jenkins, and so on, constitute Group B, produces in-group/out-group prejudice (e.g., more favorable evaluations of other people assigned to Group A, relative to those assigned to Group B)" (2009, 30). Racial-spatial categorization, as Sundstrom argues, both exploits and enforces the us-them dichotomy that structures how we think about ingroup versus outgroup others. As the social connotations that are ascribed to certain racialized place terms (such as ghetto and barrio) and the groups of people who inhabit them are normalized, this creates the false impression that the marginalization of some people is natural or even inevitable.

Taken together, Lipsitz and Sundstrom's discussions give insight into the relationships between race, space, and place, that is, how racial-spatial practices are systemic and how such practices structure individual experience. Once we accept that spatialized racism is systemic, then it is also possible, and I argue useful, to read ordinary interactions, and the emotions that are invariably part of these interactions, as indicative of broader social issues. "[B]earing witness to the interiority of what it means to be subjected to forms of anti-Black racism that occur within routine spaces of social transaction," as Yancy puts it (2008, 867), also provides an opportunity to theorize emotions in relation to race and geography. While I build on Brooke Neely and Michelle Samura's claim that "racial iterations and processes (e.g. identities, inequalities, conflicts and so on) are also about how we collectively make and remake, over time and through ongoing contestation, the spaces we inhabit" (2011, 1934), I expand their race-space framework into an emotion-race-space framework. In other words, I argue that emotion, race, and space are co-constitutive. The texts considered in the book show that while the sites in which racism takes place changed over time, they have only taken on different forms that are often more covert, but no less emotionally harmful. What may be more hidden in ordinary life often emerges clearly from literary fiction, which is therefore well-suited for studying emotions not only as individual psychological phenomena but as informed by historical and ongoing racial-spatial dynamics.

Given the many ways in which racial privilege and subjugation are enacted in and through space, Lipsitz argues for the existence of a "white spatial imaginary [which] portrays the properly gendered prosperous suburban home as the privileged moral geography of the nation," while it relies on "practices of surveillance, regulation, and incarceration … as forms of frontier defense against demonized people of color" (2011, 13). The white spatial imaginary essentially is the result of "attempt[s] to inscribe on the landscape the artificial divisions between the races that the pathologies of white supremacy instantiated in social life" (51). Whereas the negative emotional consequences of the white spatial imaginary present one focus of the book, another focus lies on the ways in which Black subjects imagine and create alternative geographies that enable more positive attachments to place and others. In this context, Lipsitz proposes the existence of a "Black spatial imaginary," which first emerged as "enslaved Africans in America found it necessary to address the injuries of race by fashioning new understandings of space" (53). During and after slavery, Black subjects consistently and out of necessity "turned sites of containment and confinement into spaces of creativity and community making" (53). Following Gilmore's famous declaration that a "geographical imperative lies at the heart of every struggle for social justice" (2002, 51), the Black spatial imaginary is engaged in "unthinking … parochialism" and contesting the "geographically organized vulnerability for Blacks" (Lipsitz 2011, 54–55). In doing so, it seeks to create "a more decent, humane, and just society, not just for Black people but for everyone" (17). The Black spatial imaginary not only challenges the structural confinement of Blackness, it also bears witness to emotionally meaningful Black place- and worldmaking practices.

The examination of the ways in which Black individuals and communities have always created alternative geographies despite white violence is at the heart of the steadily expanding field of Black Geographies. In the groundbreaking edited collection *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* (2007), Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods argue that "black geographic narratives and lived experiences need to be taken seriously because they reconfigure classificatory practices" and "allow us to consider alternative ways of imagining the world" (5). In "Black Matters are Spatial Matters: Black Geographies for the Twenty-First Century" (2019),[14] Hawthorne similarly notes that

> Black Geographies asserts the inherent spatiality of Black life—the spatial imaginaries, space making practices, and senses of place rooted in Black communities. Starting from the understanding that all social relations are grounded in spatial relations, this scholarship privileges Black world-making practices in all of their multiplicities. Such an emphasis counters long-standing trends in the discipline of geography, in which Black people were seen as lacking geography (due to the upheaval of the trans-Atlantic slave trade); or as *victims* of geography (due to ongoing practices of displacement and spatial segregation). (5, emphasis in original)

Rather than merely examining the consequences of racial-spatial domination, Black geographic scholarship brings into focus Black ways of being in the world. In *From Slave Cabins to the White House: Homemade Citizenship in African American Culture* (2020), Koritha Mitchell asserts that Black place- and homemaking practices are "defined and pursued in ways that call upon an authority beyond the nation-state" (2020, 22–23). According to Mitchell, "[t]o cultivate homemade citizenship is to embody and enact a belief that has reverberated across generations: one may not be able to escape the racism and sexism the United States heaps onto particular groups, but that does not mean one cannot create more inhabitable spaces in the midst of hostility" (21–22). As Mitchell's work, and that of many other scholars, shows, African American literature is an essential source for analyzing Black spatial matters.

Black Geographies, Race, and African American Literature

Although not solely a literary study, McKittrick's *Demonic Grounds: Black Women And The Cartographies Of Struggle* (2006) draws centrally on Black narrative to explore Black geographies. Like Lipsitz, McKittrick argues that paying attention to Black geographic practice "opens up a conceptual arena through which more humanly workable geographies can be and are imagined," which fundamentally contests notions that "we can view, assess, and ethically organize the world from a stable (white, patriarchal, Eurocentric, heterosexual, classed) vantage point" (xii-xiii). McKittrick's reading of Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), for instance, interrogates the meaning of Jacobs's transformation of her grandmother's garret, in which she hides for seven years, "into a

usable and paradoxical space" (xxviii). By placing his own protagonist in a "loophole of retreat," as Jacobs herself called it, Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad*, as I will discuss, creates explicit intertextual resonances to Jacobs's representation of Black female spatial struggle, contestation, and possibility.

While the emergence of Black Geographies has provided new ways of approaching narrative, investigations of spatial concerns and the quest for home have a long tradition in African American literary scholarship.[15] Morrison, for instance, uses the metaphor of the house to explicate how the realities of race shape being and belonging in the United States, and the metaphor of home to describe Black creative practices that "depriv[e] [race] of its lethal cling" (1997, 5). As Morrison puts it, "[i]f I had to live in a racial house, it was important, at the least, to rebuild it so that it was not a windowless prison into which I was forced, a thick-walled, impenetrable container from which no cry could be heard, but rather an open house, grounded, yet generous in its supply of windows and doors" (4). Her notion of home-creation speaks to the radical reimagination and remapping of space at the heart of the Black Geographies. As several spatially oriented studies of African American literature attest, Black counter-geographies—geographic imaginations and practices that run counter to and contest the white spatial imaginary—play a central role in the Black literary imagination. Herman Beavers's *Geography and the Political Imaginary in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (2018), for example, attends to several Southern fictional settings in Morrison's narratives, arguing that "Morrison suggests that black life in the South needs to be understood as being capacious enough that acts of placemaking embrace the idea of conflicting iterations of space-time" (217). Thadious Davis's *Southscapes: Geographies of Race, Region, and Literature* (2011) even more explicitly focuses on the Southern Black geographic imagination, highlighting that "[r]ather than merely representing the trauma or pain inflicted on black victims of segregation … black writers from the Deep South use their spatial location to imagine, create, and define new and unproscribed subjectivities" (4). Kenton Rambsy's *The Geographies of African American Short Fiction* (2022) introduces the term "cultural geo-tagging" to describe the ways in which "Black writers use geographic markers to inscribe their stories with layered and resonant social histories" (9). Trudier Harris's *The Scary-Mason Dixon Line: African American Writers and the South* (2009) analyzes the nexus between race, geography, and fear that characterizes

the work of "African American writers [who] place their characters in situations where there is a pronounced fear of the South—the physical landscape, the legacy of injustice/Jim Crow, mob violence, mental and physical restrictions, a general fear of southern white people" (3). While the storyworlds examined in *Emotion, Race, and Space* cover a broad range of historical and contemporary settings, the South also features strongly in these narratives. Several texts are set in the slaveowning and Jim Crow South, but even the fictional settings outside the South, or outside planet Earth, evoke the South as a real-and-imagined place, especially in relation to the racial-spatial imaginaries of slavery and segregation.

There is also an explicit environmental concern in the fifth chapter of the book, which turns to Afrofuturist storyworlds that interrogate ecosocial (in)justice. I will additionally draw on research in the environmental humanities, African American ecocriticism, and econarratology to explore how the storyworlds narrate grief as a consequence of environmental injustice, while also considering the ways in which grief has shaped Black women's ecologies.

Looking Ahead, Looking Back

While African American literature in the twenty-first century is informed by and responding to contemporary questions and crises, it is rooted in the (hi)stories that have birthed the current moment. By following a temporal trajectory—from mid-nineteenth-century plantation slavery, mid-twentieth-century de jure segregation, to the present century, and then onward to possible futures—*Emotion, Race, and Space* tracks historical and continuing relationships between affective experience, racial ideology, and spatial organization. The selected primary texts engage a wide variety of genres, categories, and modes of storytelling: the neo-slave narrative, the neo-segregation narrative, the neo-passing narrative, African American satire, and (eco-)Afrofuturism. Together they speak to the aesthetic multiplicity and capaciousness of the contemporary Black literary imagination, while each providing a different lens on affective as well as political concerns. Importantly, each chapter is organized around one or two emotions, considering how fear and hope, shame and guilt, anger, and grief are interlinked with the various social, political, and historical contexts of the novels. My readings primarily attend to the ways in which these emotions are bound up with the entwining social constructions of race and space. In

the third and fifth chapter, considerable emphasis is also placed on (non-normative) gender and sexuality, which, in addition to race, define the intersectional reach of twenty-first-century African American fiction.

The second chapter examines Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* (2016) and Edward P. Jones's *The Known World* (2003). By applying an emotion-race-space framework to the two neo-slave narratives, the chapter provides a reading of fear and hope in the context of historical and ongoing forms of race, geography, and power. While the runaway journey of Whitehead's Black female protagonist exposes the ways in which racial-spatial subjugation and confinement strategically produce Black fear and incapacitate Black hope, Jones uses his Black male slave-turned-slaveholder protagonist to interrogate a form of hope that is enmeshed with white racial and geographic power. Just as importantly, both narratives bear witness to Black female geographic practices *as* practices of revolutionary hope. In doing so, they make legible subversive intersections between Black hope and Black geographies amid and despite white geographies of terror.

The third chapter extends the explanatory force of the emotion-race-space framework to the study of Toni Morrison's neo-segregation narrative *Home* (2012) and Brit Bennett's neo-passing narrative *The Vanishing Half* (2020). On the one hand, it considers the historical and ongoing ways in which Black shame and guilt are bound up with racial-geographic separatism. On the other hand, it examines how alternative placemaking disrupts the logic and effects of Black guilt and shame. The narratives both invite and complicate readers' empathy with protagonists who wrestle with the effects of racial-spatial hierarchies and are themselves guilty of perpetuating violence (physical and discursive). Importantly, they also use these and other characters' experiences to reveal the significance of inclusive and communal spaces for emotional healing and liberation. The radical placemaking built around empathy with others like and unlike oneself which is modeled by Morrison's Southern Black women is only further expanded by Bennett's L.A. community whose intersectional spatial imaginary enables an unmaking of shame and guilt brought on by parochial understandings of race, gender, and sexuality.

The fourth chapter explores how Percival Everett's *Erasure* (2001) and Maurice Carlos Ruffin's *We Cast a Shadow* (2019) satirically dismantle and ethically critique the limited cultural space afforded to Black male anger, while also providing deeper insight into the complexities of anger in

relation to racial and spatial politics. Reading the satirical narratives through the emotion-race-space nexus, the chapter examines the continuing, present-day confinement of Black emotions at the confluence of racial and spatial oppression. While Everett's Black writer-protagonist is angry about the strictures of race within the white publishing landscape, Ruffin's protagonist rejects anger altogether in order to obtain a semblance of safety as a Black man in anti-Black geographies. Although both satirical storyworlds deliberately complicate empathetic engagement with their flawed protagonists, they even more importantly encourage revolutionary outrage at a society that routinely confines Black social, material, and psychological space. The inherently hopeful outrage espoused by the novels, then, opens up imaginative space for alternative emotional, racial, and geographic imaginaries in which Black lives are fully valued.

The fifth chapter considers how Sherri L. Smith's *Orleans* (2013) and N.K. Jemisin's Broken Earth series—*The Fifth Season* (2015), *The Obelisk Gate* (2016), and *The Stone Sky* (2017)—speculate about the consequences and possibilities of Black female grief in the context of multiple and enduring crises, including the challenges presented by climate change. The eco-Afrofuturist storyworlds expose how overlapping forces of racial, gendered, spatial, and environmental oppression produce grief in Black women, while also foregrounding the revolutionary potential of grief and communal grieving as catalysts for pushing back against ecosocial injustice. In doing so, they offer important reflections on the grievability of Black lives as well as the grievability of more-than-human life. By interrogating how emotion, race, space, and environment intersect in these texts, my analysis, on the one hand, offers reflections on grief as bound up with environmental injustice, which is itself a form of racial-geographic violence. On the other hand, it provides a means for rethinking emotions, geographies, and ecologies in the context of oppression as far more than the sum of adverse experiences.

Notes

1. For narratological approaches to Black texts, see, for instance, Dejin Xu's *Race and Form: Towards a Contextualized Narratology of African American Autobiography* (2007) and Heather Russell's *Legba's Crossing: Narratology in the African Atlantic* (2009).

2. See Spillers's *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature* (2003), Baker's *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (1985), Gates's *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (1988), Dubey's *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic* (1994), McDowell's *"The Changing Same": Black Women's Literature, Criticism, and Theory* (1995), Holloway's "Revision and (Re)membrance: A Theory of Literary Structures in Literature by African-American Women Writers" (1990) and *Legal Fictions* (2014), Wall's *Worrying the Line: Black Women Writers, Lineage, and Literary Tradition* (2005), Levy-Hussen's *How to Read African American Literature: Post-Civil Rights Fiction and the Task of Interpretation* (2016), Sullivan's *The Poetics of Difference: Queer Feminist Forms in the African Diaspora* (2021), and Abdur-Rahman's *Millennial Style: The Politics of Experiment in Contemporary African Diasporic Culture* (2024).

3. One of the main reasons why scholars in African American studies have not earlier or more readily embraced research from the cognitive sciences is not just the discipline-crossing nature of this project, but also considerable and warranted skepticism toward science itself. Speaking of ethnic and postcolonial scholars more broadly, Kim notes that many remain "leery of science and medicine in general and cognitive studies in particular because, historically, 'science' writ large has been used to articulate racial and sexual difference as inferior and/or pathological" (2013, 3). Scholarship at the intersection of cognitive narratology and race and ethnic studies seeks to meaningfully combine cognitive studies' penchant for generalizability with a deep sensitivity to sociopolitical practices, power relations, and the narratives that guide them.

4. In their 2023 article on psychology's contributions to anti-Blackness in the United States, Auguste and colleagues point out that the "lack of representation of Black participants" in studies is linked to "the exclusion of research by Black scientists from high-impact academic journals [which] actively silences these perspectives" (10). Roberts et al. similarly report that "[p]sychological research is mostly edited by White editors, under whom there have been fewer publications that highlight the important role of race in psychology" (2020, 1303).

5. Sedgwick and Massumi are credited with heralding two different lines of thought within affect theory, following psychologist Silvan Tomkins and philosophers Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, and Spinoza, respectively. For scholarship in affect theory, see, for instance, Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (2003), Butler's *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004) and *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (2009), Ngai's *Ugly Feelings* (2005), Gregg and Seigworth's

The Affect Theory Reader (2010), Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* (2011), Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness* (2010) and *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2015), Massumi's *The Politics of Affect* (2015), and Houen's *Affect and Literature* (2020).

6. For a discussion of the differences and possible syntheses between affective science and affect theory, see the second chapter in Hogan's *Literature and Emotion* (2018).

7. In line with Crawford's argument, and contrary to Kenneth W. Warren's *What Was African American Literature?* (2011), this book assumes African American literature to be a transhistorical entity. Warren has argued that African American literature *was* segregation literature "oriented by the effort to change or repeal the laws that significantly shaped black social and political life from the 1890s through the 1960s" (96). Even though racial inequalities continue to exist in the post-Jim Crow era, Warren contends that "with the legal demise of Jim Crow, the coherence of African American literature has been correspondingly, if sometimes imperceptibly, eroded as well" (2).

8. By contrast, sympathy usually denotes feeling *for* somebody, without necessarily sharing their emotions (as is the case with empathy).

9. According to Gallese and Wojciehowski, "artistic fiction is often more powerful than real life in evoking our emotional engagement and empathic involvement." They argue that "[t]hrough an immersive state in which our attention is focused on the narrated virtual world, we can fully deploy our simulative resources, letting our defensive guard against daily reality slip for a while."

10. While Keen does not question that "readers feel empathy with (and sympathy for) fictional characters and other aspects of fictional worlds," she argues that "the case for altruism stemming from novel reading [is] inconclusive at best and nearly always exaggerated in favor of the beneficial effects of novel reading" (2007, vii). Therefore, the relationship between empathy and altruism, and thus the notion that "empathy felt for a fictional character can improve attitudes and stimulate concern for members of a stigmatized group," should be subjected to empirical investigation. See also Batson et al. (2015) on the empathy-altruism hypothesis.

11. Soja first used the term "spatial turn" in *Postmodern Geographies* (1989, 39). He argued that "a revolutionary new way to think about space and the powerful effects of specifically urban spatiality on human behavior and societal development" (2009, 17) emerged in the 1960s. Scholarship under this umbrella includes Harvey (1973, 1989, 1996), Lefebvre (1991, 2014), Soja (1989, 1996, 2010), and Massey (1994, 2004).

12. See David Livingstone's *The Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a Contested Enterprise* (1993) for a discussion of geography's historical ties to colonial expansion.

13. See, for instance, Gilmore's "Fatal Couplings of Power and Difference: Notes on Racism and Geography" (2002), McKittrick's *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (2006) and "On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place" (2011), McKittrick and Clyde Woods's *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* (2007), Lipsitz's *How Racism Takes Place* (2011), Kobayashi's "The Dialectic of Race and the Discipline of Geography" (2014), Finney's *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (2014), Shabazz's *Spatializing Blackness: Architectures of Confinement and Black Masculinity in Chicago* (2015), and Hawthorne and Lewis's *The Black Geographic: Praxis, Resistance, Futurity* (2023).

14. Hawthorne notes that the "growing institutional recognition of Black Geographies over the last 5 years, including the founding of the Black Geographies Specialty Group of the American Association of Geographers in 2016 by Dr. LaToya Eaves, has been the product of tireless organizing by Black intellectuals—especially Black women—to carve out spaces for their scholarship and political commitments within the discipline of geography" (2019, 2). Yet, it is also important to emphasize that "Black geographic thought has existed (though under other names) for centuries" (3).

15. Scholarship on geography in African American literature includes Melvin Dixon's *Ride Out the Wilderness: Geography and Identity in Afro-American Literature* (1987), Valerie Sweeney Prince's *Burnin' Down the House: Home in African American Literature* (2005), Thadious Davis's *Southscapes: Geographies of Race, Region, and Literature* (2011), Jennifer Terry's '*Shuttles in the Rocking Loom': Mapping the Black Diaspora in African American and Caribbean Fiction* (2013), Judith Madera's *Black Atlas: Geography and Flow in Nineteenth-Century African American Literature* (2015), Herman Beavers's *Geography and the Political Imaginary in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (2018), William Merrill Decker's *Geographies of Flight: Phillis Wheatley to Octavia Butler* (2020), Trudier Harris's *The Scary Mason-Dixon Line: African American Writers and the South* (2009) and *Depictions of Home in African American Literature* (2021), Alice Sundman's *Toni Morrison and the Writing of Place* (2022), and Kenton Rambsy's *The Geographies of African American Short Fiction* (2022).

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Fear, Hope, and Geographies of Slavery in Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* and Edward P. Jones's *The Known World*

Abstract This chapter examines Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* (2016) and Edward P. Jones's *The Known World* (2003). By applying an emotion-race-space framework to the two neo-slave narratives, it provides a reading of fear and hope in the context of historical and ongoing forms of race, geography, and power. While the runaway journey of Whitehead's Black female protagonist exposes the ways in which subjugation and confinement strategically produce Black fear and incapacitate Black hope, Jones uses his Black male slave-turned-slaveholder protagonist to interrogate a form of hope that is enmeshed with white racial and geographic power. Just as importantly, both narratives bear witness to Black female geographic practices *as* practices of revolutionary hope. In doing so, they make legible subversive intersections between Black hope and Black geographies amid and despite white geographies of terror.

Keywords African American literature • Colson Whitehead • Slavery • Neo-slave narrative • Race • Geography • Emotion • Empathy • Fear • Hope

There exists an anti-Black language of fear that is both cause and effect of current forms of racial and spatial discrimination, and that is also part of slavery's legacy. There exists simultaneously a Black language of hope that is inseparable from an investment in alternative racial and spatial relations, which could likewise be traced back to the ways in which Black people imagined and practiced freedom during and after slavery. One moment in recent history that made both Black fear and Black hope hypervisible was the aftermath of George Floyd's killing on May 25, 2020, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Floyd, a Black man read as a threat in white public space, was murdered by white police officer, Derek Chauvin, who cited fear of Floyd as the reason for his use of violence. The footage of the murder, however, shows where and with whom the pervasive fear lies. Inhabiting white geographies is routinely accompanied by a heightened sense of fear and anxiety for Black subjects. Chauvin's callous killing of Floyd—one of many recorded instances of police violence against Black people—demonstrated once again that white violence continues to destroy as long as racism continues to structure narratives, institutions, and spaces. But the aftermath of Floyd's murder also rendered visible Black hope for justice, which is routinely incapacitated because it is subversive to white power. In a moment when attention spans and media reach were heightened amidst the coronavirus pandemic, political activists channeled grief, despair, and outrage over Floyd's murder, specifically, and the "protracted murder of [Black] hope" (Corrigan 2020, 21), more generally, into a great number of discrete and yet connected protests. The Black Lives Matter demonstrations mobilized the public to take Black hope seriously and listen to Black fear, which is all too often outweighed by anti-Black narratives of fear that render emotional complexity strategically invisible.[1] Such forms of Black fear and Black hope are embedded in contemporary political contexts, but these contexts carry with them the racial and spatial logics of the past, which is why *Emotion, Race, and Space* starts with the literary form of the neo-slave narrative to explore relationships between fear, hope, race, and geography.

Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* (2016) and Edward P. Jones's *The Known World* (2003) provide templates for understanding fear and hope as bound up with both white geographies of domination and Black geographies of resistance. First, I will introduce the neo-slave narrative, perhaps the most prominent genre of contemporary African American literature. Second, I will outline what research in psychology and neuroscience reveals about fear and hope, while also considering both emotions in the context of race, geography, and power. On this basis,

I will discuss how *The Underground Railroad*, by narrating the protagonist's experiences both on and off the plantation, foregrounds the tension between fear and hope that is bound up with Black practices of resistance amid and despite racial-geographic violence. I will then turn to a consideration of how *The Known World* interrogates the fears, anxieties, and hopes that slavery's racial and spatial imaginary produces in enslaver and enslaved. Jones's and Whitehead's neo-slave narratives each render visible the potential of hope by depicting it as a catalyst for their characters' Black geographic imaginaries and practices. However, *The Known World* also complicates the notion of hope as oriented toward equality and justice through its representation of characters whose hopefulness is directed toward achieving individual power within an oppressive system.

To explore how the neo-slave narratives engage readers with their characters' emotional experiences as they navigate slavery's racial geographies, the chapter will draw on Marie-Laure Ryan's (2003) spatially oriented theory of narrative, which distinguishes between a tour and a map strategy. Whereas *The Underground Railroad* employs the tour strategy to invite readers' empathy with the runaway protagonist, *The Known World*'s fragmented approach to focalization and inclusion of actual maps represents a combination of the tour and map strategy. Starting with Whitehead's more recent novel, instead of proceeding chronologically, therefore allows me to expand my theoretical apparatus. While I am not suggesting that the neo-slave narratives build on one another, both are part of a larger project of repetition and revision that is central to the African American literary tradition.

THE NEO-SLAVE NARRATIVE

The past decades have seen a proliferation of the neo-slave narrative as arguably the pre-eminent genre in African American literature. As Yogita Goyal argues in *Runaway Genres: The Global Afterlives of Slavery* (2019), "slavery offers immense aesthetic and political resources to contemporary African American writers" (1). Writers such as Margaret Walker, Gayl Jones, Ernest J. Gaines, Ishmael Reed, Sherley Anne Williams, Octavia E. Butler, Toni Morrison—and more recently Edward P. Jones, Colson Whitehead, Lalita Tademy, Thylias Moss, Yaa Gyasi, and many more—have positioned slavery at the forefront of the Black literary imagination. These authors retrofit for contemporary audiences what Charles Johnson termed "one of the oldest literary forms indigenous to the American

experience" (2005, xv). The antebellum slave narrative was not only indigenous to the American experience, it also played a significant role in altering the (Black) American experience.

The primary function of slave narratives, such as Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845) and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), was to establish the humanity of the enslaved and convince white readers of the atrocity of slavery. Martha K. Cobb notes that the first-person narrative voice of slave narrators signifies a form of writing that rests "on the slave narrator's own terms rather than on terms imposed by the society that has enslaved him or her" (1982, 38). However, the genre was also bound by fixed conventions and formulaic patterns that were enforced by white editors and sponsors.[2] Yogita Goyal argues that the "capacity to generate empathy" (2019, 5), and to appeal to white readers, was used not only as a key strategy to advance the goals of abolitionism, but it also contributed to "enshrine the language of sentimentalism as the most effective weapon in the human rights arsenal" (12). Writing for empathy remains an important aspect of many neo-slave narratives such as Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad*. However, the passage of empathetic concern for Black characters is not always the principal function of neo-slave narratives such as Jones's *The Known World*. While Jones does invite empathy with several characters in the novel, his critique of white supremacy's affective hold relies on the active disinvitation of empathy with the Black slaveholding protagonist. Such diverging approaches speak to the heterogeneity of African American literature in the twenty-first century, which routinely challenges established notions of race, representation, responsibility, and authenticity.

Indeed, neo-slave narratives are marked by immense diversity in both subject matter and form. Whereas antebellum slave narratives positioned their truth value in opposition to fiction—to quote Jacobs's words in the preface to her narrative "READER; BE assured this narrative is no fiction" (2001, 2)—neo-slave narratives are necessarily and self-consciously fictional storyworlds. Raquel Kennon observes that

> as fictionalized narratives of slavery, many texts borrow and replicate to varying degrees the formal conventions, such as style or plot, of the classic autobiographical slave narrative of the 18th and 19th centuries while others depart dramatically from this form, challenging and reimagining the "official" historical record to assert the voice and agency of the texts' narrator-protagonists. (2017)

In *Slavery and the Post-Black Imagination* (2020), Bertram D. Ashe and Ilka Saal suggest that neo-slave narratives from the 1990s and 2000s move "beyond Ashraf Rushdy's initial definition of the genre as first-person prose narratives that adopt the conventions of the antebellum slave narrative" (4). They add that "in both content *and* form" contemporary neo-slave narratives are "seeking to intervene politically and poetically in established discourses of slavery and black identity" (8, emphasis in original).[3] The two neo-slave narratives that I consider both use formally innovative strategies to interrogate various forms of Black subjectivity in relation to the sites, sights, and afterlives of slavery.

In *The Site of Memory* (1998), Toni Morrison suggests that the realm of fiction opens up a plethora of possibilities for the revelation of Black subjectivity. She describes the Black literary imagination as a "route to a reconstruction of a world, to an exploration of an interior life that was not written and to the revelation of a kind of truth" (195). Katherine McKittrick adds that Morrison's "site of memory" also becomes a "*sight* of memory" which "requires a return to and engagement with painful places, worlds where black people were and are denied humanity, belonging, and formal citizenship" (2006, 33, emphasis in original). According to McKittrick, "[r]econstructing past interior lives of black people in the diaspora is an important geographic act" because it "assumes that the story of blackness in the diaspora is actual and possible, and that the discursive erasure of black peoples does not eliminate how they have been implicated in the production of space" (34). The literary-imaginative portrayal of the objectification and dehumanization of Black subjects during slavery is indeed a painful "site" and "sight" of memory. But it is within these adverse circumstances that the narratives explore the complexities of Black emotional and geographic experiences.

The Psychology and Politics of Fear and Hope

Fear is one of several emotions that have been defined as "primary" and thus universally shared and recognizable by all humans. According to neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, "we are wired to respond with an emotion, in preorganized fashion, when certain features of stimuli in the world or in our bodies are perceived, alone or in combination" (1994, 131). Fear is one such basic survival mechanism, which "constitutes combined physiologic and psychologic reactions with an objective to maximize the probability of surviving in [a] dangerous situation" (Jarymowicz and Bar-Tal

2006, 371). The perception of threatening stimuli triggers fear arousal, the experience of which typically results in fight, flight, or freeze responses (e.g., Öhman and Mineka 2001). Patrick Colm Hogan notes that these actional outcomes tend to be "hierarchized—in fear, first try flight, but if that does not work, try to fight (or in certain cases, freeze)" (2011, 37). While terms such as "fear, panic, terror, anxiety, anguish, dread, worry" are commonly used to describe the subjective experiences that arise in response to (perceived) threats, neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux helpfully differentiates between fear and anxiety (2015, 10). In contrast to the perception of "present or imminent" external threats that typically activate fear, the perception of more "amorphous" and more internal threats, with less certain consequences, creates a sense of anxiety (10).[4] Anxiety therefore is a close relative of fear, but, due to the lack of imminence, it is typically associated with a more prolonged activation of symptoms such as elevated tension, nervousness, and vigilance.

As with all other emotions, fear and anxiety operate within a broader sociopolitical context. Throughout U.S. history, fear has been used and abused in the service of racial power. Slavery was a system of white racial terror, which routinely used violence or threats thereof as a means of control. While racial capitalism denied the personhood of the enslaved and their capacity to feel, it strategically produced fear in Black subjects to capitalize on the very emotionality whose existence was denied. Dominant white narratives about Black emotional inferiority, though fictional, were central to slavery. In his antebellum slave narrative, *The Life of Josiah Henson: Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada, as Narrated by Himself* (1849), Josiah Henson, for example, wrote that "[a]ffections, which are as strong in the African as in the European were to be cruelly disregarded" (27). On the plantation, a key site of strategic Black dehumanization, enslaved subjects were positioned as emotionless or "emotionally different or inadequate" (Dwyer 2012, 320). The dismissal of Black emotional complexity operated as a mode of subjugation, even as the mechanics of fear were commonly abused for purposes of control. Moreover, racial and geographic violence was used to structurally incapacitate flight and fight, presenting freezing or immobility as the only possible option and escape and resistance as impossible.

The fear produced through anti-Black violence on the plantation found various afterlives in practices of segregation, criminalization, policing, and surveillance. The mobilization of social fears *of* Blackness is both cause and consequence of such racial-geographic practices, which systematically

produce fear *in* Black subjects (individually and collectively). The psychological as well as physiological consequences of racism have been documented in numerous studies: from heart palpitations and hypervigilance to anxiety disorder and posttraumatic stress disorder.[5] The complexity of Black fear and anxiety experiences, however, is too often dismissed in an environment that defines Blackness *as* threat in order to reproduce and protect white power. As sociologist Tressie McMillan Cottom writes, "whiteness defends itself. Against change, against progress, against hope, against black dignity, against black lives, against reason, against truth, against facts, against native claims, against its own laws and customs" (2019, 117). The need for defense reveals that white racial terror is its own kind of fight response, which protects the survival of whiteness in the face of perceived threats to its continuation.

The Underground Railroad and *The Known World* both narrativize the fears and anxieties of white characters, showing that those who participate in denying Black humanity, through physical and affective control and subjugation, cannot escape the consequences of their own web of fears about Black advancement and/or Black retribution. More importantly, the neo-slave narratives critique the negative repercussions of racial-spatial oppression through the fear experiences of different Black characters. While *The Underground Railroad* and *The Known World* expose the racist misuse of fear in the service of whiteness, they also zoom in on Black fear as a possible catalyst for disruption and resistance. Compared to Richard Wright's well-known interrogation of the relationship between fear and anger-aggression in *Native Son* (1940), Whitehead and Jones trace possible linkages between fear and hope.[6] In doing so, their storytelling contributes to expand imaginations about Black fear experiences and their potential actional outcomes.

In contrast to fear, hope is a secondary emotion that can be produced by a variety of other emotions. The affective valance is overall positive, and hope can, as Turner notes, "mitigate the dis-associative power in the negative emotions" such as fear and anger (2007, 9). Matthew W. Gallagher asserts that "the fundamental premise is that hope is the combination of both agency and pathways thinking and that hope not only helps individuals to identify goals but that hope is [a] strong source of resilience" (2018, 4). What research in psychology describes as the relationship between hope and change has long been part of "religious and spiritual traditions [that] have also identified hope as a virtue to be cherished and cultivated" (3). Wayne E. Croft observes that "[d]uring slavery, the motif of hope was

defined as freedom from oppression" (2017, 64), but it was not necessarily connected to (attempts of) escape from the plantation. Croft elaborates that individual and communal acts such as "praying, singing, and more importantly, preaching" were central to the kind of "hope for freedom [that] had both this-worldly eschatological dimensions and other-worldly eschatological dimensions" (64). The different ways in which Black characters practice (affective) freedom—by practicing hope—on the plantation and beyond are indeed central to the literary imagination of both neo-slave narratives. *The Underground Railroad* and *The Known World* interrogate hope as a practice of affective resistance against racial-spatial oppression, but the latter also contrasts it with forms of hope that are directed toward gaining individual power within anti-Black geographies.

How fictional characters, analogous to real humans, practice hope is centrally defined by the goals underlying the emotion. Contemporary hope theory distinguishes between two types of goal-directed thinking—pathways thinking and agency thinking. According to C. R. Snyder, pathways thinking is "approach[ing] particular goal pursuits with thoughts of generating usable routes" (2002, 251). The production of mental pathways is both a temporal process, wherein both past and present impact imagined futures, and a spatial one, which entails thinking about how to get from one place to another (metaphorically and/or literally). Additionally, agency thinking is "the motivational component in hope theory," which is "the perceived capacity to use one's pathways to reach desired goals" (251), especially when encountering impediments and goal blockage that may necessitate alternative pathways. In "A Cultural Context Lens of Hope" (2018), Lisa M. Edwards and Jessica B. McClintock describe both pathways and agency thinking as "the building blocks of hope theory," but they also point out that "[w]hile hope may be a universal construct that all can access and develop, it is clear that people use and conceptualize hope in very different ways" (95). As is the case with other emotions, "there is still a dearth of research about individuals of color and hope as compared to European Americans" (102). Edwards and McClintock highlight that context is crucial to an understanding of hope:

> Individuals across groups may share certain obstacles, such as lack of social support or a lack of self-confidence, yet some obstacles are unique to certain groups. Within the United States, for example, members of marginalized groups such as racial and ethnic minorities often experience systemic obstacles to goal attainment. … Expecting that an individual's goals would be

completely thwarted by these obstacles would clearly be problematic, yet not recognizing that these larger, sociopolitical obstacles exist is equally concerning. Indeed the balance between maintaining hope in spite of challenges, while also acknowledging that some obstacles are insurmountable, is a difficult one. (96)

A contextual approach to hope therefore requires an understanding of the larger sociopolitical obstacles that minoritized individuals and groups in the United States routinely encounter and wrestle with.

Research has found that hope can, on the one hand, be a "protective asset" in coping with high levels of exposure to racial discrimination (Khahra et al. 2019, 378), which is in turn "related to positive outcomes, including fewer depressive symptoms and less anxiety" (380). On the other hand, exposure to racial discrimination and violence has also been found to "negatively impact the physical and mental health of African Americans" (377). Traumatic "acts of abuse can disrupt a person's hope" (Jenmorri 2006, 42), which can lead to "higher levels of hopelessness among African American emerging adults" that are in turn "linked to greater suicidal ideation and depressive symptomatology" (Khahra et al. 2019, 380). In other words, both hope and hopelessness exist under oppressive conditions. Whether the former or the latter emerges, and when, has much to do with the specific ways in which an individual's life is shaped by thwarting events and experiences—for example, trauma in childhood and adolescence; lack of resources for coping with fear, loss, and abuse; lack of positive attachment resources (places and people); and insufficient social power for enacting individual way- and willpower.

Since literary fiction is well equipped to trace both the particular and structural aspects of emotional experience, reading for hope as well as fear in African American storyworlds can contribute to an understanding of these emotions in the context of historical and ongoing forms of race, geography, and power. My discussion of *The Underground Railroad* in the next section will begin with an exploration of the ways in which the Black female protagonist practices place- and family-bound hope on the plantation itself. More broadly, the reading will interrogate the tension between hope and fear that characterizes Whitehead's neo-slave narrative. Escape from the plantation promises freedom from emotional abuse, racial control, and spatial captivity, but as the protagonist moves from one storyworld space to another, her experiences are both liberating and confining. As the novel invites readers to tour the historical space-time context

alongside the runaway character, it also negotiates the legacies of slavery that are still felt and materialized in American society today. While the speculative play with history reveals that the fears and atrocities of the past are not behind us, a reading of the novel's literalized underground railroad as a vehicle toward freedom foregrounds the importance of revolutionary hope for envisioning and creating a more just world.

The Relentlessness of Fear and the Imperative of Hope in *The Underground Railroad*

"The first time Caesar approached Cora about running north, she said no. This was her grandmother talking" (Whitehead 2017, 3). The opening introduces *The Underground Railroad*'s protagonist, Cora, while also transporting readers back to a time and place in which Cora's grandmother, Ajarry, is kidnapped from her African home and sold into captivity in America. While Ajarry found ways of navigating the sites of American slavery, she concluded that "[t]o escape the boundary of the plantation was to escape the fundamental principles of your existence: impossible" (9). This does not mean that Ajarry did not practice hope, but it does suggest that what hope she had was not directed toward leaving. Cora, who lives in different times than those of her grandmother—times that are marked by the existence of a physical underground railroad—perceives differently the possibilities for escape. Her refusal to accept the inalterability of boundaries enables her to imagine the existence of a space beyond the plantation in which her Blackness will not be an antithesis of freedom. Whitehead places Cora in the midst of a storyworld characterized by racism, spatialized bondage, and emotional oppression. At the same time, he uses the protagonist as a vehicle to challenge the boundaries of that world.

Cora's refusal to be paralyzed by the afterlives of the past and the realities of the present is mirrored through Whitehead's refusal to limit his narration to a single point of view. *The Underground Railroad* uses neither the first-person narrative voice typical of antebellum slave narratives nor a third-person limited perspective to relate the story solely from the point of view of the runaway protagonist. Whitehead's seemingly omniscient, third-person narrator allows him to depict both the protagonist's experiences and the larger system of racial oppression that characterizes her world. The storyworld is predominantly focalized through Cora's perspective, which contributes "to re-affirm the historical value of the original slave narrative and to reclaim the humanity of the enslaved by

(re)imagining their subjectivity" (Anim-Addo and Lima 2017, 3). But the narrator also uses several different character-focalizers to emphasize that Cora's individual story cannot be detached from the stories of others, some of whom circumscribe her place in the world on the basis of the power conferred to them by whiteness. The formal organization therefore supports the narrative's aim to invite readers to engage with the protagonist's experiences of fear and hope as closely bound up with the system of slavery, its geographies, discourses, and power relations.

White Plantation Geographies of Fear, Black Geographies of Hope

The Underground Railroad begins with a realist account of the protagonist's exploitation on the Randall plantation—a site of enslavement for Cora, her mother, and her grandmother. As it narratively recreates the physical and emotional oppression that Black subjects endured during slavery, the novel exposes multiple forms of terror, abuse, and alienation that shape the protagonist's life, including her experience as an orphan, her rape by a group of enslaved Black men, and the stories of her madness that serve to keep "the strange girl outside the circle of respectability" (Whitehead 2017, 25). While Cora resents her mother Mabel for escaping the plantation and leaving her behind, she never learns about her actual fate. Only in the penultimate chapter does the narrator reveal to readers—but not to Cora herself—that Mabel died on her way back to Randall as she was trying to come back for her daughter. This narrative choice not only puts readers in a privileged position, but it also serves a political function insofar as it draws attention to how slavery's erasure of family ties produced Black grief and incapacitated Black grieving. "*The Underground Railroad* openly acknowledges the ways narrative brokers our understanding of and relationship to history" (2017, 88) as Matthew Dischinger points out, while it also uses its own storytelling to expand readers' understanding of Black emotional and geographic experience.

Specifically, the neo-slave narrative alerts readers to the protagonist's struggles over space on the plantation. In doing so, it points to the "everyday contestations, philosophical demands, and the possibilities the production of space can engender for subaltern subjects" (McKittrick 2006, 121). There is little that belongs to Cora on the Randall plantation but a plot of garden she inherited from her grandmother and mother. Ajarry died in the cotton on the plantation, but she left behind a piece of the earth for her one surviving child, Mabel. With her grandmother long dead

and her mother Mabel gone for years, Cora is in charge of the inheritance. While she is officially as much part of the property of the plantation as the garden itself, it functions as her "anchor in the vicious waters of the plantation to prevent her from being carried away" (Whitehead 2017, 65). In *Black on Earth: African American Ecoliterary Traditions* (2010), Kimberly N. Ruffin suggests that applying "their agricultural knowledge to land they could control … allowed the enslaved to experience ecological beauty in the midst of incredible burdens" (32–33). Not only does Cora's gardening represent an individual act of survival on the plantation, the *plot* is also a site of cross-generational Black geographic storying: "The dirt at her feet had a story, the oldest story Cora knew" (Whitehead 2017, 15). Drawing on research in affective neuroscience, Hogan points to the "basic division of space, into alien places and places of attachment," which tend "to be often involved with person attachment systems" (2018, 60). Within the thoroughly oppressive and alienating geographies of the plantation, Cora's garden plot serves as a place of attachment, which embodies the family history of the three enslaved Black women whose generational placemaking challenges the nonexistence of Black geographies during slavery.[7] By bearing witness to how Black enslaved subjects practice hope geographically and ecologically, the neo-slave narrative not only disrupts white spatial and ecological control, but it also makes legible a radical coupling of Black emotional, geographic, and ecological experience. In this case, hope is not directed toward escape, but toward generating a different relationship to place and nature amid and despite slavery's anti-Black geographies.

Another way in which the protagonist contests the structural production of fear on the plantation is through her relation to others. Cora protects a little boy, Chester, who accidentally bumps into the master and makes him spill wine on his clean white shirt. Although Cora "had seen boys and girls younger than this beaten and had done nothing," it is then that a "feeling settled on her heart … grabbed hold of her and before the slave part of her caught up with the human part of her, she was bent over the boy's body as a shield" (40). Stephanie Li describes this scene in the novel as Whitehead's betrayal of a genuine search for psychological truth. For Li "[t]he sheer illogic of Cora's act is captured by the vague use of the word 'feeling'" (2019, 17) in relation to "an inexplicably moral protagonist, and a happy ending that panders to audience appetites involving tales of black suffering" (4). Li suggests that the fact that none of the other enslaved characters ever help Cora and the fact that Whitehead does not

provide a more detailed description of her emotions make it nearly impossible to understand what moves her to help Chester. I will draw on neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese's theory of embodied simulation to consider the possibility that Whitehead remains deliberately vague in order to emphasize that the nature of the feeling is not even accessible to the protagonist herself.

Gallese defines embodied simulation as an "automatic, pre-reflexive and unconscious" process that creates "a shared interpersonal space" (2003, 525). He suggests that the mirror mechanism in the human brain enables us to simulate the actions and emotions of others using the same neural network that we use to model our own actions and emotions. Embodied simulation therefore serves as "the basis of our capacity for empathy" (519). As Cora watches how "[t]he cane crashed across his shoulder and head, again and again," and how "[t]he boy screamed and shrank to the dirt as the blows continued" (Whitehead 2017, 40), her bodily simulation of his fear and pain automatically generates a shared interpersonal space within a larger environment of Black oppression. Slavery's atrocity no doubt taught Cora that "[s]olidarity and the protection of others only leads to pain" (Li 2019, 16), but her empathy mobilizes her before she can even think of the danger for herself. While Li criticizes that "Cora's action is perplexing, and Whitehead's prose does little to elucidate her decision" (16), I wish to suggest that Whitehead's lack of precision, in fact, strives to make the situation perplexing to readers precisely because it is perplexing to Cora herself.

Rather than questioning Whitehead's ability to find the right words to describe the protagonist's emotions and actions, the absence of detailed description can be seen as the narrator's, and author's, choice to portray the consequences of dehumanization that deny Cora herself the language to access her own humanity. Cora, who has grown up experiencing that to be Black is to be nonhuman, finds her own empathy—a profoundly human capacity—puzzling. Even when she remembers the situation at a later point, we learn that "she was stymied when she tried to recall the urgency of that moment, the grain of the feeling that possessed her. It had retreated to that obscure corner in herself from where it came and couldn't be coaxed" (Whitehead 2017, 46). Through Whitehead's combination of internal and external focalization—seeing what the protagonist sees and seeing what the ostensibly omniscient narrator sees—the novel represents Cora's own vision, but also the limitations thereof. It invites readers to empathize with Cora's empathy with Chester and empathize with her as

she is punished for her empathy, and to understand also how the affective violence practiced during slavery has constrained Cora's ability to grasp her own empathetic emotions and behavioral reactions.

Moreover, readers' empathetic engagement with the protagonist throughout the narrative also provides them with clues about Cora's personality, which can add to a more nuanced understanding of why she helps Chester. For instance, a consideration of commonalities in Cora's emotional experiences and responses suggests that she tends to react to fearful experiences by fighting: when an enslaved Black man attempts to appropriate her plot of garden, the protagonist puts him back in his place and she, out of necessity, murders a white boy during her journey of escape. While the fight response is a universal human reaction to danger, the proneness to strong instinctive reactions also appears to be indicative of Cora's individual character. Indeed, there is a connection between the decidedly proactive ways in which she responds to fear and practices hope. By defending her garden plot, she guards the stories of the Black women before her and their shared ecological practice. The seeds that Cora takes with her when she leaves the plantation do not only keep alive their shared family history, while mitigating some of the grief caused by her mother's perceived abandonment, but they also act as a powerful symbol of hope during her journey. Moreover, the fact that both she and Chester are orphans also plays a central role for her protective act: Cora helps Chester because the fear of witnessing him being harmed and the corresponding goal of protecting him from harm motivate her to act on behalf of someone who is like family in the absence of biological kin.

In addition to foregrounding Black practices of hope and resistance amid plantation violence through Cora's affective relationships to place and people, *The Underground Railroad* places flight—a typical element of the bondage-to-freedom story—at the center of its narration. The brutal murder of another enslaved subject, who tried to escape the plantation, is designed to frighten Cora into submission. However, contrary to the master's intentions, the narrative suggests that her thoughts in this moment center around the imagination of a future no longer circumscribed by slavery, which produces a new sense of hope in Cora, as her imagination takes her

> someplace past the burning slave and the great house and the lines that
> defined the Randall domain. She tried to fill in its details from stories, sifting
> through the accounts of slaves who had seen it. Each time she caught hold

of something—buildings of polished white stone, an ocean so vast there wasn't a tree in sight, the shop of a colored blacksmith who served no master but himself—it wriggled free like fish and raced away. She would have to see for herself if she were to keep it. (Whitehead 2017, 56–57)

The master's intended "moral instruction" (54) marks the beginning of the protagonist's escape story and her resolution to free herself from the microcosm of the plantation that has confined her since birth. What Fredric Jameson called the "gap between phenomenological perception and a reality that transcends all individual thinking or experience" (1991, 416) is useful for describing Cora's inability to cognitively map the vast space outside of the plantation. The freedom stories that Cora might have heard came only from those who are still enslaved and not from those who successfully escaped. Lifelong spatialized bondage has made it difficult for the protagonist to imagine what it is like out there and to imagine herself navigating a space in which Black people have agency over their own bodies. However vague her imagination of life outside the plantation may be, her belief in its possibility guides her agency thinking, whereas the routes to freedom offered by the underground railroad support the generation of usable pathways.

An Affective Tour Through Racial Histories and Geographies

Whitehead's magically realist literalization of the underground railroad articulates Black hope spatially through its tunnels, tracks, and locomotives, which provide pathways toward freedom for enslaved subjects. Rather than a network of secret routes and houses operated by mostly white people, Whitehead's underground railroad is a physical structure secretly built by enslaved Black people. In "The Perilous Lure of the Underground Railroad" (2016), Kathryn Schulz points out that "most slaves who sought to be free didn't run at all. Instead, they chose to pursue liberty through other means" such as purchasing their own freedom or escaping to "Spanish Florida, Mexico, the Caribbean, Native American communities in the Southeast, free-black neighborhoods in the upper South, or Maroon communities." Even though the national imagination of the railroad provides "a comparatively comfortable place to rest in a profoundly uncomfortable past," especially for white Americans, Schulz emphasizes that it "was perhaps the *least* popular way for slaves to seek their freedom" (emphasis in original). *The Underground Railroad* taps

into such an imagination, including numerous white abolitionists who assist Cora, but its reconfiguration of the railroad and emphasis on Black agency, struggle, and resistance serves as an addition and corrective to stories that over-emphasize the role of sympathetic whites.

When Cora arrives at the first station of the railroad, her question of "[w]ho built it?" is met with a counter-question by the conductor: "Who builds anything in this country?" (Whitehead 2017, 81). By positioning the railroad as a crucial site of collective Black geographic resistance, the novel challenges Black erasure from history and geography, while also celebrating Black achievement. Not only did Black subjects build a literal pathway toward freedom, but they make use of a collective form of agency thinking. Whereas hope theory often focuses on individual goal pursuit, Edwards and McClintock emphasize that for people of color family and community are important "resources for maintaining agency and pathways" (2018, 96). In this case, the construction of the underground railroad—much like the Black female characters' cross-generational gardening—can be seen as a practice of hope that hinges on what Herman Beavers, in his reading of Toni Morrison's fiction, describes as "the characters' realization that interdependence is a key element" (2018, 7). Like several other narratives considered in this book, *The Underground Railroad* expands our understanding of the relationships between emotions and Black collective placemaking.

The affective resistance that *drives* the railroad in the novel is not only resilience and hope, but also what Sue J. Kim describes as moral outrage—an inherently hopeful emotion that is "based in collective notions of justice, ethics, and rights" (2013, 177).[8] Kim refers to Priyamvada Gopal who suggests that "[r]eal indignation is born not of hatred but of empathy and solidarity with others. It seeks to move beyond the particulars of one's self and community to something more universally human" (2011). When Cora finally arrives at the railroad's last station, no locomotive awaits her, but only a tunnel with a handcart. As she powers her way through the tunnel, using the handcart and later only her feet to get to the "North," she is reminded that she is not "just a passenger" (Whitehead 2017, 318), but an active agent of Black resistance and thus, recalling Caesar's view of Cora, "the locomotive itself" (281). As Madhu Dubey notes, Whitehead's railroad again "becomes laden with heavy metaphorical weight" (2020, 13). She points out that "[t]his trope channels the rich legacy of the underground in African American literature—as a space of invisibility and exclusion but also latent possibility in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952)

and, in Richard Wright's 'The Man Who Lived Underground,' as the vantage point from which the gap between the promise and practice of American democracy becomes most glaringly visible" (13). Cora's journey from Georgia all the way to the North, and then to the West, communicates the disconnect between democratic ideals and social inequity by showcasing the racial-spatial violence that perpetually seeks to destroy Black agency and hope.

Each new space confronts Cora with its own version of racial terror, prompting readers to engage with the different forms of racism and their emotional consequences. Whitehead's narration of the escape, through the protagonist's focalized perspective, offers what Marie-Laure Ryan calls a tour of the storyworld. Drawing on cognitive psychological work by Charlotte Linde and William Labov (1975), Ryan suggests that the tour strategy simulates "the embodied experience of a traveler" as it portrays "space dynamically from a perspective internal to the territory to be surveyed" (2003, 218). As Cora moves through South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Indiana, the neo-slave narrative invites readers to tour the racialized spaces of pre-Civil War America alongside the protagonist. In addition to encountering the different ways in which white supremacy and anti-Black racism are spatialized within the different states, readers are also given a tour through history and the historical development of racial thinking in the United States. The protagonist's movement through the literary geographical space of the storyworld is coupled with anachronistic movements through time outside the diegetic frame of the narrative. In other words, within the logic of the storyworld, Cora does not travel in time but Whitehead prompts readers to do so. Derek C. Maus asserts that "Whitehead counts on his twenty-first-century readers to recognize references that his nineteenth-century characters not only do not comprehend but also *cannot* comprehend, thereby forcing the reader to consider the implications of interpreting Cora's story through such retroactive lenses" (2021, 125, emphasis in original). As I apply Ryan's theory of the tour strategy to *The Underground Railroad*, my primary question is: How does Whitehead use the protagonist's emotional experiences of racialized space to provide an immersive tour through the nineteenth-century storyworld that Cora is navigating, while also critiquing the history of white supremacy that is "spatially embedded" in his speculative narrative?

When Cora arrives in South Carolina, the first station on her journey, the narrative reveals that "[s]he looked up at the skyscraper and reeled, wondering how far she had traveled" (Whitehead 2017, 84) and that she

uses an elevator in the twelve-story high building which "towered over any structure in the south" (103). The newness amazes Cora and disrupts her own cognitive models of space because she has never encountered such a building, thinking of it "as a monument to her profound change in circumstances" (104). At the same time, a skyscraper with an elevator likely disrupts readers' imagination of South Carolina in the mid-1800s. Reminiscent of Ishmael Reed's *Flight to Canada* (1976), *The Underground Railroad* moves "beyond a mimetic and linear representation of the individual slave's quest for freedom and toward a re-formative and temporally fluid representation of the American slave system and its legacy" (Spaulding 2005, 30). Through its inclusion of fantastical elements that are historically out of place—a subterranean train system, a skyscraper, and an elevator—the novel creates a superimposition of contemporary and past landscapes. In doing so, it foregrounds that technological advancement, a prominent symbol of progress, does not necessarily equal racial progress, while also highlighting the need for new forms of spatial imagination that are built on an understanding that real and imagined, historical and present, landscapes can be changed.

In Whitehead's South Carolina, Cora is yet again classified as property and legally owned by the government. Nevertheless, the protagonist cannot but marvel at the prospect of Black people being allowed to "get food, jobs, and housing. Come and go as they please, marry who they wish, raise children who will never be taken away" (Whitehead 2017, 111). At first, the novel prompts readers to tour what appear to be spatially and emotionally liberating geographies alongside Cora, to whom "walk[ing] down the sidewalk as a free woman" (104) and singing and dancing with other Black people is "tonic for the battered soul" (123). The narrative, however, quickly disrupts the possibility of a linear path toward freedom, showing instead how racism continues to defend itself against Black hope by taking on new forms. The state purports progress from slavery, but institutes different forms of oppression, such as strategic sterilization to "free them [enslaved subjects] from bondage without fear that they'd butcher us in our sleep" (146). A doctor explains that it is imperative to eliminate "those of melancholic tendency" and manage Black men's "sexual aggression and violent natures" to "protect our women and daughters from their jungle urges which … [is] a particular fear of southern white men" (145–146). The reinvention of more subtle, yet no less harmful, systems of oppression is based on the enslavers' "own fear" about "the possibility of insurrection" (Sharples 2020, 12). By anachronistically echoing the horrendous exploitation of Black subjects in the wake of slavery

through the protagonist's experiences of race and space in South Carolina, Whitehead reaffirms the refusal of romantic hope that is baked into the genre of the neo-slave narrative, which emerged in response to the many ways in which white supremacy has reinvented itself in slavery's aftermath. In a place that only pretends to take seriously Black hope, the protagonist forcibly learns that mere pathways and agency thinking cannot be enough if the thwarting circumstances one is trying to overcome keep reinventing themselves. This visceral understanding teaches Cora not to place her hope in myths of white progress, but to nevertheless believe in the possibility of Black individual and collective agency for imagining and practicing freedom. For Whitehead's readers, empathetic engagement with the protagonist's defeated hopes also encourages a broader reflection on how the historical progression of white power intersects with the structural incapacitation of Black hope. While the relentless production of Black fear as well as Black grief does not foreclose Black hope, as both neo-slave narratives show, it severely limits the space afforded to it.

Whitehead's fictionalized South Carolina interrogates several different ways in which white fear of Black hope, and thus Black advancement, spurred different forms of anti-Black oppression in slavery's aftermath, including the racist history of eugenics and the Tuskegee Syphilis study. In this context, the chapter points to what W.E.B. Du Bois described as the fear of "good Negro Government" during the Reconstruction-era period (2013, 381). This fear, suggests Ta-Nehisi Coates, also "has much explanatory power for what might seem a shocking turn—the election of Donald Trump" in the wake of the Obama presidency (2017, xiv). Such parallels between past and present likely resonate with the twenty-first-century readers of Whitehead's neo-slave narrative. Coates argues that

> [t]he symbolic power of Barack Obama's presidency—that whiteness was no longer strong enough to prevent peons from taking up residence in the castle—assaulted the most deeply rooted notions of white supremacy and instilled fear in its adherents and beneficiaries. And it was that fear that gave the symbols Donald Trump deployed—the symbols of racism—enough potency to make him president, and thus put him in position to injure the world. (xiv)

The Underground Railroad highlights the close link between white racial-spatial violence and white fear of Black progress as well as Black retribution, the latter of which is explicitly addressed in the North Carolina chapter.

The subjugation that South Carolina hides under a facade of advancement is strategically signposted in its sister state where "the negro race did not exist except at the ends of ropes" (Whitehead 2017, 187). The plan is to continue expanding the "Freedom Trail"—a long trail of Black corpses hanging from ropes—until there are no Black people left.[9] Cora is consequently forced to hide from the state's deadly racism in a white couple's attic. The neo-slave narrative positions Cora's story in relation to Harriet Jacobs's slave narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), which details how she spent seven years in a tiny space in her grandmother's attic. Whitehead prompts readers to engage with Cora's subjective experience of confinement and claustrophobia in the "cramped nook," which "came to a point three feet from the floor and ran fifteen feet in length" (2017, 184). By pointing out that "her body remembered the limits on her movement [as] Cora slept, nestled between the rafters as if in the cramped hold of a ship" (202), the narrative parallels the protagonist's experience with that of many Africans, who were forcibly transported on slave ships, including her grandmother Ajarry. The attic provides Cora the necessary protection from a regime that orchestrates spectacles of Black death and Black suffering for public consumption, but it also enables Cora to observe the spectacle of white fear. As she watches North Carolina's white citizens from above, through a small hole in the wall, the use of internal focalization allows readers to share Cora's ensuing realization that whites "were prisoners like she was, shackled to fear" (216):

> [T]he scale of the violence was hard to settle in her head. Fear drove these people, even more than cotton money. The shadow of the black hand that will return what has been given. It occurred to her one night that she was one of the vengeful monsters they were scared of: She had killed a white boy. She might kill one of them next. And because of that fear, they erected a new scaffolding of oppression on the cruel foundation laid hundreds of years before. (206–207)

Soon after Cora escapes the plantation, an encounter with a group of antagonistic and opportunistic white pig-hunters—who are desperate to catch her to get a monetary reward—leaves her no chance but to defend herself, which results in the death of a white boy. Cora grieves for the boy, but she also fears the consequences of his death because she is subsequently searched as a runaway and a murderer. Importantly, the passage above highlights Cora's own evolving understanding of white fear.

An entire chapter in *The Underground Railroad* is focalized through the perspective of the slave catcher, Ridgeway, who claims that "[t]he slave that disappears—it's a notion, too. Of hope. Undoing what I do so that a slave the next plantation over gets an idea that it can run, too. If we allow that, we accept the flaw in the imperative. And I refuse" (268). This speaks to the destructive ways in which white America fights its fears of Black advancement by continuously practicing and perpetuating violence and oppression. Carol Anderson has argued that the "trigger for white rage, inevitably, is black advancement" (2020, 3). As Anderson puts it, "[i]t is not the mere presence of black people that is the problem; rather it is blackness with ambition, with drive, with purpose, with aspirations, and with demands to full and equal citizenship" (3). While North Carolina's self-proclaimed mission is the eradication of Black people, Ridgeway's assertion that Cora and her mother represent "the best of your race" and therefore a "flaw in the imperative" (Whitehead 2017, 268) represents what Koritha Mitchell has called "know-your-place aggression" (2020, 2). Indeed, *The Underground Railroad* fictionalizes the historical continuation of know-your-place aggression by narrating a myriad of ways in which the Black female protagonist's struggle for freedom and advancement is met with white violence.

The ongoing persistence of anti-Black racism negates Cora's initial hope that the farther away she is from the plantation the freer she will be. However, important advancements in her journey bring renewed pathway and agency opportunities. After Ridgeway captures in North Carolina, the slave catcher himself eventually ends up in chains while three Black men rescue Cora and bring her to the Valentine farm in Indiana, which is owned and managed by Black people and described as a "kind of depot, attracting people who were between places" (Whitehead 2017, 292). Valentine is supposed to be only an interstation, but Cora wants to stay because she appreciates "the elemental rhythms of planting and harvest, the lessons and imperatives of the shifting seasons" (317–318). Whereas her practice of hope on the Randall plantation was mostly bound to her garden plot, Cora's positive sense of place on Valentine extends to the entire farm and its inhabitants—highlighting how positive emotions such as hope, joy, and love intersect with communal Black geographic and ecological practice. The library, which spatializes the Douglassian emphasis on the importance of literacy, is an especially significant place for Cora. It not only documents stories about Black liberation, but it is itself part of the counter-geographic story of revolutionary Black hope that is being

written on Valentine farm. Cora feels at home within a community of hard-working and caring Black people who support other Black people because they understand the moral imperative of freedom. As Morrison said in a 1979 speech at Barnard College, they understand that "the function of freedom is to free somebody else" (2019, 111).

Since this recognition is not widely shared among the white characters in the novel, the last instantiation of white rage and violence happens when Valentine farm is viciously attacked. Before describing the actual ambush, the narrator states that "[t]he final gathering on Valentine farm took place on a brisk December night" (Whitehead 2017, 333). In so doing, Whitehead makes use of the same sort of "flashforwarding device used to such disconcerting effect in Edward Jones's *The Known World*" (Dubey 2020, 22). After an army of white men ambush Valentine farm—a geography of Black hope so threatening to the racial order of white supremacy that it "needs to be destroyed" (Whitehead 2017, 266)—Cora is recaptured by Ridgeway, but manages to escape the slave catcher yet again. As the protagonist is pumping the handcar from the last station of the railroad into an unknown space, Whitehead describes the richness of clandestine Black geographies as "the miracle beneath … [t]he secret triumph you keep in your heart" (363). Even though "Cora never achieves a definitive legal freedom" (Maus 2021, 124), her final realization that she could not see the true face of America "but she *felt* it, moved through its heart" (Whitehead 2017, 363, emphasis mine) emphasizes the liberating potential of Black geographic imaginaries which exist vis-à-vis white geographies of racial violence.

After all, as *The Underground Railroad* demonstrates, Black hope has always existed despite structural efforts to undermine it. Its open but hopeful ending, Cora joining a Black man who is on his way to St. Louis and then to California, might not reflect "the true disposition of the world" as Li claims (2019, 4). However, such an interpretation forecloses imaginative possibilities by accepting the structural inhibition of Black hope as fixed and unchangeable, which is not what Whitehead's Black female protagonist does. Instead, she moves according to a maxim that Whitehead expressed in a 2016 interview with Vicky Mochama: "If you don't have hope, then why go on?" Touring *The Underground Railroad*'s storyworld alongside the protagonist offers not only an experiential account of white supremacist geographies, but it also opens up conceptual space for understanding intersections between Black hope, geography, and community.

Fear, Hope, and the Affective Hold of White Supremacy in *The Known World*

The Known World portrays several Black characters whose hopes lie not in escaping slavery's geographies, but in profiting from the anti-Black oppression practiced in them.[10] Jones's fictional rendering of a Black plantation owner—who exploits the labor of enslaved Black subjects alongside white slaveholders—interrogates what Lightner and Ragan describe as "surely one of the most peculiar features of the peculiar institution" (Lightner and Ragan 2005, 535).[11] However, when the hopes, goals, and actions of a system's most abused individuals contribute to reproduce its violence, this is less "peculiar" than it is a testament to the system's capacity to prescribe practices of hope that sustain its power. As Jones's neo-slave narrative depicts Black characters who covet the white master's power, it interrogates the destructive ways in which the affective power of white supremacy shapes relationships to both place and others.

Whereas *The Underground Railroad* mostly relies on Cora as a "tour guide," *The Known World* uses the tour strategy to represent the fears, anxieties, and hopes of many different character-focalizers who navigate geographies of white power. Additionally, the neo-slave narrative draws on what Ryan calls the "map strategy" in two different ways. First, it uses the seemingly omniscient, third-person narrator to offer what Ryan describes as a representation "from the disembodied God's-eye point of view" (2003, 218). While Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu suggest that the map strategy's "external, elevated, static perspective" allows readers to "locate the elements of the landscape with respect to each other" (2016, 27–28), my analysis neither looks at literal spatial locations and/or relations in the storyworld nor does it treat the narrator's mapping as static.[12] Rather, I wish to emphasize how *The Known World*'s strategic use of the map strategy offers a panoramic understanding of how space and practices of spatial domination affect different characters across time. The links between fear, hope, power, and geography are simultaneously bound to and unbound from slavery, which is also expressed through the narrative's formal use of geographic and temporal fluidity: jumping from one place to another, following individuals after death, and extending the narration way past the nineteenth century. While each character's story is marked by a distinct set of experiences, they are all embedded in the same broader geographies of white supremacy, which makes it possible to observe how both their fears and hopes acquire a structural component.

The second way in which Jones uses the map strategy is through the inclusion of actual maps. Since the maps are not visualized, readers' access is mediated through the narrator's and characters' descriptions of and relations to them. As they tour through the pasts, presents, and futures of the characters' lives, readers are encouraged to understand how their fears and hopes are bound up with cartographic representations that either play into or challenge existing power relations.

Fear, Hope, and Geographies of Slavery

The novel begins with the death of Jones's protagonist, Henry Townsend, and seamlessly jumps back and forth in time and space to tell his life story. Through a flashback, Henry is introduced as "a black man of thirty-one years with thirty-three slaves and more than fifty acres of land that sat him high above many others, white and black, in Manchester County, Virginia" (Jones 2004, 5). We learn that Henry's father, Augustus, finally managed to emancipate his son at the age of 17, after successively liberating himself and his wife.[13] Touring the storyworld through Augustus's perspective reveals how fear motivates him to move to the very edge of a county that practices slaveholding to increase what Neil McNaughton and Philip J. Corr describe as "the literal distance between the subject and a predator" (2009, 715). While distance is one of our "most basic defensive reactions" to fear, McNaughton and Corr contend that "defensive distance is not related directly to distance per se," but to "an internal cognitive construct of intensity of perceived threat" (2009, 715). Although the physical distance from slaveholders enables Augustus to reduce the intensity of perceived threat, it cannot resolve the threats of staying within the confines of slaveholding Virginia.[14] This is most clearly revealed when a slave patroller willfully destroys Augustus's claim to liberty by eating his free papers and selling him back into bondage. The neo-slave narrative thereby chronicles both the (re)production of Black fear and Black grief as well as the punishment of Black hope.

Unlike his parents, Henry harbors no fears in relation to his proximity to and involvement in slavery. Shortly after he is freed, Henry purchases a piece of land and his first human property, Moses, from his former master. As David Ikard points out, Henry becomes invested in "an ideologically warped milieu where African Americans are socially conditioned to see white dominance and the brutal exploitation of black bodies for capital gain as natural" (2011, 65).[15] In contrast to more traditional

bondage-to-freedom narratives, which typically focus on "conversion through exercising an act of will," Katherine Clay Bassard notes that Henry suffers from a "lack of agency in initiating or securing his own freedom" (2008, 415). Jones's protagonist does not lack agency per se, but he lacks agency and pathways thinking that is directed toward increasing his distance to slavery. By the time Henry is liberated from enslavement, he is trained to practice the kind of hope that maintains the racial and economic functions of slavery.

During his formative years, Henry encounters two types of hope: First, his parents' hopes for freedom and their corresponding struggles to liberate Henry from slavery. Second, his master William Robbins's hopes to ostensibly empower Henry by educating him in "the business of mastering" (Jones 2004, 73). Henry's grieving for his parents, following their emancipation, coincides with a developing attachment to Robbins, which centrally shapes the form that hope eventually takes in his life. As the narrator observes, "[k]nowing how painful loneliness could be, having been separated as a child from Augustus and then Mildred, Henry thought it a good thing, never to be alone, to always have someone" (84). As I will explain more closely in the fifth chapter, grief can disrupt one's sense of self and understanding of the world, it can increase susceptibility to exploitative relationships, and it can mobilize attachments to other grievers. All of the above aspects apply to Henry's relationship to his master. Henry's attachment to Robbins eases his grief and fills the gap created by the absence of his parents—a gap that Robbins created—while Henry also performs an emotional service to his psychologically troubled master. Upon every visit with his "other" family, a Black family, Robbins experiences what is described as "storms," likely a form of mental distress caused by a combination of love, guilt, and grief. Returning to the plantation after these encounters, Robbins "depended on seeing the boy waving from his place in front the mansion, came to know that the sight of Henry meant the storm was over" (27–28). Robbins's investment in Henry's ostensible empowerment makes his own crimes, and the affective repercussions thereof, more bearable. This, however, comes with emotional consequences for Henry whom Robbins educates to practice the kind of individualistic hope that is fatally enmeshed with capitalism and unjust power relations. The hopes and goals of the white man—a power structure personified by Robbins—define the geographies that Henry operates in and that Jones critiques.

Henry might be unable to imagine another version of freedom, that is, what he could become beyond slavery's bounds, but he does understand that he is "operating within a space that rewards those who take what is available to them within the spatial arrangement" (Ardoin 2013, 643). Henry's alignment with white power structures, then, cannot be separated from *his* understanding that within the anti-Black geographies of slavery individual agency and pathways potential rise and fall depending on how well one serves the white man's interests. Bassard observes that Henry gains social power through his own version of passing: Black slaveowners "extend the notion of passing beyond physiological passing, which requires the privilege of white skin color, into the psychological and social dimensions of the term" (2008, 408). They cross the "power line" causing "identities [to] shift from one side of the social text of power to the other in such a way as to cause a temporary destabilization in the coordinates of oppressor and oppressed" (408). Being a Black slaveholder seemingly allows Henry to contest anti-Blackness. As Margo Natalie Crawford points out, "Jones's move to foreground black slaveowners also has the potential to liberate black people from the psychic hold of slavery; for if black slaveowners existed, then being black cannot, in the deeper psychological registers, equal being a slave" (2016, 77). However, Crawford also asserts that "*The Known World* takes us to a deeper sense of the antiblackness that black people participate in when they become part of the white supremacist power structure" (77). This is nowhere as apparent as in Henry's insistence on his right to engage in state-sanctioned anti-Blackness: "I ain't done nothin that any white man wouldn't do. I ain't broke no law" (Jones 2004, 138). While Henry keeps insisting "that he wanted to be a better master than any white man he had ever known" (64), the hope that he can become a more humane master on the sole basis of his Blackness is naive at best and cruel at worst. His widow Caldonia's attempt to describe Henry as "a good master … as good as they come" (Jones 2004, 181) is bound to fail because the wielding of fear and the crushing of hopes for dignity and freedom is integral to the "business" of mastering other humans.

During his lifetime, Henry never recognizes how his complicity in Black oppression keeps him forever confined in a world of white supremacy. However, Jones describes in spatial terms how this very realization shapes the moments after Henry's death:

[A]s he formed some words to join the conversation, death stepped into the room and came to him: Henry walked up the steps and into the tiniest of houses, knowing with each step that he did not own it, that he was only

renting. … Whoever was renting the house to him had promised a thousand rooms, but as he traveled through the house he found less than four rooms, and all the rooms were identical and his head touched their ceilings.[16] (2004, 10–11)

In this passage, which signifies one of Jones's many breaks from (pseudo-) realism, a dead Henry navigates a spatialized version of the miniature life that he created for himself. As the narrative invites readers to tour the house alongside Henry, it prompts them to understand that slavery brings down master and enslaved alike. His actions, guided by his investment of hope in achieving power within an oppressive system of anti-Blackness, do not even allow Henry to walk without crouching.

In addition to Henry's perspective, the novel negotiates the emotional trauma of slavery through the character of Moses. The narrator introduces Moses, Henry's first slave and overseer, as he is eating dirt on the Townsend plantation, "not only to discover the strengths and weaknesses of the field, but because the eating of it tied him to the only thing in his small world that meant almost as much as his own life" (2). Trudier Harris notes that Moses appears to be "one with nature, someone with whom readers might identify and sympathize with" (2009, 187). However, this does not align with the narrative's later revelation that Moses "embraced the more abusive sides of power and enslavement … to intimidate other blacks and to remind them constantly that he is one step above them" (187).[17] Touring the storyworld through Moses's perspective not only provides insight into his changing and contradictory relations to both space and others. But it also delineates Moses's own wielding of fear upon others as an attempt to gain power, however marginal, in order to compensate for the inordinate amount of fear and grief that he experienced as an enslaved person.

Moses's character development follows what Howard Sklar, based on Meir Sternberg (1978), calls the "recency effect." According to Sklar, "subsequently revealed expositional information serves to modify and even change readers' first judgments regarding a character" (2013, 57). The gradual revelation of details about Moses as a cruel overseer who, for instance, makes a pregnant woman work in the fields and lose her baby, troubles readers' empathy with and sympathy for him. However, the narrative's use of flashbacks simultaneously draws attention to how the enormity of loss in Moses's past compromised his present ability for emotional attachment as well as his capacity for hope. While research in psychology has identified hope as a potential response to trauma, ascribing to it a generative function for envisioning possibilities despite losses and limitations

(e.g., Long 2022; Richardson 2023), there are also studies which show that trauma and "racial discrimination, especially during emerging adulthood can precipitate or exacerbate hopelessness" (Khahra et al. 2019, 380). The novel, in fact, locates the root of Moses's hopelessness in his traumatic personal history. When Robbins first buys Moses, the latter is begging not to be separated from a woman named Bessie because "[s]he all I have in this world. We is one as a family" (Jones 2004, 173). Following his own lack of agency to stop forces much bigger than him to save Bessie, "the sun did not rise very high in Moses's life" (286). Traumatic grief disrupts Moses's world and "reinforces his own thingness" (Mutter 2011, 132), making him feel "despair and helplessness toward the institutions and people that oppress him" and "identify with the oppressor rather than the oppressed" (Ikard 2011, 81). This also explains why Moses embraces the form of hope that Henry practices, imagining himself as Henry's successor, thinking that "[p]eople would have said, 'That Marse Moses, he got somethin magic in him to make that plantation like it is'" (Jones 2004, 333). While the recency effect changes readers' perceptions of Moses, the narrative urges them to recognize that Moses's own lack of empathy with and sympathy for his fellow human beings is a result of the insidious effects of slavery on the human psyche.

The Limits and Possibilities of Mapping: White Racial Anxiety and Black Revolutionary Hope

The Known World explores the characters' situatedness in the context of slavery, but the narration often also moves beyond the spatial and temporal embeddedness of his characters. Jones provides a kaleidoscopic representation of space and time by using the map strategy's panoramic and seemingly God-like perspective in combination with a fragmented approach to focalization. He routinely breaks with his otherwise realistic narration to reveal how his characters' lives turn out, thereby also seeking to "jolt the reader from automatic responses to a literary representation of slavery" (Ryan 2008, 205). In so doing, Jones urges readers to remain cautious about what can truly be known both in their worlding of the story and in the storying of their own world. The strategies of narration that he uses to structure his own textual space therefore support a key premise of Black geographic thought, namely, that there is no one, immutable "vantage point" from which we can view the world.[18] Jones's multifocal, multitemporal, and multispatial representation of his storyworld

leaves no doubt about the fact that neither history nor geography is neutral and fixed, but that both can be read anew, reinterpreted, and changed.

The spatial and temporal fluidity that defines Jones's usage of the map strategy is, for example, illustrated when Stamford, one of the enslaved subjects on what is now Caldonia's plantation is playing with Celeste and Elias's newborn Ellwood:

> The baby's hands had reached the man's face and he was tapping every feature of it, doing everything that was necessary for the man to say the words the baby had come to expect in their brief history together. Stamford's mouth opened more and more. "You here early this mornin," Stamford Crow Blueberry would say to Ellwood Freemen that day some twenty years later in Richmond. Ellwood would be walking up the street with the reins of his horse in his hand, and Stamford would be walking with a baby resting on his shoulder, the newest member of the Richmond Home for Colored Orphans. … It mattered only that those kind of chains were gone and that he had crawled out into the clearing and was able to stand up on his hind legs and look around and appreciate the difference between then and now, even on the awful Richmond days when the now came dressed as the then. Behind him, as he walked back, was the very corner where more than a hundred years later they would put that first street sign—STAMFORD AND DELPHIE CROW BLUEBERRY STREET. (Jones 2004, 353–354)

The narrator seamlessly moves from a gathering on Caldonia's plantation in 1850s Virginia to a post-abolition future in which the baby in the scene is a grown and free man. Whereas Cora's escape story in *The Underground Railroad* is driven by hope for eventual freedom, Whitehead never includes a passage such as this one that imagines a clearly better future outside of slavery for the runaway protagonist. Jones's narrator does so by transitioning to the future with the verb "would," which, according to Cindy Weinstein, signifies that "the future can be imagined as a temporality that escapes the pain of the present" (2015, 109). What Weinstein calls the "would to power" not only represents a temporal shift, but also a liberating spatiality which is demonstrated through Jones's repeated usage of the words "would be walking" to describe both Stamford's and grown-up Ellwood's freedom of movement. Later in the passage, Jones still writes about the future, but he uses past tense to describe the trauma that remains present after emancipation. By communicating that the transition from slavery to freedom, from the plantation to the city, is not a linear one, Jones interrogates the afterlives of slavery in the future of his storyworld,

but also in his readers' extratextual twenty-first-century world. In the final sentence, he again goes back to using the verb "would" to transport readers even further into a future in which the people in his narration are already dead. Their efforts of providing Black orphaned children with hope through community and home-creation, however, remain present in the form of a street sign which continues to shape future space. Both oppression and liberation create legacies, suggests Jones, and he critiques one and commends the other.

Finally, the inclusion of actual maps is central to Jones's neo-slave narrative. By not representing the maps visually, but mediating readers' access via language, the novel points to the importance of narrative for our understanding of space. At the same time, it uses the limited socio-spatial understanding of specific characters to highlight the dangers of accepting one single interpretation as true and fully knowable. The first map, aptly called "The Known World," is located at the local sheriff's office in the Manchester County jail. Here, the novel alludes to Waldseemüller's 1507 map "Universalis cosmographia," the first known document to name "America."[19] Even though "certain aspects of the land mass are deemphasized or entirely absent, [and] others are blatantly misrepresented" (1187), Sheriff Skiffington, the map's owner, declines a more accurate map: "I'm happy with what I got" (Jones 2004, 174). Ardoin notes that the map "highlights both the falsities that emerge inevitably as part of the very process of mapmaking and the additional layer of falsity that sets in once the ink dries and the falsehoods begin to be treated as true enough" (2013, 642). Maria Seger further suggests that, by getting the creator's name wrong and changing the size of the map, "[t]he novel implies that the historical past being accessed in the present (both within the novel and outside of it) is fictional or at least inaccurate" (2014, 1187). Jones includes this map as a meta-narrative that foregrounds how maps, as socially significant metanarratives about the world, both reflect and produce dominant social narratives. David Harvey has argued that "[h]ow we represent space and time in theory matters, because it affects how we and others interpret and then act with respect to the world" (1989, 205). The maps in *The Known World*, and the characters' relations to them, give insight into such processes of representation and interpretation, negotiating both the limits and possibilities of mapping.

Clara Martin's investment in the limited imaginary of "The Known World" is one example of how an investment in racial-spatial boundaries as rigid and inevitable affectively traps white characters, especially as the fear

of losing material privileges and power outweighs the possibility for emotional attachment and love outside social norms. Clara is a white widow, who allows her slave Ralph to comb her hair, falling asleep in his comforting presence and calling "his name, once and once again" (Jones 2004, 151). When her attraction becomes obvious to herself, Clara immediately registers it as a transgression, thinking that "there was something wrong in calling him like that" (151). Perceiving her emotions and actions as deviant, Clara "closed her mouth" (151), which encapsulates the silencing power of shame. The seemingly fixed path that gender, race, and class proscribe for Clara thwart her agency in choosing an alternative pathway, while also compelling her to negate the existence of her feelings, even to herself. In his discussion of the relationships between individual emotional experiences and social structures, Michael Lewis contends that "denial and repression serve the function of preventing people from having particular emotional experiences that they [and the society they live in] deem unacceptable" (2008, 314). Clara goes further than denial, though, by projecting "her own racialized anxieties" onto Ralph through racial shaming—creating an image of him "as a rapist and murderer-in-waiting" (Ikard 2011, 68). The narrator reveals that "Clara and Ralph, would live another twenty-one years together," whereas "Clara would die first, asleep in her bed, a knife under her pillow and another beside her in the bed, as close as a lover" (Jones 2004, 162–163). Clara's fabricated racial and gendered anxiety turns into what neuroscientist Kevin S. LaBar describes as a "state of unease about a distal, potentially negative outcome that is uncertain or unpredictable" (2016, 751)—transforming "Clara into a version of the psychopath that she imagines Ralph to be" (Ikard 2011, 71). Her internalization of the fiction of Black inferiority, and the seemingly natural boundaries between Black and white, enslaved and free, deny Clara the freedom that whiteness promises.

In stark contrast to that stands the affective and spatial resistance by Henry's former slave and runaway, Alice Night. On the plantation, Alice is widely known as "a woman people said had lost her mind" (Jones 2004, 3). The story goes that a "mule kicked her in the head and sent all common sense flying out of her," which made Alice's "mind so addled [that] she wandered in the night like a cow without a bell" (4). In his analysis of *The Underground Railroad*, Maus argues that there is a "secondary level of storytelling [which] deliberately lies outside the characters' frame of reference" (2021, 125). Whereas Whitehead discloses to readers information that is unavailable to Cora herself, Jones engages such a narrative

strategy to provide readers with information about Alice that other characters in the storyworld do not have: "No one knew enough about the place [Alice] had come from to know that her former master was terrified of mules and would not have them on his place" (2004, 4). With the awareness of Alice's feigned craziness, readers are invited to tour the storyworld alongside her as she repeatedly wanders through the night to mentally map the plantation and its surroundings.

Reminiscent of Frederick Douglass, who forged free passes to navigate space outside of the plantation, Alice's performance of craziness is an act of hope and resilience that allows her to produce what Kevin Young refers to as "an underground railroad of meaning to survive, a second sight to redress freedom in a culture designed to destroy any remnants of Africa or inherent humanity of any African being" (2012, 23). Young's notion of "storying" refers to such acts of imagination through which Black subjects "out of necessity, reinvented themselves in order to reinvent our world" (34). Indeed, Alice's active generation of usable pathways combined with "the perceived capacity to use one's pathways to reach desired goals" (Snyder 2002, 251) represents a practice of revolutionary hope. Sara Ahmed asserts that hope is revolutionary "when the 'not yet' impresses upon us in the present, such that we must act, politically, to make it our future" (2015, 184). Psychologists Bryana H. French et al. similarly contend that "[w]hat makes hope in the face of social and political devastation radical is that it believes in a future beyond current understanding" (2023, 328). The fourth chapter will further explore the connections between outrage against present injustice and hope for future justice. Percival Everett's *Erasure* (2001) and Maurice Carlos Ruffin's *We Cast a Shadow* (2019) both direct their ethical critique against the racial-spatial constraint that incapacitates their protagonists' potential for practicing "revolutionary outrage," that is, expressing anger productively in ways that trouble white power. Similarly, the racial and geographic narratives that structure the imagination of Jones's Henry and Moses severely limit imaginative space for revolutionary practices. Yet, there are also several ways in which *The Underground Railroad* and *The Known World* model the kind of Black practices of revolutionary hope and outrage that exist in spite of relentless challenges and pushbacks, including the collective Black placemaking that brings Whitehead's underground railroad into being. Furthermore, hope is central to Cora's quest for racial and geographic freedom as well as Alice's practice of cognitive and artistic mapping.

The product of Alice's vision and revision of space are two maps that Jones introduces toward the end of the narrative when Calvin, Caldonia's brother, discovers her artwork in Washington, D.C. Alice's artistic maps are again not visually represented, but accessible solely through Calvin's interpretation of them as a

> grand piece of art that is part tapestry, part painting, and part clay structure—all in one exquisite Creation … a kind of map of life of the County of Manchester, Virginia.
>
> But a "map" is such a poor word for such a wondrous thing. … There are no people on this "map," just all the houses and barns and roads and cemeteries and wells in our Manchester. It is what God sees when He looks down on Manchester.
>
> [And] another Creation of the same materials, paint, clay and cloth. … This one is about your home, Caldonia. It is your plantation, and again, it is what God sees when He looks down. There is nothing missing, not a cabin, not a barn, not a chicken, not a horse. Not a single person is missing. … Each person's face, including yours, is raised up as though to look in the very eyes of God. … The dead in the cemetery have risen from there and they, too, stand at the cabins where they once lived. (Jones 2004, 384–385)

Through her mental maps and physical escape, Alice brings her own freedom into being. This freedom, then, affords her with the ability to create and display forms of art that encourage imaginations of alternative worlds. The first artwork that she creates, which maps a God-like vision of all of Manchester County, corresponds to more traditional cartographic representations. The second not only goes on to include the humans and animals who occupied the space, but it represents them as gazing back into the map's creator. Alice's "act of reimagining how maps function" (Beavers 2018, 4) suggests that we, too, must remember to look back at seemingly objective cartographies and geographies and the corresponding spatial narratives that structure lived experience.

CONCLUSION

The large and growing body of neo-slave narratives and scholarship on neo-slave narratives demonstrates the important position of the history of slavery in contemporary U.S. culture and literature. This chapter has, on the one hand, discussed the ways in which *The Underground Railroad* and *The Known World* interrogate the structural production of Black fear as

well as the structural incapacitation of Black hope from slavery to the present. On the other hand, it has examined the ways in which the narratives foreground Black fear and Black hope as motors for counter-hegemonic Black placemaking.

To use Ann Cvetkovich's words, these "individual stories must be taken seriously as social stories" (2003, 124), because they connect emotions to historical, social, political, and geographic contexts. While it is no surprise that racial-geographic domination has been the cause of negative and debilitating emotions such as fear, it is equally true that Black subjects and their emotions have historically been ignored, denied, distorted, and erased in American social life, public discourse, and academic scholarship. African American narratives, as I argue throughout the book, are key sources for theorizing emotions in relation to historical and contemporary political contexts.

In addition to the neo-slave narrative, the neo-segregation and the neo-passing narrative also constitute key sources for examining intersections between emotion, race, and space. By locating their characters within a Jim Crow era context, such novels negotiate the affective repercussions of segregationist geographic practices, while also bridging the temporal distance between the slave past and the present and thereby providing an understanding of the continuation of slavery's legacies.

NOTES

1. In a June 2020 episode of "The Feminist Present," a podcast by the Clayman Institute for Gender Research, sociologist Tressie McMillan Cottom examined how COVID-19 created historically specific conditions for mass political organizing. Suddenly, everyone had to confront the possibility of death. The virus not only confined us to our homes, but it also incapacitated institutions (such as the government and police). Simultaneously, the distance from social life expanded both the amount and range of overall media consumption. The hypervisibility of the fight for social justice during the pandemic and in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder, then, was made possible by the hyperpresence of fear that affected everyone. McMillan Cottom elucidates that only as white Americans were themselves confronted by a threat of an existential magnitude, were they compelled to join the fight for social justice. This only emphasizes, as McMillan Cottom asserts, the facileness of Barack Obama's hope in white America to do the "right" thing absent singular conditions. As she writes in her 2019 book *Thick And Other Essays*, "[e]ven after

Donald Trump was elected, Obama told Coates that all is not lost. He is still hopeful about the soul of white America. He said nothing about the soul of black America. That is where my hope resides" (117).

2. James Olney argued that "in one sense the narrative lives of the ex-slaves were as much possessed and used by the abolitionists as their actual lives had been by slaveholders" (1984, 51). Nonetheless, scholars such as Valerie Smith have asserted that slave narrators found ways to practice subversion despite the fixed generic conventions. Harriet Jacobs's slave narrative, for instance, "inscribes a subversive plot of empowerment beneath the more orthodox, public plot of weakness and vulnerability" (Smith 1987, 30).

3. In contrast to Crawford, who introduced the term "post-neo-slave narrative" to describe "a conceptual rather than a chronological difference" (2016, 71), Ashe and Saal (2020) emphasize the temporal distinctness of millennial interrogations of slavery that are shaped by contemporary and evolving understandings of (post-)Blackness.

4. Although the distinction is not always clear cut, and our experiences of fear and anxiety tend to be related, LeDoux's research indicates that "somewhat different brain mechanisms are engaged when the state is triggered by an objective and present threat as opposed to an uncertain event that may or may not occur in the future" (2015, 10–11). Since "fear responses evolved in situations of imminent physical harm, such as predator-prey interactions," they are typically associated with a specific elicitor or direct threat (LaBar 2016, 751). By contrast, anxiety rather corresponds to "a state of unease about a distal, potentially negative outcome that is uncertain or unpredictable" (751).

5. See, for example, Paradies et al. (2015), Comas-Díaz et al. (2019), and Alang et al. (2021).

6. For a cognitive narratological reading of fear and anger in Wright's *Native Son*, see Alexa Weik von Mossner's *Cosmopolitan Minds* (2014).

7. Kimberly K. Smith asserts that Black enslaved subjects had a "complex and conflicted relationship to the land" (2007, 18). Smith argues that, on the one hand, slavery "tended to alienate slaves from the land and the natural world by associating farming with brutality and coercion" and their own "status as a slave" (2014, 318). On the other hand, "knowledge of farming and herb lore could be a basis of power and self-respect in the slave community and even with respect to their masters" (318).

8. This moral outrage also reflects what Victor Luckerson has described as a kind of "hopeful anger" (2020), which has fueled many protests and calls for policy changes in the aftermath of George Floyd's death at the hands of law enforcement.

9. Whitehead's fictionalized freedom trail satirically references the freedom trail that runs through Boston, Massachusetts. Vanessa Lynn Lovelace describes the trail as "an exhibition of the acts of liberty that white, propertied, males could enact, and then claim as a victory for 'all' American peoples" (2017, 12). Lovelace points out that the "Boston Freedom Trail is a contested site for many whose freedom has not and cannot be tied to this space," specifically for those whose "space of freedom was found in dug out holes, attics, garrets, barns, swamps, woods, basements" (13).

10. Spaulding distinguishes neo-slave narratives from postmodern slave narratives, arguing that the former interrogate "slavery in its historical context" (2005, 5), while the latter "create an alternative and fictional historiography based on a subjective and anti-realistic representation of slavery … us[ing] the fantastic and genres like science fiction, the gothic novel, postmodern metafiction and the vampire tale" (2). He excludes *The Known World* from his definition of the postmodern because the novel's representation of slavery is not strictly fantastic or non-mimetic. Ryan, however, points out that "*The Known World*'s commitment to traditional realism and its informed engagement with historiography is balanced by its skeptical attitude toward history as a discipline and its unsettling metafictional characteristics" (2008, 205). Seger similarly observes that the novel "sometimes conforms to realist standards and at other times parodies them" (2014, 1192). It is precisely the novel's pseudorealism that points to "the danger inherent in the aim to convey a sense of historical truth through language in any genre" (1184).

11. Lightner and Ragan confirm the results of Carter G. Woodson's 1924 study *Free Negro Owners of Slaves in the United States in 1830*, which showed that the majority of Black slaveholders were free Black people who purchased their family members, but they also argue that "the minority of black slaveholders who are assumed here to have been exploitative was more substantial" than previously assumed (2005, 555).

12. Following a literal conceptualization of the map strategy would, for example, allow for an analysis of the ways in which *The Known World* evokes map-like representations of the fictional county of Virginia, the ways in which *The Underground Railroad* evokes map-like representations of the protagonist's escape trajectory, and the ways in which the novels' imagined geographies replicate the real geographies of the American South.

13. *The Known World* reveals that "Henry, in fact, was listed forever in the records of Manchester as his father's property" (Jones 2004, 16), meaning that Henry is "enumerated in the fictionalized statistics that Jones supplies in the novel as both a slaveowner and slave" (Bassard 2008, 415). Bassard suggests that the "historical dialectic between benevolent and commercial black slaveowning … is embodied in *The Known World* in the father-son conflict between Augustus and Henry" (412), but she concludes that ultimately neither "'benevolent' or 'commercial,' male or female, black slaveo-

wning" presented "any kind of threat to the white power structure under slavery" (414).

14. Whereas the Valentine farm in *The Underground Railroad* is located in the nominally free state of Indiana, the novel's representation of how the Black community's success is met with white rage and violence reveals how precarious this freedom is. This demonstrates that "any progress by those who are not straight, white, and male is answered with a backlash of violence—both literal and symbolic, both physical and discursive—that essentially says, *know your place*!" (Mitchell 2020, 2).

15. In *The Underground Railroad*, the slave catcher Ridgeway continuously reproduces such racist narratives. During one of her exchanges with Ridgeway, Whitehead's enslaved protagonist Cora explicitly questions the seeming naturalization of white supremacy. Forcibly listening to Ridgeway's drunken speech about "the American imperative" (Whitehead 2017, 266), Cora wonders whether "everything the slave catcher said was true …. every justification, and the sons of Ham were cursed and the slave master performed the Lord's will" or whether it is not true after all and "he was just a man talking to an outhouse door, waiting for someone to wipe her ass" (268–269). Cora's thoughts in this situation represent the development in her own storying of the world throughout the novel, symbolizing, as Maus astutely observes, that she has "learned a means of at least subverting—if not necessarily defeating—the distinctly American narratives that would keep her in chains" (2021, 136).

16. This could be interpreted as a reference to Jesus Christ's parting words to his disciples in John 14:2: "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?" (Reinhartz, 2002, 179). The "spatial language," reflects "movement from a current reality to a future, better one" (179), which, in turn, points to what Croft describes as a sense of hope in "other-worldly eschatological dimensions" that many Black people practiced during slavery (2017, 64). By mapping out a decidedly small house, Jones, however, suggests that this hope cannot come true for Henry.

17. There is an obvious irony in Jones's choice of Moses's name, considering that it is Moses who liberates the people of Israel from Egyptian bondage in the Book of Exodus—and considering also Harriet Tubman's famous "Black Moses" appellation in relation to her importance for the anti-slavery movement and the historical underground railroad.

18. McKittrick argues that Black thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Stuart Hall, Dionne Brand, and Toni Morrison "insist on an alternative vantage point and therefore a different sense of how geography is, and might be, lived out" (2006, 24).

19. In 2001, the only known copy of the 1507 map was purchased by the Library of Congress for ten million dollars. The Library of Congress writes that "Waldseemüller's map supported Amerigo Vespucci's revolutionary

concept of the New World as a separate continent, which, until then, was unknown to the Europeans," reflecting "a huge leap forward in knowledge, recognizing the newly found American landmass and forever changing mankind's understanding and perception of the world itself" (2003).

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Shame, Guilt, and Separatist Geographies in Toni Morrison's *Home* and Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half*

Abstract This chapter reads Toni Morrison's neo-segregation narrative *Home* (2012) and Brit Bennett's neo-passing narrative *The Vanishing Half* (2020) through an emotion-race-space framework. On the one hand, it analyzes the historical and ongoing ways in which Black shame and guilt are bound up with racial-geographic separatism. On the other hand, it examines how alternative placemaking disrupts the logic and effects of Black guilt and shame. The narratives both invite and complicate readers' empathy with protagonists who wrestle with the effects of racial-spatial hierarchies and are themselves guilty of physical and discursive violence. Importantly, they also use these and other characters' experiences to reveal the significance of inclusive and communal spaces for emotional healing and liberation. The radical placemaking built around empathy with others like and unlike oneself, which is modeled by Morrison's Southern Black women, is only further expanded by Bennett's L.A. community whose intersectional spatial imaginary enables an unmaking of shame and guilt brought on by parochial understandings of race, gender, and sexuality.

Keywords African American literature • Toni Morrison • Race • Segregation • Black women • Intersectionality • Passing • Empathy • Shame • Guilt

In her 1997 essay "Home," Toni Morrison poses several fundamental questions that guide her literary work: "How to be both free and situated; how to convert a racist house into a race-specific yet nonracist home. How to enunciate race while depriving it of its lethal cling?" (5). These questions are integral to Morrison's own work, but she also calls upon other Black authors to respond. In the second chapter, I considered how contemporary authors of neo-slave narratives uncover the strategic production of Black fear within white supremacist geographies, and how they simultaneously recover Black hope's radical importance for rearranging the meanings and possibilities of place despite and within white geographies of terror. In this chapter, I will continue with a consideration of how Morrison's own *Home* (2012) and Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* (2020) enunciate in- and outgroup divisions of race and space as organizing principles of shame and guilt, while also foregrounding how alternative placemaking provides possibilities for mitigating the pain of shame and guilt brought on by parochial understandings of identity.[1]

I will read *Home* as a neo-segregation narrative and *The Vanishing Half* as a neo-passing narrative. The neo-segregation narrative, a term that was introduced by Brian Norman (2010), and the neo-passing narrative, coined by Mollie Godfrey and Vershawn Ashanti Young (2018), are contemporary literary traditions that parallel the historical revisionism of the neo-slave narrative. They all follow what Norman calls "bitemporal fields of vision" (2010, 13)—thereby bringing the past to bear on the present—which is integral to much of contemporary African American literature. It is therefore no surprise that the African American writers whose work I examine in *Emotion, Race, and Space* have participated in all three literary traditions in a rich variety of ways.[2] The chapter will, on the one hand, interrogate how shame and guilt are constituted and perpetuated by racial-spatial discrimination. On the other hand, it will explore how the characters' inclusive geographic imaginaries and practices enable an untethering from the emotional pain brought on by essentialist in- and outgroup divisions.

It is worth noting that the radical everyday acts of place- and community-making modeled by the Black female characters in *Home* are further expanded in *The Vanishing Half*. Through a concurrent exploration of race as well as nonnormative identities of gender and sexuality, Bennett engages in a more explicitly intersectional exploration of the questions posed by Morrison. Like other African American novelists of a younger generation, Bennett shines light on the expansiveness of Black geographic

imaginaries that extend empathy and belonging to differently and multiply minoritized individuals.[3] Both of the narratives under consideration, though, "require … the active complicity of a reader willing to step outside established boundaries" (8–9). Drawing on Suzanne Keen's concept of authorial strategic empathy, which defines the ways in which authors use empathy to address specific audiences, I argue that Morrison and Bennett employ "broadcast strategic empathy" to prompt "every reader to feel with members of a group, by emphasizing common vulnerabilities and hopes" (2006, 215). On the one hand, Keen's theory supports the book's broader argument that many twenty-first-century African American literary projects encourage empathy in diverse audiences. On the other hand, the concept can usefully be connected to Black Geographies' own aim of expanding empathy by challenging the racial-spatial hierarchies that contribute to producing selective forms of empathy reserved for ingroup members only. By inviting empathetic engagement with characters who suffer from and oppose social as well as geographic exclusion, Morrison and Bennett entreat readers to confront both the emotionally destructive consequences of essentialist white geographies and to register the radical emotional potential of alternative Black geographies.

As my readings in the chapter will show, the emotion-race-space framework proposed in this book enables a theorization of the emotional consequences of the violent marriage between race and space, while simultaneously expanding discussions of emotion, race, and space to examine also the liberatory potential of Black emotional geographies that exist within and despite white geographies of terror. Given the historical and ongoing flattening and erasure of Black emotional complexity and geographic agency, it is crucial to understand Black emotional and geographic responses to oppression as meaningful and complex acts.

The Neo-Segregation Narrative and the Neo-Passing Narrative

What sort of literature do we have in mind when we talk about segregation literature? Unlike the antebellum slave narrative, the pre-civil rights segregation narrative does not seem to belong to a clearly delineated literary tradition with specific formal and thematic conventions. Chronologically, segregation narratives encompass African American literature produced during the era of de jure racial segregation, that is, between the two

landmark court cases *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) and *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Like the authors of slave narratives, segregation narrative authors wrote from within conditions of legalized racial oppression. But unlike the authors of slave narratives, writers as varied as Charles W. Chesnutt, Nella Larsen, Ann Petry, Richard Wright, and James Baldwin used fictional narratives to interrogate and critique racial segregation. While there clearly are continuities between non-fictional and fictional narratives in terms of autobiographical components in the Black literary tradition, the lack of obvious formal and thematic unifying features in segregation narratives is one reason why these narratives have not been classified under some larger grouping for a long time. There is, of course, a considerable number of studies about literature produced during the segregation era, but, as Brian Norman suggests, they all "stop short of identifying a distinct segregation aesthetic" (2010, 174).[4] This is where Norman's and Piper Kendrix Williams's *Representing Segregation: Toward an Aesthetics of Living Jim Crow, and Other Forms of Racial Division* (2010) and Norman's *Neo-Segregation Narratives: Jim Crow in Post-Civil Rights American Literature* (2010) intervene.

According to Norman, there are three central traits that characterize the segregation narrative, and by extension the neo-segregation narrative, namely, "a cartography of racial division, an aesthetics of fear, and crucial scenes of cross-racial contact" (2010, 10). This set of aesthetic strategies captures the importance and interconnectedness of space, emotion, and race. Fear, as Norman suggests, is integral to the ways in which narratives that deal with racial segregation represent the internal spaces of characters' minds in relation to the racialized spaces they navigate. At the same time, I would add that cartographies of racial division produce painful shame experiences in Black subjects, while violently casting them as guilty of deviance and criminality. Echoing Morrison's essay "Home," Norman and Williams assert that the challenge is to "represent race segregation without necessarily reinscribing it" (2010, 1). The aesthetic and conceptual model of the neo-segregation narrative offers a ready lens for understanding how Morrison interrogates the shame and guilt produced by historical and ongoing forms of racial-geographic subjugation "while depriving [them] of [their] lethal cling" (1997, 5). Indeed, Morrison renegotiates stories about Black suffering under Jim Crow, providing them with emotional complexity and bringing into focus the liberating and protective potentiality of Black women's communal spaces.

Earlier, I mentioned Nella Larsen as part of the segregation narrative tradition, and this is true in the sense that her literary explorations of mixed-race characters in *Quicksand* (1928) and *Passing* (1929) are grounded in the era of legalized racial segregation. Most readers, however, will associate Larsen's novels with the literary tradition of the passing narrative. Many Harlem Renaissance writers of the early twentieth century, including Larsen, James Weldon Johnson, George S. Schuyler, and Jessie Redmon Fauset, placed the mixed-race figure who is light-skinned enough either to actively encourage or to passively accept being perceived as white by others at the center of their narratives. According to Michelle Elam, "the performance of passing can often best index the truth of the lie of race" (2018, 242), which is precisely why the trope of racial passing was and continues to be of particular importance for African American authors. While the passing narrative may be classified as part of a broader segregation narrative tradition, it has its own thematic and formal conventions, the study of which has produced a significant and extensive body of scholarship.[5] Similar to the slave narrative, the passing narrative, as a distinct literary tradition, has therefore received much more attention than the segregation narrative.

In relation to this tradition and aligning their efforts with the definitions of both the neo-slave and the neo-segregation narrative, Godfrey and Young introduce the category of the "neo-passing narrative." They suggest that "neo-passing narratives also speak to contemporary injustices, asking readers to hold in mind classic and popular narratives of passing while noting distinctions between those and contemporary iterations of passing that speak to and against present social circumstances" (2018, 3). Although the adoption of a historiographic design connects the neo-passing narrative to the neo-segregation and neo-slave narrative, one important distinction is that "passing was and continues to be a social phenomenon" (3), which stands in contrast to the (at least nominally) locatable end dates of slavery and segregation as legal institutions. The *neo* signifies a chronological as well as conceptual difference, marked by a transformation and expansion of passing. Importantly, "neo-passing narratives frequently go beyond a simple black/white binary … in order to explore not only how identities are differently performed in relation to contemporary social norms but also how they are increasingly and explicitly intersectional" (4). Approaching *The Vanishing Half* through this framework helps to explicate how the ideological enforcement of racial,

gendered, and spatial constraint perpetuates shame and guilt, while also foregrounding the importance of intersectionally inclusive geographies that enable healing and liberation. Both neo-segregation and neo-passing narratives prompt a remembering of the segregated geographies of the not-so-distant past, which in many ways bear on the inequalities and injustices of the twenty-first century.

The reason why contemporary writers are drawn to the emotional geographies of the past is that they have much explanatory power for how emotions coalesce around spaces and bodies in the present. *Home* was published in the first year of Barack Obama's second presidential term, which was the same year in which George Zimmermann killed Trayvon Martin. As Margo Natalie Crawford suggests, this captures the "simultaneity of African Americans not being able to breathe and occupying positions of power" (2024, 31). *The Vanishing Half* was published in the last year of Donald Trump's first presidential term, which was also the year in which Derek Chauvin killed George Floyd. The Trump presidency was not only fueled by white fear and rage in response to the election of the first Black president (Anderson 2020), but it further normalized expressions of white rage and the policing of non-white bodies. Vanessa Wills argues that the continued white killings of Black citizens speak to "the logic of black guilt" (2013, 227), which suggests that there is something both threatening and shameful about being Black and that, just by being Black, it is impossible to be free from guilt. While civil rights legislation legally ended Jim Crow segregation, the logic of Black guilt, and the shaming facilitated by the logic of racialized geographies, continues to render Black bodies "as bodies out of place, as not belonging in certain places" (Ahmed 2015, 211). In response to the ongoing production of Black trauma and death in white geographies, many contemporary African American writers return to historical records of anti-Black violence to critique its continuing presence. As opposed to entertaining facile hopes about a postracial society, these writers open up conceptual space for understanding the ways in which the coupling between race and space has historically produced Black emotional pain, and the ways in which Black people nonetheless practiced hope by creating Black geographies centered around the logic of empathy.

Morrison and Bennett critique white emotional geographies by elucidating how social and geographic divisions evoke shame and guilt and how shame and guilt, in turn, function as organizing principles of social and geographic divisions. Just as importantly, they also take on a role as

theorists of Black emotional geographies. Their storyworlds unearth the radical everyday imagination of characters who create spaces that are free from the shaming and guilting power of racism and social exclusion. Before I move to a discussion of how the novels provide a counter-narrative to reductive ideas of Black shame and guilt, a brief introduction to the psychology as well as the politics of shame and guilt is in order.

The Psychology and Politics of Shame and Guilt

Shame and guilt are complex, negative emotions that are evoked by self-evaluation. According to psychologists Tangney, Stuewig, and Mashek, they "function as an emotional moral barometer, providing immediate and salient feedback on our social and moral acceptability" (2007, 347). Although both are negative and self-conscious emotions, shame is typically defined as the uglier experience. In contrast to experiences of guilt, which involve "a negative evaluation of a specific behavior," shame "involves a negative evaluation of the global self" (349). Shame is thus "a key emotional response to events in which the positive value or status of one's social self is threatened" (Kemeny et al. 2004, 154). While shame and guilt are individually experienced, they are also inextricably linked to the social context in which the self is embedded. It is therefore crucial to understand historical and contemporary racial-spatial formations as constitutive of shame and guilt.

Shame is routinely used to teach individuals and groups their place in society, both symbolically and literally. Jim Crow segregation is a particularly horrendous historical example of how shame has been mobilized to (re)produce racial categories of difference. Stephanie Fetta points out that "racialization specifically employs shame to give affective materiality to the physical notion of race" (2018, xvi). During the era of legalized racial segregation, the separation and/or fragmentation of public space in accordance with socially constructed categories of race, codified, for example, in "whites only" and "colored" signs, served the continual reproduction of the second-class status of Black citizens in the United States. Unsurprisingly, this has had profound emotional consequences on how Black Americans view themselves. W.E.B. Du Bois's suggestive metaphor of "double consciousness," which he describes as the "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" is particularly important in this context (1999, 11). Separate and unequal practices of geographic organization

communicate that those who are segregated are worth less, prompting them to direct a judging and othering gaze at the bad self, thus evoking negative, self-conscious emotions of shame. In "'Unashamedly Black': Jim Crow Aesthetics and the Visual Logic of Shame" (2014), Eurie Dahn argues that the "sense of 'two-ness,' epitomized by double consciousness, is also integral to the affect of shame with its internalizing of the imagined gaze of an other" (93). Dahn asserts that shame is "perhaps the most pernicious" manifestation of double consciousness, which "played a significant role in African American periodicals and literature from the end of the nineteenth century to the 1960s" (94). Whereas Dahn refers to texts that might be classified as segregation narratives, shame plays an equally central role in neo-segregation as well as neo-passing narratives. Both *Home* and *The Vanishing Half* illustrate how shame, as a manifestation of Du Boisian double consciousness, impacts their characters as they navigate racialized landscapes.

Furthermore, each text shows how group membership based on racial and spatial lines produces guilt. The shame-inducing logic of segregation is centrally informed, and allegedly justified, by what is commonly known as the presumption of Black guilt. Koritha Mitchell, for instance, asserts that "American culture has routinely cast black and brown people as criminals, even when they are not … [which] proves that deflection and shaming distort people of color even when they embody everything the country claims to respect" (2014, 145). Mitchell not only addresses the destructive ways in which guilt and shame interact, she also discusses how narratives of Black guilt and criminality have historically been used to justify the post-Reconstruction era violence of Jim Crow, lynching, the War on Drugs, police surveillance and violence, and the system of mass incarceration, which Michelle Alexander calls the "New Jim Crow" (2010). While the *where* of race continues to shift and evolve, enforcing racism in and through geographies always has physical, material, as well as emotional consequences. The same is true for other structures of domination, such as classism and gender- and heteronormativity. The narratives under consideration in this chapter each expose the destructive nature of discriminatory social practices by bearing witness to their characters' guilt as well as shame experiences.

Since social-geographic structures and narratives do not only produce shame and guilt, but also drive the plot of the novels, it is instructive to also consider the typical behaviors and actional outcomes associated with the experience of either emotion. According to Michael Lewis,

phenomenological responses to shame, which is a form of self-disgust, include the desire to "hide, disappear, or die" (2008, 748). The exposure of the self creates a sense of worthlessness, which is commonly embodied through the lowering of one's head, shrinking of one's body, or the inability to speak. In contrast to shame, guilt is generally thought to promote reparative actions based on an "aversion at one's past acts," likely including "the empathic feeling one has with regard to victims of these acts" (Hogan 2011, 180). Although shame and guilt often operate in interaction with each other, their diverging action tendencies signify another set of differences between shame as a bad feeling about one's *self* and guilt as a bad feeling about one's *behavior*.

My analysis of the novels draws on the psychological research briefly sketched in this section, while thinking through the ways in which shame and guilt operate in the context of essentialist social and geographic divisions. *Home* and *The Vanishing Half* uncover how racial, geographic, as well as gendered violence produces shame and guilt as well as corresponding behavioral tendencies in their Black characters. Simultaneously, they highlight how alternative Black geographies, built on solidarity and inclusion, provide possibilities for emotional liberation. In so doing, they invite a worlding of the story and a storying of the world that encourages the imagination of more expansive world imaginaries.

Emotional Geographies of (Un)Belonging in Toni Morrison's *Home*

Morrison's neo-segregation narrative transports readers to the Jim Crow South of the 1950s. In a 2012 interview following the publication of *Home*, Morrison observes: "I have noticed how people think of it as a kind of golden age, you know post-war, lots of money, everybody was employed, and the television shows were cheerful. And I think we forgot what was really going on in the '50s" (Woodruff 2012). *Home* returns to the time and space of legalized race segregation not only to remember the racial oppression of the past, but also to interrogate the persisting legacies of Jim Crow. It invites readers to engage with the protagonist, Frank Money, who comes back to his racially segregated home country after serving in a racially integrated army during the Korean War. The segregated geographies evoke racial shame in Frank, while also intensifying his existing shame and guilt about his actions during the war.

Home's dual narrative structure, that is, the fragmentation of its own textual space, contributes to guiding readers through the protagonist's emotional experiences within a landscape of racial segregation. The cross-chapter dialogue between Frank's first-person narration and the narration of a seemingly omniscient, third-person narrator stages the protagonist's internal conflict of trying to come to terms with his past and his self.[6] Frank's resistance to the representation of his self by someone else—the third-person narrator—reflects his resistance against painful experiences of double consciousness that are evoked by racial-spatial practices of othering and manifested in shame and guilt (both typically rely on the presence of a real or imagined other). The narrators' sometimes conflicting information—especially in relation to the source of Frank's guilt and shame—allows Morrison to guide readers' empathy strategically throughout the narrative. Importantly, the use of diverging perspectives that eventually come to terms with each other drives home the novel's thematic aim of contesting the seeming fixities of self-other differentiations that are integral to the making of race and space.

Shame, Guilt, and the White Spatial Imaginary

Home initially focuses on the guilt that arises from Frank's inability to save his "homeboys" during the war. Psychologist Martin L. Hoffman explains that "survivor guilt" occurs when "one cannot justify and therefore does not deserve the advantage one has over the victim; that one's advantage, surviving or being affluent while others starve or die, violates the principle of fairness, justice or reciprocity" (2000, 190). Frank avoids his hometown Lotus, Georgia, because "[h]is easy breath and unscathed self would be an insult" (Morrison 2013, 15) to his friends' parents, which suggests that he not only feels survivor guilt but also shame at the bad self. His behavior corresponds to typical phenomenological responses to shame that include the urge to "hide, disappear, or die" (Lewis 2008, 748). The uglier emotion of shame overrides his guilt, likely in no small measure because of Frank's knowledge of his heinous act—his murder of a Korean girl—that remains withheld from readers at this point.

The emotional trauma that Frank brings home from the war intensifies his struggle to find belonging in a racially segregated space. Through Frank, Morrison negotiates what Patrick Colm Hogan describes as "the boundaries that bear on experiential aspects of bodily and peripersonal space, particularly the boundaries or borders that define self and other"

(2018b, 65). Specifically, the neo-segregation narrative interrogates the protagonist's affective experiences in relation to geographies that seek to establish boundaries between self and other based on differences in bodily space. When asked where he is from, Frank answers: "Aw, man. Korea, Kentucky, San Diego, Seattle, Georgia. Name it I'm from it" (Morrison 2013, 28). He feels no attachment to any of those places, least of all Lotus, which Frank describes as "the worst place in the world, worse than any battlefield" (83). This is what Edward Relph has called "topophobia," which is the opposite of topophilia and thus "repulsion by place" (1996, 912). In *The Geographies of African American Short Fiction* (2022), Kenton Rambsy suggests that Black writers "explore locations through the characters that they represent," distinguishing between "homegrown characters," who are native to and familiar with a region, and "outsider characters," who are strangers or visitors unfamiliar with a region (14). Morrison's Frank Money falls squarely into the third category of "homegrown outsiders—figures who are native to a region but, for some reason or another, are distant from those in their environment" (14). Growing up with grandparents who mistreated and neglected him and his sister, and with "parents [who] were so beat by the time they came home from work, any affection they showed was like a razor—sharp, short, and thin" (Morrison 2013, 53), Frank's negative attachment to his hometown is closely linked to his estranged familial relationships, which is why enlisting in the army, and thereby choosing a decidedly rootless existence, becomes his means of escape. However, this choice only substitutes one battlefield for another, which makes it nearly impossible for the protagonist to establish a stable home.

Frank's only remaining attachment to Lotus is his sister, Cee. He always protected her growing up "as they navigated the silence and tried to imagine a future" (53). Therefore, Frank returns to Lotus after receiving an anonymous letter stating that Cee's life is threatened by the unscrupulous gynecologist for whom she works. As Frank considers how to escape from the mental institution in which he has been confined since returning from Korea, he thinks that "[m]aybe that was the reason no Russian-made bullet had blown his head off while everybody else he was close to died over there. Maybe his life had been preserved for Cee, which was only fair since she had been his original caring-for, a selflessness without gain or emotional profit" (34–35). Although his trip home is motivated by the urgency of saving his beloved sister, it is not entirely selfless as he also hopes to save the picture of himself—"a strong good me" (104)—that lives inside Cee's

mind. Frank's altruistic act is therefore partly based on avoiding what Hoffman describes as "anticipatory guilt over inaction" (2000, 105), which makes Frank dread the burden of future guilt, possibly again survivor guilt, if he does not manage to save his sister. However, as Alexa Weik von Mossner suggests, the fact that "[p]art of our motivations for caring and indeed helping others in distress is thus egoistic … should not devalue the response in any way" (2014, 95). Accordingly, rescuing Cee and transferring her into the care of the Black women in Lotus ultimately enables both siblings to address their personal and shared traumas.

Before showcasing the restorative potential of the Black female spatial imaginary, though, Morrison portrays the negative emotional consequences of exclusionary white geographies. As Frank makes his way from Seattle to Georgia, he is forced to tour the segregated geographies of the United States in the 1950s. Here, it is helpful to recall Ryan's concept of the tour strategy (discussed in the second chapter), which is used to represent narrative space "from a perspective internal to the territory to be surveyed" (2003, 218). By touring the racialized landscapes alongside the protagonist, readers are invited to engage with his affective experiences of race and space. Frank uses the Green Book—a manual for African American travelers during the era of legal segregation—to map his way through the racially segregated geographies of both North and South and find "rooming houses, hotels where he would not be turned away" (Morrison 2013, 23). The necessity of using a handbook that specifies safe spaces is a case in point for how Jim Crow segregation atomized African Americans' sense of place. As she stated in an interview on *Home*, Morrison "is trying to take the scab off the 50s" (Brockes 2012), partly by disclosing the shame that the public displacement of Black bodies evokes in Frank as he "dutifully sat in the last seat, trying to shrink his six-foot-three-inch body" (Morrison 2013, 19). Frank's urge to disappear from the othering gaze that is constituted and perpetuated by racial and spatial forms of discrimination is a typical shame response triggered by his experience of being denigrated by the same country for which he fought.

Home communicates the psychological consequences of racial-spatial othering through Frank's temporary experience of a visual disorder: "All color disappeared and the world became a black-and-white movie screen" (23). Frank's vision not only mirrors the doubled racial categories of segregation, but it also critiques the consequences of the shaming power of the white gaze. Karlsson and Sjöberg emphasize the distinct visual dimension of shame, which they describe as the

feeling of being objectified, most clearly by means of feeling *visually objectified*. It is the other to whom one attributes a constituting power, while one's own self is objectified and in that sense experienced passively. The gaze of the other is experienced as disclosing (revealing) something very negative. The other's negative perceptual constitution is one side of a *double perceptual experience*. (2009, 347, emphases mine)

Frank's visual experience is a result of "the double perceptual experience" that Jim Crow-era Black-white segregation evoked in Black subjects. By literalizing the twoness that is inherent to experiences of shame and to Du Boisian double consciousness in Frank's perception of the world, Morrison not only portrays the impact of shame on Black subjects who are routinely forced to view themselves as out of place within essentialist white geographies. She also calls upon readers to empathically engage with Frank and "to go through the shame and disruption of remembering in order to begin to forge relationships that can become communities that can make a difference" (Byerman 2005, 10). *Home* critiques the ostensible fixity of racial divisions that are produced by "repetitively spatializing where non-dominant groups 'naturally' belong," asking readers to challenge "the illusion that the external world is readily knowable and not in need of evaluation, and that what we see is true" (McKittrick 2006, xv).[7] Accordingly, Frank himself resists the effects of a divisive visual imaginary, which threatens to naturalize Black-white hierarchies in his way of seeing the world and spends "[h]ours of trying and failing to recolor the western landscape" (Morrison 2013, 27). He eventually succeeds, but only after Frank begins to truly cope with his traumatic memories does his alienation give way to a form of topophilia, which is narrated through his restored and even reinforced perception of color: "Crimson, purple, pink, and China blue. Had these trees always been this deep, deep green?…. Color, silence, and music enveloped him. This feeling of safety and goodwill, he knew, was exaggerated, but savoring it was real" (117–118). Before such a positive relationship to place becomes a possibility for Frank, the text guides readers to follow him on his emotionally harrowing journey of restoring a sense of self-worth.

As the narrative gradually reveals the roots of Frank's shame and guilt, readers are repeatedly confronted with unreliable and conflicting information, a process amplified by Frank's frequent first-person intrusions into the generally third-person narration. When the protagonist first recalls the death of a little Korean girl who is scavenging for food, he tells readers that

his relief guard shoots her: "She smiles, reaches for the soldier's crotch, touches it. It surprises him … he blows her away … I think the guard felt more than disgust. I think he felt tempted and that is what he had to kill" (95–96). Only later does Frank confess that he is the one who "shot the Korean girl in her face … the one she aroused," asking "[h]ow could I let her live after she took me down to a place I didn't know was in me?" (133–134). Frank has previously been relatively easy to empathize with as he struggles to forgive himself, but this new revelation complicates matters by prompting—possibly even demanding—moral disgust. Alongside survivor guilt, Frank has been experiencing what Hoffman calls "transgression guilt," which is caused by "the awareness of harming others" (2000, 175). His confession is undoubtedly troubling, but for Frank it signifies an honest reckoning of "[h]ow he had covered his guilt and shame with big-time mourning for his dead buddies" (Morrison 2013, 135). Acknowledging the bad in himself—his bad self (shame) and his bad behavior (guilt)—opens a difficult pathway toward meaningful contrition and, eventually, healing.

Morrison's choice to reveal Frank's transgression guilt, and the source of it, only at the end of the novel is important because it prevents readers from indicting the Black male protagonist for his shameful act during the Korean war without also indicting the society that never welcomed him before the war and that keeps shaming him after it. Whereas the narrative's withholding of incriminating details serves to challenge and shock readers, Frank's final confrontation of his own haunting memories also emphasizes the importance of reckoning with the past. Morrison's neo-segregation narrative insists that readers recall the violence of Jim Crow in worlding the protagonist's story, while also prompting them to contemplate the legacies of racialized histories and geographies in the storying of their own twenty-first-century worlds.

Black Women's Spatial Imaginary, Empathy, and Affective Liberation

Home foregrounds the radical potential of Black women's geographic practices for reducing and overcoming the destructive effects of shame. As discussed in the second chapter, Cora's gardening in Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* (2016) and Alice's mental mapping in Edward P. Jones's *The Known World* (2003) function as practices of radical hope amid an onslaught of threatening situations caused by enslavement,

violence, and trauma. Elleza Kelley contends that such "small acts of 'everyday resistance' might be reconceived within an ongoing praxis of fugitivity, always in process, always in motion" (2021, 184). Indeed, the Black female characters in Whitehead's, Jones's, and Morrison's novels highlight that the reimagination and recreation of space amid and despite racial, geographic, as well as gendered constraints also signifies an ongoing praxis of emotional liberation. While *Home* both invites and complicates readers' empathy with the protagonist, the group of Black women in Lotus and their insistence on "common vulnerabilities and hopes" (Keen 2006, 215) are key to the novel's strategic invitation of broadcast empathy. Morrison calls upon the broadest possible audience of readers to engage with her Black female characters whose own practice of broadcast empathy, with others like and unlike themselves, enables them to envision and create communal geographies that are sustaining and nourishing.

Their Lotus is something beyond the destructive realm exemplified by the eugenicist Beauregard Scott (a.k.a. "Dr. Beau") who conducts sadistic experiments on his Black employees. After Frank rescues his sister from the doctor, the women not only heal the physical damage inflicted upon Cee, but they also psychologically restore her by attending to lifelong feelings of shame and self-doubt. Being "[b]randed early as an unlovable, barely tolerated 'gutter child' … [Cee] had agreed with the label and believed herself worthless" (Morrison 2013, 128–129). Initially, Cee blames her own putative worthlessness on Lotus's utterly hopeless and confining geographies: "If she hadn't been so ignorant living in a no-count, not-even-a-town place with only chores, church-school, and nothing else to do, she would have known better" (47). Until late in the novel, Lotus represents to Cee what Herman Beavers describes as "tight space," which is "a character's spiritual and emotional estrangement from community and the way it inhibits their ability to sustain a meaningful relationship to place" (2018, 6). However, when Cee once again "blamed being dumb on her lack of schooling … that excuse fell apart the second she thought about the skilled women who had cared for her, healed her" (Morrison 2013, 128). Some of them were illiterate and "had to have Bible verses read to them … [a]nd yet they knew how to repair what an educated bandit doctor had plundered," because "[t]heir devotion to Jesus and *one another* centered them and placed them high above their lot in life" (128, emphasis mine). Although their lives are still situated within segregated landscapes, they transcend the violence of Jim Crow by practicing a communal ethics of care. Correspondingly, self-worth is the first lesson that they teach Cee:

> Look to yourself. You free. Nothing and nobody is obliged to save you but you. Seed your own land. You young and a woman and there's serious limitation in both, but you a person too. Don't let Lenore or some trifling boyfriend and certainly no devil doctor decide who you are. That's slavery. Somewhere inside you is that free person I'm talking about. Locate her and let her do some good in the world. (126)

The women's actions and words have a profound healing effect on Cee who no longer allows tight space to define her literal and figurative place in the world. They teach Cee to recognize her own power in order to redefine both herself and *her* Lotus. In doing so, Morrison's Black women foreground that a path toward healing from negative thoughts and emotions, such as self-doubt and shame, necessarily involves practicing freer versions of self- and placemaking.

In contrast to Morrison's Cee, Whitehead's Cora in *The Underground Railroad* seemingly experiences no truly restorative communal space until Valentine farm. A closer look at the novel's depiction of Black female placemaking on the plantation, though, reveals "Hob" as a space for positive community building for a group of enslaved women, whom Whitehead describes in the following way: "They were exiles, but Hob provided a type of protection once they settled in … [t]he walls of Hob made a fortress" (2017, 64). The inhabitants of Hob challenge the effects of spatial exclusion and transform Hob—a space that symbolizes and reproduces the separateness and inequality of ostensible social outcasts within an enslaved Black community—into a space of protection that provides safety and mitigates vulnerability. As Morrison did before him, Whitehead illuminates how Cora and the other Hob women carve out a Black female space that disrupts the logic of Black fear, guilt, and shame, while adopting a logic of empathy and care. A focus on specifically Black female ways of being in the world, thus, brings into focus an alternative nexus between emotion, race, and space, which moves beyond a sole discussion of the emotionally violent marriage between race and space to examine also the emotionally meaningful marriage between Black women's lives and geographies.

Home's Black female characters embody what Lipsitz calls "African understandings of … shared social space … and identity as the product of interpersonal connections rather than individual differences" (2011, 52). The dynamic between similarity and difference is a central feature that characterizes their relationship with each other:

Although each of her nurses was markedly different from the others in looks, dress, manner of speech, food and medical preferences, their similarities were glaring. There was no excess in their gardens because they shared everything…. They took responsibility for their lives and for whatever, whoever else needed them. (Morrison 2013, 123)

The Black women practice empathy and care across difference, communally producing alternative geographies that provide opportunities for emotional healing and liberation.

The novel's conclusion is decidedly hopeful as Frank and Cee look at a tree that is "[h]urt right down the middle," yet still beautiful and strong (147). *Home* not only contests the historical and ongoing ways in which space has been used to enact racial oppression, it importantly also resurrects the emotionally liberating geographies that Black women have always produced. Through its bitemporal design, Morrison's neo-segregation narrative invites readers to remember the past and reimagine its continuing presence today. "This work's accomplishment," Leah Hager Cohen argues in her review, "lies in its considerable capacity to make us feel that we are each not only resident but co-owner of, and collectively accountable for, this land we call home" (2012). Much of the scholarship on the novel asserts that, as Cheryl A. Wall puts it, home is "a place in the spirit, a place that is necessarily symbolic rather than real" (2014, 64). Morrison indeed emphasizes the value of Black women's liberatory psychology, but their self- and community-making must at the same time be understood as inextricably linked to the ways in which they (locally) transcend rather than overthrow Jim Crow geographies to form more democratic spaces to inhabit.[8] *Home* exemplifies the important work done by contemporary Black writers whom Imani Perry labels "theorists of remapping" (2018, 11). By foregrounding the liberating potential of the Black female geographic imagination, it highlights that space is never natural or fixed, but that both home and freedom are perpetually in the making.

Mapping and Remapping Emotional Trauma in Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half*

The dualities of past and present, pain and possibility, are also integral to the literary imagination of *The Vanishing Half*. Even though Bennett's neo-passing narrative also begins during the period of legalized segregation, the bulk of the narrative is set in the post-Civil Rights decades of the

twentieth century. Bennett herself, like Morrison and all other authors I examine, writes from a time and place in twenty-first-century America in which identity is increasingly conceptualized as fluid and intersectional. Through her contemporary lens, she both draws on and updates the conventions of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century passing novel. While Whitehead's neo-slave narrative reimagines the history of slavery by literalizing the underground railroad, Bennett literalizes colorism through the fictional and mythical town at the center of her neo-passing narrative.

The Vanishing Half's initial setting of Mallard, Louisiana—a town established exclusively for light-skinned Black people—negotiates in- and outgroup divisions that are pertinent not only to forced legal segregation but also to self-segregation. In the novel's opening pages, the history of the place is related as follows:

> A town that, like any other, was more idea than place. The idea arrived to Alphonse Decuir in 1848, as he stood in the sugarcane fields he'd inherited from the father who'd once owned him. The father now dead, the now-freed son wished to build something on those acres of land that would last for centuries to come. A town for men like him, who would never be accepted as white but refused to be treated like Negroes. A third place. (Bennett 2020, 5)

The idea and origin of Mallard, a town obsessed with lightness, thus precedes the onset of de jure racial segregation by several decades. The formerly enslaved Decuir embraces self-segregation both as a response to racist oppression and a means of empowerment. However misguided the founder's attempt may seem to contemporary readers, he aims to give light-skinned Black Americans a rightful sense of place that they are denied by the strict, if also superficial, racial divisions of segregated American geographies.

The previous quote from the novel alludes to Soja's concept of "thirdspace," which he defines as "an-Other way of understanding and acting to change the spatiality of human life" (1996, 10). Mallard, however, does not achieve a revision of space that produces racial inclusivity and justice. The counter-geographic imagination falls short precisely because it relies on the same essentialist notions that have been integral to the production of racism. In the attempt to rid themselves of shame and the burden of double consciousness, the citizens of Mallard who endorse, embrace, and profit from geographies of colorism—which rely on differences in physiognomy to map domination—become guilty of practicing a form of

spatial regulation that produces shame in dark-skinned Black subjects. And they do not even experience a rise in social and economic mobility because of self-segregation, all they gain is the real-and-imagined privilege of lightness itself. In this context, Bennett alludes to the Blue Vein Society of the early twentieth century which was formed by an elite group of very light-skinned African Americans. Julia S. Charles notes that literary depictions of the Blue Vein Society by authors such as Charles W. Chesnutt "presented various extremes of the mixed-race figures' attempts to navigate race and space in the United States, from racial crossing/passing to the establishment of biracial communities" (2020, 51). As with such earlier texts, Bennett's storytelling serves as "a magnifying glass for the issues of colorism" (56), which create intraracial spatial divisions within the Black community.

As Bennett gives readers a sense of the idea that produces Mallard, she reveals how strategic intermarriages between light-skinned Black Americans not only render dark bodies placeless, but how they make "segregation seem desirable, natural, necessary, and inevitable" (Lipsitz 2011, 15). Amid these geographies of colorism, readers are introduced to the founder's great-great-great-granddaughters, a pair of identical twins named Stella and Desiree Vignes. Growing up in Mallard in the 1950s, the twins feel "trapped by its smallness" (Bennett 2020, 8) and escape as teenagers to New Orleans where they work and live together until Stella abruptly disappears from her sister's life with no warning and just a short note: "*Sorry, honey, but I've got to go my own way*" (61, emphasis in original). The remainder of the novel recounts how the twins' separate lives—and their daughters' lives—unfold. Having abandoned her abusive husband, Desiree returns to Mallard after 14 years, accompanied by her dark-skinned daughter Jude. Like Larsen's Irene in *Passing*, Desiree "has chosen a Black life with a Black husband" (Charles 2020, 140), but the failure of her marriage brings her back to a space that is predicated on the eradication of Blackness. Stella, much like Larsen's Clare, is passing for white and living a life of material comfort in a gated and wealthy white community in Los Angeles with her former-boss-now-husband, Blake Sanders, and their daughter Kennedy. The fact that Stella and Desiree are two identical twins who are socially read as white and Black, respectively, makes the arbitrariness of racial categories starkly obvious. Moreover, through the lens of twins, Bennett also reveals the doubled emotional consequences of passing—both for the one who got away and the one(s) left behind. In *A Chosen Exile: A History of Racial Passing in American Life*, Allyson Hobbs argues that "[h]istorians and literary

scholars have paid far more attention to what was gained by passing as white than to what was lost by rejecting a black racial identity" (11). By portraying the interruptions wrought by passing on family and community, *The Vanishing Half* brings "into focus the collective nature and communal politics of passing" (14), thereby reframing the notion that passing is individualistic only.

Whereas Desiree's perspective is privileged at first, the omniscient narrator later weaves in Stella's thoughts and emotions about the same events as well as her ambiguous feelings about racial passing. Stella clearly is the more selfish character, but access to her consciousness invites readers to empathically engage with her experiences of shame and guilt even as she becomes complicit in reproducing racialized and spatialized boundaries. While it is not particularly difficult to be sympathetic toward Stella's decision to pass for white, given the violence of anti-Black racism, readers' empathy with Stella is complicated as she participates in sustaining an exclusionary white spatial imaginary. Stella not only occupies what Charles describes as "That Middle World," which is "a [metaphysical] space separate from yet bordering on the Black and white worlds" (2020, 23), but as a racially indeterminate character she contributes to "unearthing the world that exists within the interstices in order to remark on the failures of the fixed binary" (31). Reminiscent of Larsen's Clare, who is likewise represented "as catlike, which is to say, selfish and reckless" (Charles 2020, 141), the complexity of Stella's character and her position as a racial passer reveal how the color line's fiction fails even more spectacularly in the context of mixed-race communities. Through Stella's racial performance, Bennett negotiates in- and outgroup relations between both Black and white Americans and between light-skinned and dark-skinned Black Americans. *The Vanishing Half* strategically both cues and complicates empathetic engagement with Stella, prompting readers to feel with her as she is grappling with shame and guilt, while also reflecting on how her emotions are bound up with essentialist practices of geographic organization.

Shame, Guilt, Racial Passing, and the White Spatial Imaginary

Stella, one of the novel's many mixed-race characters, but the only one who chooses to pass as white, feels threatened when a Black family purchases a home across the street. These circumstances highlight that Stella's passing does not happen in the early twentieth century, but during a

period of great social promise brought about by the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement of the 1960s. Her act of passing at a time when many people came out declaring that they are no longer passing, in fact, is an embodiment of the *neo* that defines the literary tradition of the neo-passing narrative.[9] Described as the shy twin from the start, Stella has become shier still after passing as white because of the need to guard her past and her racial identity. She surprises everyone, including herself, when she speaks up in order to prevent the Black family from moving into their neighborhood. After she ends her short anti-Black tirade with "[e]nough is enough!" (Bennett 2020, 146), the narrator slips into her husband Blake's consciousness to reveal that "she'd never spoken kindly of a Negro. It embarrassed him a little, to tell the truth" (147). While Blake believes that her protection of her home—as a distinct sphere of female domesticity—is only natural, he feels embarrassment at Stella's cruel attitude toward African Americans. What he does not know is that her vocal anti-Black racism is a fight response fueled by the fear of having her secret revealed. Regardless, nothing stops Reginald Walker, a famous actor in a television police drama, and his wife Loretta from moving into the all-white neighborhood with their daughter Cindy. Stella's fear of being found out by the Black family, accompanied by her desire to be close to them, subsequently affects the way in which shame and guilt fuel her interactions with the Walker family.

When she sees her daughter Kennedy play with Cindy, Stella's fear immediately sends her into fight mode and "[b]efore she knew it, she'd stormed across the street and grabbed her daughter's arm" (165). Once back in their house, she explains the abrupt end of the playdate to her daughter by telling her: "we don't play with niggers" (165). Stella responds to the Walkers' integration of the white neighborhood with an attempt to institute de facto segregation along Black-white lines through hostility and public shaming. By telling herself that "[s]he had nothing to be embarrassed about, really" (166)—because this is how any white woman would have reacted—she attempts to justify her behavior to avoid transgression guilt. Although the characters' context and actions are radically different, the situation echoes the words of Jones's Black slaveholding protagonist Henry Townsend in *The Known World*: "I ain't done nothin that any white man wouldn't do" (2003, 38). A comparison between the novels shows that both characters practice a form of passing for individual gain: As mentioned in the second chapter, Henry's version of passing entails a crossing of the "power line" (Bassard 2008). More

importantly, it suggests that over a century later the white supremacist racial-spatial imaginary continues to structure society, rewarding individual acts of "consuming, claiming, and owning things … and demarcating … [place] in the same ways that those in power do (often through displacement of others)" (McKittrick and Woods 2007, 5). Even though Stella rationalizes her own policing of racial boundaries, she cannot help but feel "empathy-based transgression guilt" (Hoffman 2000, 113), as "she still felt sick each time she pictured Loretta standing on her porch, hugging that doll" (Bennett 2020, 166). In addition to feeling guilty for her bad behavior, Stella also experiences the uglier emotion of shame. When Loretta gives back Kennedy's doll in total silence, Stella almost wishes that Loretta had "[c]alled her a backward, small-minded bigot. But she wouldn't. She was decent because she had to be, which only made Stella feel more ashamed" (166). For Loretta, Stella represents a member of a privileged group who uses her whiteness to wield power over place; and it is Stella's awareness of Loretta's perception that makes her experience an intense feeling of shame. This represents "the multilayered complications of crossing" that Charles discusses in relation to Fauset's 1928 passing narrative *Plum Bun*: While "[t]he sense of loyalty to collective identity—nationhood, if you will—which is fundamental to both the Black community and family, comes secondary to the personal and differing standards of the crosser" (2020, 146), Stella comes to feel the heavy emotional weight of her individual choice through her interactions with Loretta. She feels guilty for shaming the Walkers for their "Otherness" and commanding her daughter to keep her distance. Loretta's facial expression, and their secret but shared status as African American women, makes her empathically re-experience Loretta's pain as if it were her own. Because her performance of identity blurs the boundaries between Black and white, Stella's resistance to the new Black presence in the neighborhood constitutes also a fearful resistance against a re-emergence of a part of herself that she long managed to hide.

Her subsequent behavior corresponds to common action tendencies related to shame and guilt. The typical phenomenological responses to shame, including the desire to "hide, disappear, or die" (Lewis 2008, 748), first make Stella avoid Loretta for three weeks. When she can no longer tolerate her feelings, Stella "baked her guilt into a lemon cake with vanilla frosting," which she uses to initiate an apology to Loretta (Bennett 2020, 167). What Hoffman calls "empathy-based transgression guilt" not

only motivates her acts of "apologizing and making reparations to the victim" (2000, 116), but it also makes her cross the real-and-imagined color line. While Stella first tries to ostracize Loretta because she dreads that their common ingroup status as African Americans might be revealed, it is precisely the hidden ingroup status that likely intensifies her empathy-based transgression guilt and subsequently motivates her to get rid of it. After Loretta accepts her apology, "Stella wondered if she'd realized her secret. She almost wished Loretta had. It scared her, how badly she wanted to belong to somebody" (Bennett 2020, 170). Only as she begins to spend time with Loretta, whose smile reminds her of Desiree, does Stella realize how lonely she has been "living in a world not meant for" her (169). Their relationship reveals to readers, and to Stella herself, "the overwhelming pull … toward Black people," which mirrors Clare's feelings after her re-encounter with Irene in *Passing* (Charles 2020, 140). In the time to come, nothing becomes more important to Stella than talking to Loretta while their daughters play in the Walkers' backyard. Although her apology and her interactions with Loretta are egoistically motivated—Stella wants to belong and get rid of her guilt—her actions in this part of the novel also express solidarity. By making amends to Loretta, and being the first and only one in the neighborhood to initiate what appears to be interracial contact, at least from the perspective of the people around her, Stella is challenging the exclusionary white spatial imaginary.

The next conflict arises, however, when Stella joins a discussion with Loretta and her Black girlfriends concerning Loretta's plan to send Cindy to the same school that the white neighborhood kids attend. Loretta's friends tell her that it is not worth it because of how much the girl will suffer. When Stella agrees, adding that "[t]hose other parents will make her life hell, they'll want to make an example out of her. You don't know how they talk when you're not around," one of the women interrupts her: "And I bet you jump right to her defense too" (Bennett 2020, 177). Stella apologizes, but Loretta gets angry at what she considers Stella's useless white guilt:[10]

> Loretta gave her a strange smile.
>   "You think I want your guilt?" she said. "Your guilt can't do nothin for me, honey. You want to go feel good about feelin bad, you can go on and do it right across the street."
>   Stella set the wet glass on the countertop, dried her hands on the towel. So this is what Loretta really thought about her—a white woman swarming

around to assuage her guilt. And wasn't it true? She did feel guilty, but if anything, spending time with Loretta only made her feel even worse. Her real life seemed even more fake by comparison. And yet, she didn't want to stay away, not even now, not when Loretta was angry at her. (178)

Loretta refers to emotions of racial guilt that white people experience because they "see their group as responsible for illegitimate advantage held over other racial groups, such as African Americans" (Iyer et al. 2003, 118). In psychological terms, white guilt is closely related to what Hoffman calls "bystander guilt over inaction" (2000, 102) or what Branscombe and Miron describe as "collective guilt," which is "experienced when people categorize themselves as members of a group that has committed unjustified harm to another group" (2004, 316).[11] This type of guilt does not result from directly causing someone else's suffering, but from blaming oneself for not helping or being associated with a group that has harmed another group. Stella's in-between position as a mixed-race figure who passes for white also complicates her experience of guilt. Loretta thinks that Stella experiences collective guilt or "guilt by association" (Branscombe and Miron 2004, 316) because she is part of a privileged group. Based on Stella's empathetic responsiveness to Loretta's anger, though, Stella experiences individual guilt for "illegitimately" claiming the racial and spatial privileges of whiteness while Loretta cannot. In this situation, Stella perceives her advantage as doubly illegitimate because, according to dominant racial hierarchies, her access to white privilege itself is lacking legitimacy and because she is not helping someone with whom she, in fact, empathizes on an ingroup and not on an outgroup level. Whereas Loretta herself is unaware of Stella's internal conflict, this knowledge is transmitted to readers themselves, who are invited to empathically understand Loretta's anger as well as (the focalizing) Stella's own complex empathy with Loretta.

Stella and Loretta's friendship ultimately ends when Kennedy, remembering her mother's words, tells Cindy: "I don't want to play with a nigger" (Bennett 2020, 199). After Loretta reports the incident to Stella and tells her to "stay away," Stella slaps Kennedy, "star[ing] into her daughter's face, seeing everyone that she had ever hated" (199). In the next moment, however, as "she was looking at her daughter again, gazing at her watery eyes … Stella fell to her knees, pulling her daughter close, kissing her damp face" (199). As Charles points out, "the hybrid space that is That Middle World can be one of emotional and social alienation" (2020,

30). The affective consequences triggered by Stella's racial performance—she both resists and exploits the existing racial binary—serve as an indictment of that very binary. Although Stella fantasizes about apologizing to Loretta and even revealing her secret, her empathetic distress induces her "not only to refrain from helping but also to be leery of feeling empathy in the first place for fear of what it may lead" her to do (Hoffman 2000, 34). Instead of approaching Loretta again, or at the very least not actively sabotaging her efforts to build a home and live in dignity and peace, Stella chooses the absolute opposite and tells her white women neighbors how uncomfortable she felt with the way Loretta's husband looked at her when he helped her carry her groceries. Stella spreads rumors to shame the Walkers out of her community because their presence, and the possibility of Loretta detecting and disclosing her racial passing, may threaten her own privileged social place. Her actions are not only selfish but also incredibly dangerous, given how many lynchings were based on Black men's alleged reckless eyeballing of white women.

While Stella's earlier behavior confirms Hoffman's claim that empathy-based bystander guilt may be an important motivator of prosocial acts such as apologizing, becoming more considerate, and making reparations, her subsequent behavior clearly corresponds with Hoffman's other claim that "[e]mpathic observers who feel that the victim needs and deserves to be helped may nevertheless refrain from helping because of the competing presence of powerful egoistic motives such as avoiding involvement or fear" (2000, 102). Branscombe and Miron similarly suggest that personal identity concerns likely lead individuals to appraise ingroup actions as legitimate and thus override feelings of collective guilt (2004, 316–317). Guided by personal concerns and wishes, Stella becomes directly responsible for reproducing narratives of Black guilt which in a very real way affect the Walker family. Having been constantly "bombarded with the idea that people of color are criminals" (Mitchell 2014, 145), the white people in the neighborhood do not even consider questioning Stella's claim. To protect white space from the alleged danger of Blackness, or even just the danger of the Black gaze, they do not shy away from using violence themselves. After several bricks are thrown into the Walkers' house, they are finally forced to leave the neighborhood, which reveals how the practice of racism forcefully denies space, and the possibility of home-creation, to Black people.[12]

Stella's passing performance entails her participation in whiteness as a practice that "aggressively denies to blackness everything it claims for

itself" (Mitchell 2020, 21). Her lack of solidarity with the Walkers therefore complicates readers' emotional engagement with her in a way that invites empathetic anger. According to Hoffman's definition of empathetic anger as the feeling of anger "when someone else is abused" (2000, 98), readers may feel angry at the culprit, Stella, and empathize with the Walkers instead. By presenting the events through Stella's consciousness, however, Bennett uses what Weik von Mossner describes as a narrative strategy that "condemn[s] readers to empathize with a protagonist they find morally ambiguous" (2014, 121). Thus, Stella's "actions cannot be condemned without also condemning the social situation that has produced both the actor and [her] deeds" (129). Access to Stella's mind prompts readers to feel with her as she struggles with experiences of shame and guilt, while also urging them to read her emotions as products of an oppressive white spatial imaginary that she both suffers from and reproduces.

Whereas legalized racial segregation is a central thematic concern of passing narratives set in the early decades of the twentieth century, Bennett's neo-passing narrative lays bare how de jure boundaries are replaced by de facto ones. Even though Bennett implicates her passing protagonist in the reproduction of white geographies, she avoids turning Stella into a "tragic mulatta" and punishing her for her act of passing for what the country's racial logic insists she is not. Rather, she uses Stella's position as a passer to negotiate the affective violence of essentialist racial and spatial boundaries, and calls upon all readers, as co-creators of the text, to reject parochial boundaries in favor of solidarity and inclusion.

Yet, Stella's is only one of the many focalized perspectives in *The Vanishing Half*. The narrative slips in and out of the consciousness of various characters, and it provides an intertwined exploration of race and nonnormative gender identity. The following section will consider how the storyline revolving around Desiree's daughter, Jude, shows how solidarity across difference can fashion new ways of belonging. This plotline not only refutes the shame imposed on Jude as a dark-skinned person in Mallard, but it also demonstrates how inclusive practices of communal placemaking pave the way to Jude's emotional well-being after going away to college. While the geographies of care provided by *Home*'s Black women characters prove central to Frank and Cee's emotional as well as physical recovery, Jude similarly begins to heal as she shows solidarity with, and finds belonging in, a diverse community in Los Angeles, far from Mallard's colorstruck parochialism.

Expanded Intersectionality, Empathy, and Geographies of Affective Liberation

Upon her arrival in Mallard, Jude experiences the pernicious effects of the othering and shaming gaze directed at her by the light-skinned African Americans populating the town. As a child, she does not comprehend why the other kids stare at her, and her mother explains that they are just curious because she is new in town. But soon the insults and jokes—along with her grandmother's commands to stay inside all summer and to always wear a hat when she goes out—make Jude experience the psychic tension that is integral to shame as a manifestation of double consciousness. The revelation that Jude knows that "[s]he would get no darker, although she seemed to the longer she lived in Mallard" (Bennett 2020, 84) demonstrates the effects of Mallard's intraracial shaming. The ugliness of shame not only makes Jude see herself through the eyes of Mallard's light-skinned population, but it also makes her internalize their contempt against darkness and experience her dark self as an inherently bad self. As she is navigating Mallard's geographies that make lightness appear natural and desirable, Jude repeatedly attempts to lighten her skin color in an attempt to gain a sense of place.

Jude's emotional healing process only begins years later, when she moves to Los Angeles on a UCLA track scholarship. After she meets the "golden brown and handsome" Reese Carter at a party (100), Jude finds herself fascinated with him. Following their first encounter, the narrator dips into Reese's consciousness to disclose how he, formerly known as Therese Anne Carter, left his old life in El Dorado, Arkansas, behind and adopted a transgender identity as a man. Reese's character represents one way in which the neo-passing narrative negotiates identity not only through racial but also through gender binaries. As Reese asks himself "[h]ow real was a person if you could shed her in a thousand miles?" (103), this reinforces not only the sense that identity and space are interwoven in terms of both race and gender, but also that the ability to change may necessitate leaving behind a space in which identity is presumed to be fixed by what is externally observable.

When Reese first reveals his transgender identity to Jude and asks her what she thinks about it, she answers: "I don't know … I've never heard anything like it" (105). The narrator then discloses to readers what she does not speak aloud: "She'd always known that it was possible to be two different people in one lifetime" (105). The parallel that Jude draws

between Reese's identity as a trans person and what she imagines her aunt Stella's experience of racial passing to be might seem problematic to some readers. In the wake of the public outcry following Rachel Dolezal's passing, for example, many people have argued that one should resist drawing hasty comparisons between transgender and "transracial" identities for deciding which identity performances are policed and which are not.[13] Jude's creation of parallels to her own and her family's life, however, shows how what Hogan calls "recognitional empathy" (2018a, 130) may be beneficial for bridging in- and outgroup boundaries on an interpersonal level. Indeed, Bennett does not draw a simple equivalence for the sake of self-justification, but she demonstrates the potential of recognitional empathy as a starting point for greater understanding.

According to Hogan, recognitional empathy involves "seeing the parallels between one's own experience and that of the character, often a character representing some stigmatized group" (2018a, 130). He adds that this includes "a setting aside of the cultural, historical, or merely individual particularity of one's experience, a setting aside that opens up the possibility of recognizing parallels, both inferentially and in the simulation of emotional experience" (130). While Hogan specifically refers to readers' empathy with characters, Bennett also demonstrates the value of recognitional empathy through inter-character empathy processes. Jude readily empathizes with Reese by drawing parallels to transitional experiences of racial identity with which she is familiar, albeit indirectly. Jude's empathizing with Reese may, in turn, appeal to readers' own empathy. Cisgender readers may empathize with how Jude draws on parallel *and* different experiences to understand Reese's experiences, but they may also draw their own parallels in an effort of "potentially expanding the scope of our empathetic response, both to the fictional target and, ideally, to parallel groups and individuals in the real world" (Hogan 2018a, 131).[14] Hogan directly relates the self-criticism that is involved in setting aside differences to Keen's concept of broadcast strategic empathy. By inviting readers to engage with the particularity of her characters' individual experiences, Bennett draws attention to both parallels and differences, but most importantly she invites readers as varied as Black, non-Black, cisgender, and non-cisgender to empathize with her characters across in- and outgroup divisions. Since emotional matters are also spatial matters, the in- and outgroup boundaries through which we differentiate ourselves from others do not only affect our emotional responses, but they often also

impact material boundaries and lived experiences of space. In this way, *The Vanishing Half* asks readers to appreciate the interconnectedness between space and emotion: both the painful impact of exclusion and confinement and the power of empathy to generate inclusion and belonging.

Reese and Jude feel strong self-doubt and shame about their bodies as a result of their struggles to feel at home in the Southern spaces they once occupied. Both experienced shame as bound up with tight space, that is, their inability to occupy space freely caused affective pain, which in turn "inhibite[d] their ability to sustain a meaningful relationship to place" (Beavers 2018, 6). Indeed, their estrangement and shame result from the "affective judgement" of others, which is performed, as Sara Ahmed asserts, when "some bodies are recognised *as* strangers, as bodies out of place, as not belonging in certain places" (2015, 211, emphasis in original). The affective evaluation of dark bodies, inherent in Mallard's geographies of lightness and the broader American geographies of whiteness, was central to the formation of shame in Jude's early years. Whereas Reese is also Black, though not dark-skinned, the narrative does not relate his experiences of racial shame. Rather, it negotiates Reese's shame in relation to trans people's embodiment of otherness within a nation-space that defines nonnormative bodies as strange bodies.

At the beginning of their relationship, Reese's and Jude's respective forms of shame make them hide from one another even in the privacy of their shared home. As Lewis points out, visual objectification may evoke a "global attack on the self-system," accompanied by the desire "to disappear from the eye of the self or the other" (2008, 748). Reese, for instance, gets both defensive and angry when Jude first sees the bandage around his chest that digs into his ribcage. However, Jude provides the emotional support that he needs to cope with the ugliness of shame, while also helping him to save enough money for his chest surgery. Similarly, Jude herself barely tolerates Reese's gaze and his compliments because it makes her immediately feel "self-conscious," thinking that he might not "mind that she was dark, maybe, but he couldn't possibly like it" (Bennett 2020, 133). Although Jude left Mallard, she could not escape the effects of the shame that was instilled deep inside her. Reese keeps reminding her, though, that both he and his friends "ain't those people back home" (133). The negative effects of their body-shame therefore begin to unravel as their loving relationship develops and as they become part of a broader community of caring people that resist the strictures of tight space.

The community that Jude and Reese discover in Los Angeles envisions a spatial imaginary that, while not exclusively Black or even of color, seeks empowerment by conceptualizing "identity as the product of interpersonal connections rather than individual differences" (Lipsitz 2011, 52):

> The girls had come over. The girls, Barry always said, when he meant the other men who performed alongside him at his drag nights. By spring, Jude had been to enough of Barry's parties to know what everyone looked like without makeup: Luis, who sang Celia Cruz in pink fur, was an accountant; Jamie, who wore a Supremes wig and go-go boots, worked for the power company; Harley transformed himself into Bette Midler—he was a costume designer for a minor theater company and helped the others find their wigs. The girls took Jude in until she felt, almost, like one of them. She'd never belonged to a group of friends before. And they'd only accepted her because of Reese. (Bennett 2020, 111)

The fact that all members of this community accept each others' differences seems to contradict this final thought, which is itself a vestige of Jude's self-doubt. Reese, after all, is not performing in drag, but is instead a transgender man, and neither Jude's heterosexuality nor her (cis)gender identity seems to be in question. Rather than casting difference as strangeness, the members of this community reimagine how difference takes place. In so doing, they put forth a collective and intersectional imaginary that enables a new kind of affective space free from any shame brought on by identity categories of race, gender, and sexuality.

Even though Jude is the storyline's main focalizer, the narrator interweaves multiple passages focalized through Reese, while also, for example, giving insight into Barry's mind. By cutting across different identity categories through its use of various focalizing characters, *The Vanishing Half* seeks to fulfill the universalizing aims of broadcast strategic empathy and widen readers' "empathetic circle" (Keen 2006, 224). The ultimate aim of Bennett's novel, as Beavers argues in relation to Morrison's fiction, "is not to say something different about what it means to be black in the twenty-first century, but to say a different thing altogether about what it means to be human" (2018, 20). Practicing a form of collective placemaking which emphasizes common human vulnerabilities as well as solidarity across difference not only allows Jude and Reese to reclaim space, but it also allows them to heal from race- and gender-based shame. Accordingly, the

geographic imaginary that *The Vanishing Half* puts forth is one in which difference is a meaningful and integral part of the making of space, belonging, and, ultimately, home.

Conclusion

The neo-segregation and neo-passing narrative are contemporary literary traditions that turn to legalized Jim Crow segregation and its aftermath to encourage a remembrance of the past and speak to conditions of the present. *Home* and *The Vanishing Half*, as I have argued in this chapter, make use of such a bitemporal mode of storytelling to expose the historical and ongoing ways in which racial-geographic formations produce Black shame and guilt. On the one hand, my reading has shown that the representation of shame and guilt in each of the novels corresponds well with cognitive psychological insights on these emotions and the action tendencies associated with them. On the other hand, it has sought to offer a deeper understanding of how racial and spatial divides shape experiences of shame and guilt. As I hope to have demonstrated, Morrison and Bennett's storyworlds, like the storyworlds of a variety of other African American authors, constitute key sources for exploring how the geographic enforcement of racial divisions impacts affective experiences and lived realities.

Beyond interrogating the emotional pain produced by racial-spatial practices and narratives, *Home* and *The Vanishing Half* present communal placemaking as a central shame mitigation strategy. While shame casts individuals as out of place, socially, but also Other to themselves, imagining and creating spaces that allow for meaningful connections with others can have a profound healing effect. Morrison's Southern Black women and Bennett's diverse L.A. community powerfully exemplify such practices. Their open and inclusive geographies provide possibilities for an unmaking of acute emotional pain and trauma. Ultimately, the texts remind us that there is much to learn about *emotions in context* from the Black literary imagination, offering helpful ways of thinking about individual psychological concerns as closely linked to both place and community.

Empathy is crucial to the emotional geographies modeled by the characters in *Home* and *The Vanishing Half*. While anti-Blackness and colorism both thwart the potential and scope of empathy through racial-geographic acts of separation and confinement, the texts discussed in this chapter

reveal empathy, with others like and unlike oneself, as an important resource in the creation of more socially just and affectively liberating places, communities, and homes. Through the use of what Keen has called "broadcast strategic empathy" (2006, 215), Morrison and Bennett encourage their readers to contest the fixity of in- and outgroup categories both in their worlding of the story and in the storying of their own twenty-first-century world. Whereas both negotiate the relationships between shame, guilt, race, and space, Bennett's concurrent interrogation of gender- and heteronormativity also speaks to the expanding intersectional imagination of an emerging generation of African American writers. My discussion of N.K. Jemisin's eco-Afrofuturist Broken Earth trilogy (2015–2017) in the fifth chapter will further elaborate on the potential of queered spatial imaginaries. While the second and third chapters focused on historical narratives that examine the affective landscapes of slavery and segregation, and their legacies, the fourth chapter will turn to African American satires that critique the ways in which present-day material and cultural geographies produce Black emotional confinement.

NOTES

1. Patrick Colm Hogan defines the "fundamental organizing principle of social emotions – that is, their partial contingency on group divisions" in the following way: "Part of what it means to characterize someone as an in- or out-group member is that one sets a default value for one's emotional response to that person's emotion expressions – parallel for an in-group member, complementary for an out-group member" (2011, 177).
2. Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* (2016), for instance, can be read as part of the neo-slave narrative tradition. Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys* (2020), Morrison's *Home* and *The Bluest Eye* (1970) may be classified as neo-segregation narratives. Finally, Whitehead's *The Intuitionist* (1999) and Everett's *Erasure* (2001) can be read as neo-passing narratives. In my analysis of *Erasure* in the fourth chapter, however, I will be less concerned with how Everett turns racial passing on its head and more with how he uses satire to interrogate the ways in which anger is inflected by social constructions of race and space.
3. For a discussion of how younger Black writers, including Bennett, Bryan Washington, Kaitlyn Greenidge, and Akwaeke Emeze, further expand and intersectionalize the communal space created by the Black female characters in Morrison's *Home*, see Mikić and Maus (2023).
4. For scholarship on African American literature during the segregation era see, for instance, McCaskill and Gebhard (2006) and Duck (2006).

5. There exists an extensive body of scholarly work on racial passing in American literature and culture, including, for example, Wald (2000), Pfeiffer (2002), Gallego (2003), Nerad (2014), and Charles (2020).

6. Several scholars have analyzed the dual structure of narration in Morrison's *Home* in relation to trauma and witnessing (e.g., Ibarrola 2014; Visser 2016). Jean Wyatt's analysis of the dual narrative structure in Morrison's novel *Paradise* (1998) also holds true for *Home*: "Displacement—both geographic and psychic—is the force that moves both plot and character. Narrative form echoes the thematics of displacement" (Wyatt 2017, 17).

7. The spatialization of the Black-white divide is one of the many ways in which the organization of space in the United States contributed to the seemingly natural subordination of different racialized groups. For a critical race narratological analysis of the narrative production of "separate racial worlds," see Blake Wilder's "Black World/White World: Narrative Worldmaking in Jim Crow America" (2017).

8. The Black female characters in Morrison's *Home* practice what Koritha Mitchell calls "making-oneself-at-home," which is a process that "must be defined and pursued in ways that call upon an authority beyond the nation-state. Its value does not derive from civic inclusion. Many African Americans understand that black people often better embody American ideals than do the straight white men who are the country's archetypal citizens" (2020, 22–23).

9. In the 1950s, Black periodicals including *Ebony* and *Jet* featured a number of confession stories and articles by former passers who declared a refusal to continue passing. Gayle Wald observes that "these postpassing articles address themselves to the concerns of racially defined readers, articulating collective values of pride in 'Negro' identity and challenging the social and economic pressures that promote passing as an 'alternative' to racial segregation" (2000, 119). A 1952 article titled "Why 'Passing' Is Passing Out" includes an example thereof: "With new and greater opportunities, the Negro is competing more and more on even terms with other men in a competitive society. The faster he becomes equally integrated into the American economy, the slower he will be to resort to the peculiar American sociological phenomenon of 'passing.'" In *Neo-Passing: Performing Identity after Jim Crow* (2018), Godfrey and Young observe that "although *Jet* was accurate in anticipating the imminent dismantling of Jim Crow segregation and an increase in opportunities for African Americans, its prediction that passing would 'pass out' has yet to occur" (1). The contributions to Godfrey and Young's edited collection analyze not only why passing has persisted, but also how literary representations of passing as a performance of identity have expanded.

10. Loretta's words echo James Baldwin's comments on the failure of white liberalism in the 1950s and 1960s: "People talk to me absolutely bathed in a bubble bath of self-congratulation. I mean, I walk into a room and everyone there is terribly proud of himself because I managed to get to the room. It proves to him that he is getting better. It's funny, but it's terribly sad. It's sad that one needs this kind of corroboration and it's terribly sad that one can be so self-deluded" (2010, 60). Years later, during the 1981 National Women's Association Conference, Audre Lorde addresses both the potential of guilt and the danger inherent in common expressions of white guilt: "I cannot hide my anger to spare your guilt, nor hurt feelings, nor answering anger; for to do so insults and trivializes all our efforts. Guilt is not a response to anger; it is a response to one's own actions or lack of action. If it leads to change it can be useful, since it is then no longer guilt but the beginning of knowledge. Yet all too often, guilt is just another name for impotence, for defensiveness destructive of communication; it becomes a device to protect ignorance and the communication of things the way they are, the ultimate protection for changelessness" (2007, 131).

11. Hoffman provides an example of white civil rights activists in the 1960s who reported that they would have felt guilty had they not done anything to contest the victimization of Black Americans (2000, 103). Research suggests, though, that action tendencies for white guilt are ambiguous: "it may correspond with antiracist attitudes and behavior, but it may also motivate defensiveness and disengagement" (Grzanka et al. 2020, 47).

12. Lipsitz observes that "[i]n the years before fair-housing laws were passed, Black real estate brokers faced death threats, assaults, and bombings of their residences by angry whites intent on policing the color line. Even worse, the understanding in the manual of potential Black neighbors as criminals stealing wealth that somehow should be reserved only for whites helped fuel and excuse wave upon wave of violent white vigilante attacks on Black people seeking to move into white neighborhoods" (2011, 26). As Mitchell argues, the fact that Black achievement is routinely met with white violence "is a way of reminding everyone of the target's 'proper' place, a way of insisting that certain people should not feel secure in claiming space and resources. In other words, violence is a performance of the denial of citizenship, an active rejection of the idea that one belongs" (2020, 5–6).

13. There was much controversy because many were quick to draw comparisons between "transracial" and transgender identities when the case of Rachel Dolezal, a white woman passing as Black, became public. One important difference between the two is that trans people do not transition to achieve economic and social privileges—in many cases they are depriviledged because of it—but they transition to live their gender identity

authentically and to get rid of the feeling of gender dysphoria (psychological distress created by a mismatch between gender identity and the sex assigned at birth). For a useful discussion, see Green (2015).

14. Pointing to Joanne J. Meyerowitz's work, Hogan notes that "[t]he possibility is suggested by cases where cisgender readers of transgender autobiography have engaged in just this sort of search for parallels, as shown by fan letters sent to the early transgender 'celebrity,' Christine Jorgensen" (2018a, 131). Meyerowitz writes that "[o]ver and over again, nontransgendered readers identified with her and sympathized with her struggle. They placed her story in the context of their own lives and their own beliefs" (2002, 96). Precisely such a recognition of common vulnerabilities and experiences is what authors who employ broadcast strategic empathizing aim to evoke in their readers.

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CHAPTER 4

Anger, Outrage, Race, and Space in Percival Everett's *Erasure* and Maurice Carlos Ruffin's *We Cast a Shadow*

Abstract This chapter explores how Percival Everett's *Erasure* (2001) and Maurice Carlos Ruffin's *We Cast a Shadow* (2019) satirically dismantle and ethically critique the limited cultural space afforded to Black male anger, while also providing deeper insight into the complexities of anger in relation to racial and spatial politics. Reading contemporary African American satire through an emotion-race-space framework, I argue, provides a means for examining the continuing confinement of Black emotions at the confluence of racial and spatial oppression. While Everett's Black writer-protagonist is angry about the strictures of race within the white publishing landscape, Ruffin's protagonist rejects anger altogether in order to obtain a semblance of safety as a Black man in anti-Black geographies. Although both satirical storyworlds deliberately complicate empathetic engagement with their flawed protagonists, they even more importantly encourage revolutionary outrage at a society that routinely confines Black social, material, and psychological space.

Keywords African American literature • Blackness • Satire • Humor • Race • Place • Anger • Outrage • Emotion • Empathy

Satire occupies an essential place in the contemporary canon of African American literature. In *Laughing to Keep from Dying: African American Satire in the Twenty-First Century* (2020), Danielle Fuentes Morgan suggests that "[i]t is the capacious nature of satire, this possibility for reading African American literature, performance, and events as enacting a strategy of satirizing to reveal the inherent absurdity of and frustrations with continued racism and racialization, that offers context for twenty-first century African American cultural production" (21). Drawing on Morgan's emphasis on African American satire's potential for critiquing racial inequality, the chapter will use Percival Everett's *Erasure* (2001) and Maurice Carlos Ruffin's *We Cast a Shadow* (2019) to think through relations between anger, outrage, race, and space. While Everett discloses his Black male protagonist's harmful *expression* of anger, Ruffin interrogates his Black male protagonist's harmful *rejection* of anger. The characters' understanding of and relationship to anger are radically different, and yet they both are inextricably bound up with the structural invalidation of Black emotional complexity and the criminalization of Black anger within white cultural geographies.

Erasure and *We Cast a Shadow* not only expose the racial-spatial practices that produce and confine Black outrage, but they also use their satirical critique to prompt outrage in readers themselves. What is central to my understanding of the narrative invitation of outrage is the revolutionary—and inherently hopeful—potential of both satire and anger. To satirize something is to believe that it *can* be reformed. Likewise, to be outraged about something implies that the current state of events is *not* inevitable. Everett and Ruffin's satirical expression of revolutionary outrage thus encourages readers to direct moral indignation at the deliberate, but not inevitable, place of racial hierarchies in the U.S. culture.

I would like to position the notion of revolutionary outrage in relation to Morgan's conceptualization of "revolutionary laughter":

> By situating their joking within the context of laughing to keep from dying, [twenty-fist-century African American satirical works] seek to inspire revolutionary laughter, or laughter that itself inhabits a tricky space of simultaneous delight and sorrow to inspire justice. This laughter evokes contemplation and self-reflection that challenges the status quo…. Rather than strict didacticism or moralizing, these works disrupt the standard paradigmatic understanding of race and racialization and, through revolutionary laughter, hold the audience accountable. (2020, 9–10)

Erasure and *We Cast a Shadow* both use humor strategically for their social commentary, evoking what Morgan terms revolutionary laughter. There is, however, no requirement for African American satire (and satire more generally) to be humorous. Derek C. Maus, for instance, examines *The Underground Railroad*'s decidedly noncomic usage of satire for the purpose of "historiographic subversion" (2021, 127). Even as the strategic use of humor is central to *Erasure* and *We Cast a Shadow*, it is equally true that significant parts of both novels are not particularly humorous. The humor that is required for inspiring revolutionary laughter, then, is not required for inspiring revolutionary outrage, but it can be one aspect of it.

The chapter will examine *Erasure*'s meta-critical interrogation of anger and race within African American literature itself and within the white publishing landscape. My reading of *Erasure* will therefore be concerned with literary and cultural space, rather than material space. While Everett's use of first-person narration may be one way of formally communicating his oft-expressed resistance to speaking *for* the Black community, the individual writer-protagonist's experiences of anger about racial displacement are central to the novel's satirical commentary and critique of the injustice directed *against* the Black community. Rather than solely being angry with Everett's protagonist for perpetuating harmful stereotypes about Blackness, the narrative directs readers' outrage at the racial violence that produces and constrains the protagonist's place within the white publishing industry. Whereas the narrator's rage in *Erasure* makes him complicit in reproducing stereotypical assumptions about Blackness and making such familiar racial images palatable for mass consumption, in *We Cast a Shadow* it is the absence of the narrator's anger that makes him serve rather than challenge the white racial and spatial imaginary. The rampant anti-Blackness in Ruffin's near-future storyworld immobilizes the narrator's imagination, making him internalize dominant racial hierarchies and accept them as inevitable. While this renders outrage against injustice useless to him and resistance impossible, the novel encourages readers' empathetic identification with the protagonist as well as their outrage against the social structures and spaces that confine him.

Narrative empathy is thus central to Ruffin's satirical critique, whereas Everett, as I will discuss, satirizes shallow forms of empathy. Yogita Goyal notes that many contemporary satirical writers "are known precisely for rejecting sentimentalized portraits of Blackness, for resorting to irreverence and farce, and for refusing the seriousness ascribed to dialogues about race" (2019, 106). Goyal suggests that the social critique offered by

authors such as Paul Beatty, Mat Johnson, and Everett himself "acquires force in repelling rather than soliciting empathy" (33). *Erasure* fits this definition as it does not position its protagonist as the center of empathetic identification, using him instead as a vehicle to "destabilize and ultimately to undermine morally or ethically suspect behaviors and/or beliefs wherever they are found" (Maus 2014, xix). In contrast to Everett's critique of the commodification of empathy in relation to a stereotypical Black aesthetic, *We Cast a Shadow* employs satire as a mode for offering social critique *via* appeals to readers' empathy. Although Everett and Ruffin's diverging approaches to narrative empathy situate them in a different position in the contemporary African American satirical camp, exploring them side by side foregrounds the different ways in which a satirical commitment to unsettling Black confinement may take shape.

What both novels do, I argue, is encourage revolutionary outrage against anti-Black emotional, racial, and spatial subjugation. In so doing, they insist that Black emotions, Black lives, as well as Black cultural and material spaces matter. While *Erasure* was published more than a decade before the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement, and *We Cast a Shadow* shortly before the movement's resurgence in 2020, it is helpful to read both novels against the backdrop of the movement, precisely because such a reading highlights the role that many contemporary African American narratives may have in encouraging revolutionary outrage against discursive and physical anti-Black violence and the systemic denial of the grievability of Black lives.

AFRICAN AMERICAN SATIRE

The study of contemporary African American satire typically happens alongside parallel and related discourses such as post-Blackness and post-soul aesthetics.[1] Even as W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903) was crucial in renegotiating the spirituality of Black struggle, Emily J. Lordi notes that "it was in the late 1960s that 'soul' acquired keyword status, emerging as a name for the social and aesthetic grace wrought from racialized pressure" (2018, 206). The language of soul emphasized the resilience of Blackness, and the transformation of oppression into "a kind of cultural advantage" (207). The Black Arts and Black Power era, however, also came to be associated with rigid authenticity politics, patriarchal

masculinity, and homophobia. While scholars such as Gayle Wald challenged overly reductive readings of 1960s and 1970s as a "homophobic and patriarchal monolith" (2015, 9), subsequent discourses of post-soul culture and post-Blackness sought to complicate and expand what was perceived to be an investment in Black essentialism. In his 1989 manifesto "The New Black Aesthetic," Ellis proclaims the arrival of a new generation of Black artists who share distinct parallels with earlier Black artists and movements, but who are "[n]either … shocked by the persistence of racism as were those of the Harlem Renaissance, nor … preoccupied with it as were those of the Black Arts Movement" (239). Tate suggests that "post-soul culture revels in the contingency and diversity of blackness, and subjects the canon of positive images to subversion and parody—and appropriation" (1992, 631). Ashe similarly notes that the post-soul aesthetic marks cultural productions that hold Blackness "up for examination in ways that depart significantly from previous—and necessary—preoccupations with struggling for political freedom, or with an attempt to establish and sustain a coherent identity" (2007, 614). Taylor additionally argues that "[h]owever one understands the ideas of post-soul culture, post-civil rights politics, and post-black identity and aesthetics … [e]ach then becomes a partial window onto some relatively distinct aspect of the far-reaching and multifaceted reorganization of black life that has occurred over the last couple of decades" (2007, 625). It is no surprise, then, that satire is one central mode of discourse for the articulation of post-Black aesthetics and the interrogation of the complexities surrounding the representation of Blackness itself.

Such an aesthetic that challenges confining scripts and practices is both critical and self-critical. In the introduction to *Post-Soul Satire: Black Identity after Civil Rights* (2014), Maus establishes the "inherently dual-vectored nature of post-soul satire":

> The satirical subtext embedded within individual works simultaneously transmits its ethical critique at two distinct frequencies. The first of these is aimed at "in-group" audiences—that is, at African American readers, viewers, and so on—and generally offers a Horatian (namely, a relatively mild ridicule of vices and hypocrisy) satirical commentary on follies and self-destructive habits … Alongside this, there is usually also a more Juvenalian (namely, scornful and morally indignant mockery) satire directed at political institutions, social practices and cultural discourses that arise outside the community and constrain, denigrate, or otherwise harm it in some way. (xiii–iv)

While the duality of critique defines post-soul satire, this is very much in line with Darryl Dickson-Carr's theorization of the African American satirical novel throughout the twentieth century. Dickson-Carr contends that African American satirical novels share salient characteristics, such as "unremitting iconoclasm, criticism of the current status of African American political and cultural trends, and indictment of specifically American forms of racism" (2001, 16), while also pointing out that the representation of the Black "struggle against … victimization … cannot be looked at exclusive of the injuries African Americans have inflicted upon themselves" (17). So even as twenty-first-century satirists use their story-worlds in new and creative ways to open up material, discursive, and emotional space for inspection and critique, their work remains closely linked to that of their forebears. This is evidenced by the intertextual relations between Ralph Ellison's 1952 magnum opus *Invisible Man* and *Erasure* as well as *We Cast a Shadow*, but also by the pronounced thematic similarities between George S. Schuyler's 1931 novel *Black No More* and Ruffin's *We Cast a Shadow*.

The cultural and literary spaces that older generations of Black writers carved out thus build the foundation of more recent African American satirical texts. At the same time, emerging satirical production is defined by its troubling and stretching of Black artistic and political imaginaries. Morgan's *Laughing to Keep from Dying* offers an insightful argument about the expansive representation of Blackness in twenty-first-century African American satire:

> the utility of satire is found in its upending of dominant ideologies that render race essential and racism natural. These discourses take Blackness back and endow it with the nuance it has always had. The laughter inspired by satire opens up space to acknowledge kaleidoscopic Blackness—the multiple autonomous ways of being Black—that prevents psychic death, or being objectified and flattened. It is this revelation of kaleidoscopic Blackness through a satirical reading of racialized expectations and stereotypes that uncovers the potential of Black interior space. (2020, 3)

African American satire, then, is well suited for challenging what Casey Hayman describes as "the hypervisible and hypermediated shadow of 'Blackness' writ large" (2014, 149). While satirical texts necessarily need to evoke such mass-mediated, stereotypical constructions of Blackness in order to critique them, they engage with them for the sake of defying "the

status quo [which] manifests in an opening up of Black interior space …
the hidden, private realm of Black thought and feeling beyond any
expected performance of Blackness" (Morgan 2020, 2). By making explicit
how racial scripts and stereotypes impact Black self-making, they do not
only contest dominant narratives about Blackness that take up too much
(cultural and literary) space, but they also make room for what Morgan
defines as kaleidoscopic Blackness. Morgan points out one important dif-
ference between earlier Black satirical texts—which "usually also contained
a clear, homiletic message to underscore authorial purpose"—and twenty-
first-century satirical texts:

> More recent works instead push the effort to dismantle to the forefront,
> seeking justice in the subversion itself rather than in placing a didactic mes-
> sage as the immediate and sole purpose. For better or for worse, the onus is
> now on audience interpretation more than in the past and emphasizes that
> satire foregoes easy readings both in terms of simplicity of interpretation and
> the comfort of the reader. (4)

The lack of a unified, didactic message assigns an active role to readers,
who are encouraged to approach contemporary African American satire
with the implied understanding that searching for a clear message would
run counter to an understanding of Blackness as kaleidoscopic.

While there is no complete synchrony between satire and humor, the
use of comedic appeals is one central way in which African American sati-
rists engage readers in their subversive narrative worlds. Many contempo-
rary satires "inspire laughter" and "compel the audience to reexamine
themselves and their complicity within the establishments being satirized"
(Morgan 2020, 10). In an interview, Everett himself points out: "Humor
is an interesting thing. It's hard to do, but it allows you certain strategic
advantages. If you can get someone laughing, then you can make them
feel like shit a lot more easily" (Shavers 2004). Like anger, humor—or
more precisely the laughter encouraged by the strategic use of humor—
can be a force for change. Terrence T. Tucker, in fact, argues for "strategic
humor as a mode of resistance and an expression of rage." In his 2018
book *Furiously Funny: Comic Rage from Ralph Ellison to Chris Rock*,
Tucker contends that "comic rage" takes humor "beyond comedy's gen-
eral purpose, which, in white America, has been entertainment" and "pro-
duces a mixture of anger and laughter that critiques the racist logic that
enforces the color line regardless of color." Everett and Ruffin's own use

of comedy inspires laughter, while also seeking to unsettle readers, to create discomfort, and, ultimately, to provoke a sense of revolutionary and inherently hopeful outrage that implies the possibility of a different world.

The next section offers a more detailed discussion of both anger and outrage and their relationship to hope. Anger has been widely written about and theorized in African American literary and cultural criticism, but this has rarely involved a dialogue with the cognitive sciences. Recent scholarly work has shown, though, that psychological research can provide valuable insights for studying anger in literary texts that grapple with questions of race, while such texts in turn constitute key sources for a deeper understanding of anger as bound up with social and political contexts.

The Psychology and Politics of Anger

Anger is a response to aversive stimuli. According to psychologists Michael Potegal and Gerhard Stemmler anger typically "involves an active approach" (2010, 5), which distinguishes it from other emotions triggered by negative arousal, such as sadness and shame. Whereas actional responses to shame typically include withdrawal, Patrick Colm Hogan notes that "attack is the primary outcome" of anger (2003, 254). Drawing on Jaak Panksepp's observation that the rage system "is especially easily aroused by thwarting and frustrations" (1998, 52), Hogan observes that anger is "a response to frustration that projects an inhibiting agent—an opponent or enemy— even when there is no such agent behind the frustration" (2003, 254). Such inhibitory triggers may include "frustration; threats to autonomy, authority, or reputation; disrespect and insult; norm or rule violation; and a sense of injustice" (Potegal and Stemmler 2010, 3). Hogan also differentiates anger from fear, suggesting that fear is evoked by malevolent acts that are threatening in nature, whereas anger is triggered by malevolent acts that are inhibitory. While fear experiences involve fight-flight-freeze responses, reactions to anger can range from defensive over confrontational to aggressive behavior. The anger-attack reaction is precisely why anger, perhaps more than any other emotion, is considered bad and destructive, and yet always more taboo for some individuals and groups than others. I will elaborate on the politics of anger below, but first I want to briefly consider the dominant discourse in cognitive psychology on how and why emotions of anger are typically elicited.

The majority of theorists studying anger follow the appraisal account of emotions, which suggests that emotions are rooted in appraisals about

how a certain situation impacts ourselves and the achievement of our goals. Several key factors are central to the appraisal theory of anger: motivational relevance, which is the perception that an event has implications for the individual and their goals; agency attribution, the perception that an external agent is responsible and should be blamed; the perception of unfairness, illegitimacy or injustice; and coping potential, typically defined as the "perceived ability to deal successfully with the eliciting event" (Berkowitz and Harmon-Jones 2004, 110). Psychologist Nico H. Frijda claims that coping potential involves the "nonacceptance of the present event as necessary or inevitable; and it implies that the event is amenable to being changed" (1986, 199). What is crucial to anger, according to Frijda, is that it "implies hope" (429). This inherent hopefulness, in turn, centrally shapes anger's potential for encouraging modes of thinking and acting that recognize that change is possible.

While the above-mentioned factors are crucial for understanding key elicitors of anger, Berkowitz and Harmon-Jones suggest that appraisal theory may not "give sufficient attention to other factors that might also be involved in anger generation" (2004, 108). They argue for an "associative" model, in which cognitive appraisals constitute one of many triggers of anger within a network of associations, including psychological distress, physical pain, and other "subjectively aversive conditions [that] can generate anger even when an external entity is not seen as the cause of the negative situation" (114). These aversive conditions include "feelings, thoughts and memories, and motor impulses, all associatively linked in an anger–affective aggression syndrome, without the operation of attributions and appraisals" (117). Berkowitz and Harmon-Jones contend that cognitive factors "such as an external agent's judged responsibility for the incident, may intensify the anger reaction rather than being necessary for this emotion to occur" (115). This is in line with Hogan's perceptual-associative or sub-appraisal theory of emotion, which takes into account appraisal as well as other factors—such as perception, simulation, and the activation of emotional memories—as possible eliciting conditions of emotions.[2] Such associative or sub-appraisal models are especially instructive when applied contextually, that is, in relation to the larger historical, political, and cultural contexts that contribute to shaping the ways in which anger is experienced, expressed, and understood.

It is particularly telling that Sue J. Kim begins her *On Anger: Race, Cognition, Narrative* (2013) with the words "[a]nger gets a bad rap" (1). Whereas Aristotle already wrote "that only fools *don't* get angry, and that

although overly angry people may be 'unbearable,' the absence of anger (aimed at the right offenses) is a vice rather than a virtue" (Solomon 2008, 5, emphasis mine), Kim rightly observes that "[c]alling someone 'angry' often labels that person as irrational, unstable, and unpredictable" (2013, 1). Kim points out that anger "may be partly physiological, cognitive, and psychological, yet it is also deeply ideological, inseparable from factors such as race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and religion" (1). What is important to my own thinking about the relationship between race and anger is Kim's emphasis that both are "ideologically and historically constructed" (5). Therefore, any account of how anger operates within the racialized context of the United States needs to account for the overwhelming and continuous "fear and dismissal of black rage" (49). The pathologization of Black anger is so prevalent precisely because "[m]ainstream communication wants racism to be accepted as an immutable given in the fabric of existence, like evening time or the common cold," as Audre Lorde has argued in her famous address on the "uses of anger" (1981, 8). In other words, anger expressed against racism threatens the status quo. While Lorde speaks of and to Black women, in particular, her argument is even more encompassing because of its diagnosis that all oppressed people who express anger are met with threat. Crucially, Lorde contends that the anger of the oppressed, when expressed productively, is not destructive but "a powerful source of energy serving progress and change" (8). Anger in the form of revolutionary outrage, then, is an expression of (hopeful) resistance.

It is also an act of solidarity. Kim suggests that "moral outrage" is "based on a perception that a group norm has been violated, whether or not one as an *individual* benefits; or rather, moral outrage unites individual and collective goals, so that individual goals and hopes are concomitant with collective goals" (2013, 176, emphasis in original). While cognitive theories provide significant insights into anger as a universal human phenomenon, they are less well suited to account for outrage as a form of anger that moves beyond individual blame-placing to a more collective and system-oriented indignation. Kim argues that even though "[o]utrage is, technically speaking, a form of anger," its basis in "collective notions of justice, ethics, and rights" does not align with the selective individualism of scientific studies of emotion (176–177). This is one reason why studying African American storyworlds can contribute to a better understanding of emotions such as anger in relation to the historical, racialized, and socio-spatial contexts that contribute to its production.

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2015), Sara Ahmed suggests that the "means by which emotions flow or are blocked take us back to fundamental social and political questions about how spaces are organised around certain bodies" (225). She argues that precisely those "emotions that have often been described as negative or even destructive can also be enabling or creative, often in their very refusal of the promise of the social bond … anger against injustice can move subjects into a different relation to the world" (201). What Ahmed describes as "emotional struggles against injustice" (201) are affective acts of resistance against socio-spatial inequalities that determine who gets to occupy certain spaces and how, and who is barred from, or confined in, those same spaces. Using satire as a mode of social critique, the two texts considered in this chapter expose the pathologizing of Black rage by both mass culture and Black subjects and artists themselves, as we will see in *Erasure*, and attribute the lack of it to the insidious effects of internalized anti-Blackness, as we will see in *We Cast a Shadow*.

The African American Writer and the White Literary Landscape in *Erasure*

Like the rest of Everett's multifaceted fictional oeuvre, *Erasure* is a work that "will inherently frustrate any attempts at definitive classification" (Maus 2019, 1). Indeed, Everett has often expressed suspicion toward the labels attached to him and his work, positioning himself as an author "profoundly opposed to limitations, finalities, and closures of meaning" (5). Reading *Erasure* within the framework of African American satire is, therefore, not an attempt at definitive labeling, but rather a useful entry point for discussing the intersections between anger, outrage, race, and space.

Erasure not only subverts U.S. society's racial scripts through its content, but it also communicates its critique of essentialist boundaries of race through textual space. Therefore, I want to begin by considering "the spatial form of the text," a definition introduced by literary critic Joseph Frank to "describe a type of narrative organization … that deemphasizes temporality and causality through compositional devices, such as fragmentation, montage of disparate elements, and juxtaposition of parallel plot lines" (Ryan et al. 2016, 5). *Erasure*'s fragmented narrative space consists of journal entries by Everett's protagonist Thelonious "Monk" Ellison, which are interspersed with ideas about literary theory, a short story, an

academic paper, reflections on woodworking, imaginary conversations between historical figures, and, most prominently, a novel within the novel. The different but interrelated textual spaces each expresses different ways of being Black, and different ways of being angry while Black, thereby formally capturing what Tate describes as "the contingency and diversity of blackness" (1992, 631) and what Morgan calls "kaleidoscopic Blackness" (2020, 3). The spatial fragmentation of the text mirrors not only the protagonist's increasing psychic fragmentation, but these formal choices also contribute to the novel's project of remapping the material, discursive, and emotional borders that confine Blackness.[3]

The Black Author's Place, Race, and Anger

Erasure's central fragment is the novel within the novel, *My Pafology*, later re-named *Fuck*, which lends itself to a theorization of the relationship between anger, race, and the publishing landscape. *My Pafology*, written and pseudonymously published by Monk, is not only a text that details the sort of Black rage that is stereotypically portrayed as dangerous, but also a text that results from the writer-protagonist's experience of anger about the literary marketplace and his position in it. Monk struggles to find critical and commercial success as an author because he refuses to write about race and *the* African American experience, and yet he finds his books deliberately (mis)placed in the African American section of a bookstore, although "the only thing ostensibly African American was my jacket photograph" (Everett 2004, 34). Seeing oneself through the eyes of a dominant and judging Other creates a sense of double consciousness that may be manifested in shame, as I have argued in the third chapter. The sensation of double consciousness may also anger more than it shames, as it does in Monk's case, whose individual goals are blocked by what he perceives as an unwarranted and unjust racialization of his literary work in relation to his authorial body.

When Monk locates his books in the "wrong" place in the bookstore, his experience of anger about racialized confinement is described as follows: "I became quickly irate, my pulse speeding up, my brow furrowing … That fucking store was taking food from my table … Saying something to the poor clone of a manager was not going to fix anything, so I resigned to keep quiet" (34). As the protagonist experiences these typical phenomenological responses to anger, he is not explicitly concerned with the potential danger of displaying anger in public as a Black

man, but he chooses not to express his anger because he recognizes the futility of "blaming the wrong agent, *particularly* one whose lack of power within these systems mirrors our own powerlessness" (Kim 2013, 51, emphasis in original)—in this case the bookstore manager. Such a recognition affirms that individual conceptualizations of anger that make us look for "a *person* to blame, rather than a *system*" (51, emphases in original) are often insufficient and unproductive.

Monk's anger, however, intensifies following his encounter of Juanita Mae Jenkins's *We's Lives in Da Ghetto*, an African American novel selected for a TV show akin to Oprah's Book Club. The novel becomes a bestseller precisely because it plays into stereotypical assumptions about Blackness and into what James Baldwin described as white readers' "self-righteous, virtuous sentimentality" (1955, 14). To Monk, Jenkins's bestseller serves as an embodiment of the obstacles that stand in the way of his own literary career and desire to produce storyworlds that are not automatically classified as Black and submitted to anthropological readings. As he "sat and stared at Juanita Mae Jenkins' face on *Time* magazine," Monk's experience of anger causes physical pain which travels through his body:

> The pain started in my feet and coursed through my legs, up my spine and into my brain and I remembered passages of *Native Son* and *The Color Purple* and *Amos and Andy* and my hands began to shake, the world opening around me, tree roots trembling on the ground outside, people in the street shouting *dint, ax, fo, screet* and *fahvre*! and I was screaming inside, complaining that I didn't sound like that. (Everett 2004, 70)

In this passage as well as in an earlier description of Jenkins's book as "a real slap in the face" (35), the novel emphasizes how the protagonist's "embodied conviction that others have acted wrongly" (Clore and Centerbar 2004, 141) creates a strong anger experience. After being rejected again and again for "not [being] black enough" (Everett 2004, 49), that is, not adhering to the prototypical racial narratives that make "real money" (48), Monk's anger with publishers, writers, and readers who readily produce and consume Black narratives that exploit the economy of stereotype mobilizes him to write what he intends to be a satirical parody of such practices. He subsequently pours his anger into the writing of *My Pafology*, a novel which he publishes using the pseudonym Stagg R. Leigh, an allusion to the oral legend that exists around the nineteenth-century Black man Stagger Lee or Stagolee who gained notorious fame as

an alleged murderer.[4] The choice of this alter ego certainly symbolizes the magnitude of anger that Monk feels in response to the fictional Jenkins who, in turn, acts as a stand-in for African American authors such as Richard Wright.

Monk is presumably unwilling to participate in a Wrightian literary tradition, which according to him reifies the association between Black anger and violence, but he needs to reinscribe himself within the same discourse to satirize it. While Monk successfully imitates the targeted discourse, his attempt at *satirical* parody fails. Christian Schmidt emphasizes that "satire points outside of the text at the world rather than 'simply' spinning around its own textual nature as parody does" (2016, 115). Monk's communication of his satirical intentions, however, is fuzzy at best. Morgan's reading of the text illuminates that "*My Pafology* is indiscernible from the earnest and sincere" because "[n]either the author's background nor the text itself offers any touchstones" (2020, 79). *My Pafology* depicts its angry Black protagonist as out of control, irrational, and pathological, but it does not offer a critique of the structural conditions that produce Van Go's actions and emotions. Indeed, the novel positions Van Go as an "affect alien," a figure that Ahmed describes as "alienated by virtue of how they are affected by the world or how they affect others in the world" (2010, 164). While Ahmed describes the "angry black woman" as one example of an affect alien whose "speak[ing] out of anger … threatens the social bond" (67–68), the angry Black man is also socially cast as an affect alien. In his discussion of Ahmed's theory, Hogan notes that affect aliens "are recurring stereotypes that operate socially to dismiss the emotional responses of real people" (2018, 36). He relates Ahmed's poststructuralist account of affect to research in affective science which argues that "both evaluation and emotional response are inseparable from identity categorization and social group definition" (34). The angry Black man as affect alien, then, is so pervasive as a cultural stereotype that it impedes an understanding of Black subjectivity in its fullness and diversity.

As such, it also shapes the preconceptions of *My Pafology*'s white mass readership. Lesley Larkin suggests that the "black caricature created by *Erasure*'s protagonist is taken as 'authentic' by many readers because, Everett argues, narratives of black degradation are easily accepted as representative by a white audience primed to ignore the diversity of black experience" (2015, 149). Gillian Johns further asserts that "Everett's satire reaches for more than a critique of such stories on their own terms, it bitingly extends to readers (and, moreover, writers like Monk) who would

compartmentalize them and believe themselves above suspicion regarding their invention, display, and consumption" (2014, 91). Everett therefore critiques Monk for his objectifying fictional renderings of Blackness and Black emotional experience as well as Monk's readers who become complicit in consuming them. Although Monk never intends to evoke genuine empathetic identification with Van Go, he fabricates exactly the kind of narrative that he thinks is so dangerous because it is simultaneously stereotype-laden and empathy-inducing. Hogan asserts that shallow forms of empathizing do not bring about a "sense of shared subjectivity, [but] there is instead a further sort of alienation, expressed in the stereotype of an affect alien" (2018, 37). Narratives such as *We's Lives in Da Ghetto* and *My Pafology*, which reproduce stereotypes about angry Black men that feed into "what the public understands as blackness according to a liberal multicultural fantasy of authenticity that sells" (Sinykin 2017, 477), therefore only enhance affective alienation, rather than fostering an understanding of the complexity of Black male subjectivity.

Everett indicts his protagonist for participating in a reductive discourse about Blackness and Black anger, but, more importantly, he uses *My Pafology* to make an argument about the publishing industry's confinement of Black creative expression. It is both tempting and tricky to make Monk into a stand-in for Everett himself, but it is also difficult to ignore some of the similarities between Everett and his protagonist. The fact that Everett's most celebrated novel is *Erasure*—even as he published over 20 other novels over the past decades—has much to do with his racialized authorial identity and the meanings attached to it. In *Permissible Narratives: The Promise of Latino/a Literature* (2017), Christopher González notes that "[f]or most of its history of literature in America, scholars, bookstores, and audiences have viewed ethnic literatures in the United States through the lens of the author's identity" (8). Conversely, González's own book argues for an a posteriori approach to Latinx literature which attends to the texts themselves to answer how and which narrative strategies have "posed different challenges to readers during the last forty years" (10). Such an approach contests both readers' and publishers' "a priori expectation of what writing should be like, what is marketable, and what it should aspire to achieve" (10). Everett's immensely varied storyworlds have continuously challenged expectations placed upon him based on his identity. While *Erasure* is but one example of Everett's "mindfully iconoclastic perspective that he brings to his subject matter," it compellingly reveals "the interrelated acts of creating and reacting to art"

(Maus 2019, 7). Everett's storyworld not only contests overly bracketed notions of Blackness, but it provides readers with a radically expanded Black narrative space that interrogates Black male anger in ways that go far beyond the stereotype of the angry Black man.

Racial Hierarchy, Satirical Critique, and Revolutionary Outrage

The racial scripts that structure being and writing in the United States—specifically the publishing industry's racialized borders which seek to control and confine the literary imaginaries of African American authors—are the central triggers of the protagonist's anger. Both racial stereotyping and Monk's failed satirical subversion of such stereotyping are, in turn, the central targets of Everett's satirical critique. When asked whether he himself was angry while writing *Erasure*, Everett—who "undoubtedly enjoys playing the role of curmudgeonly trickster or tricksterish curmudgeon" (Maus 2019, 1)—answers: "I was more amused. Anger is for suckers" (Bauer 2013, 9). He elaborates more earnestly that anger is "not the same as outrage. You can experience outrage and see injustice, but as soon as you are swallowed by your anger, you stop thinking" (9). Not only does Everett distinguish between anger and outrage, he criticizes the former and encourages the latter in *Erasure*.

The protagonist's failure to realize his satirical authorial intent is, in fact, central to *Erasure*'s satirical commentary on and indictment of destructive forms of anger. Monk's desire for revenge for his personal failures as an author in a world that celebrates neatly categorizable art prevents him from using his anger constructively for the purpose of social critique. As Morrison has suggested, both writing and reading "require being mindful of the places where imagination sabotages itself, locks its own gates, pollutes its own vision" (1993, xi). The "frequently lazy, almost always predictable employment of racially informed and determined chains" enrage Monk, but he is unable "to maneuver ways to free up the language" (Morrison xi). Morgan asserts that "we soon realize his rage holds no revolutionary potential for either individual and communal justice in its lack of focus and it ultimately reinforces these tropes, rather than offering either catharsis or retribution" (2020, 75). Because the white literary landscape is already oriented toward novels like these, Monk's repetition of well-established and mass-profitable conventions catapults him to literary stardom: he receives a six-figure advance, an offer for a film deal, and a prestigious literary award.

Monk is not *irrationally* angry, but he does express his anger *irresponsibly*. Put differently, the anger that informs his writing is not destructive because it is Black anger, but because he cannot find a productive and responsible way to critique the stereotype of the angry Black man without reproducing it. While "anger implies that fighting is meaningful," as Frijda suggests, the "disadvantage resides in the effort and alertness required and the burden of responsibility for effecting or not effecting the change that is possible" (1986, 21). It is important to also acknowledge how Monk's social status as a Black man in a white world, reflected through his position as a Black writer in a white publishing industry, multiplies the "effort and alertness required" (21). Through Monk's gradual adoption of Stagg's persona, *Erasure* quite literally describes how Monk becomes entangled with the target of his anger. Ahmed usefully conveys the complexity of such a situation: "You become entangled with what you are angry about because you are angry about how they have entangled you in your anger. In becoming angry about that entanglement, you confirm their commitment to your anger as the truth 'behind' your speech, which is what blocks your anger" (2010, 68). Monk's psychic disintegration throughout the novel is a result of what Frantz Fanon describes as the Black man's state of being "forever in combat with his own image" (1986, 194): "The neurotic structure of an individual is simply the elaboration, the formation, the eruption within the ego, of conflictual clusters arising in part out of the environment and in part out of the purely personal way in which that individual reacts to these influences" (81). Mohammad H. Tamdgidi adds that the "complexity of the challenge facing the black man or woman, according to Fanon, is not that of facing an oppressive *other*, but one that has become internalized in the very inner geography of selves in his or her being" (2007, 129, emphasis in original). *Erasure* not only reveals how the fantasy of the angry Black man as an affect alien negatively impacts Monk's psychic space, but it directs its revolutionary outrage at the racial confinement that contributes to produce his relationship to and expression of anger.

In contrast to the protagonist's inability of translating his justified indignation into revolutionary outrage, one of the novel's other fragments, "Àppropos de bottes," notably features a character's own expression of revolutionary outrage. The Black game show participant Tom is being set up for failure by the show's hosts, but he is determined to win despite the discernible and strategic impediment to Black success. While the short segment does not detail Tom's emotional experiences, the following description indicates that Tom is driven by anger as he correctly

answers one question after the other: "Tom's brain felt like it was on fire. The answers came easily, though he didn't know why. But he understood it all and his brain was burning up" (Everett 2004, 194). This corresponds to self-reports found in cognitive research on anger by study participants who are asked to describe how they perceive their brain's reaction to inhibitory and malevolent acts, that is, what the experience of anger *feels* like. Nelly Alia-Klein et al. note that common responses include "I feel like a keg ready to explode" and "I boil inside but do not show it" (2020, 485). Tom himself uses a heat metaphor to describe the anger that mobilizes his stellar display of Black intelligence. Whereas Monk's anger provokes his choice "to 'sell out'" (Maus 2019, 89), Tom exhibits a form of revolutionary outrage which subverts from within the white supremacist notions that govern American cultural spaces.

As *Erasure* progresses and *My Pafology* continues to gain popularity and literary significance, Monk's anger only increases. When he discovers Jenkins's novel on the bedside table of the Black woman he is dating, Monk calls out her lack of intelligence and taste. The woman, Marilyn, becomes an easy target to blame because, in this moment, she embodies everyone who is guilty of promulgating objectifying stereotypes about Blackness. Everett not only holds Black writers like Jenkins and Monk accountable, but also Black readers, using dual-vectored satirical critique to make both Black and white readers "feel like shit" (Shavers 2004). However, since Monk has turned into one of those Black writers, his strong response to Marilyn is, at least in part, a projection of the anger and frustration that he feels with himself. Only at a later point does Monk realize that he was displaying "snobbish literary outrage" (Everett 2004, 247), being angry at himself for having created a faithful copy of *We's Lives in Da Ghetto*. His version of anger is both self-destructive—making him violate his personal norms of artistic integrity—but it is also communally destructive and self-serving as Monk reinforces and profits from stereotypical Black representation.

Moreover, Monk repeatedly *becomes* Stagg R. Leigh, impersonating the alleged author and ex-convict for the public's consumption of Black spectacle. Monk's adoption of Stagg's persona certainly represents the hyperpresence of stereotypes about Black anger in Monk's head. When the ostensible activities of Stagg who is "inhabiting" Monk's body are described, the narrative switches from a first- to a third-person perspective, formally expressing what Fanon described as "third-person consciousness" (1986, 110), which is the consciousness that Black subjects develop

when they internalize the racial stereotypes ascribed to their bodies. As Lisa A. Guerrero points out, "[a]s Stagg begins to materialize, the contours of Monk's own life grow more immaterial" (2020, 106), the culmination of which happens when *My Pafology/Fuck* is announced as the winner of the National Book Award (for which Monk also served as one of the judges). On stage, Monk seemingly hallucinates the presence of "a small boy, perhaps me as a boy, and he held up a mirror so that I could see my face and it was the face of Stagg Leigh" (Everett 2004, 293).[5] As Monk stares into Stagg's face—which is his own face—Stagg asks him "[h]ow does it feel to be free of one's illusions," to which Monk answers "*[p]ainful and empty*" (293), repeating the same words Ellison's protagonist in *Invisible Man* uses when his enemies confront him in a dream. While these are the last words Monk "exchanges" with Stagg in *Erasure*, Ellison's narrator-protagonist continues with the words: "*at a price I now see that which I couldn't see*" (2014, 570). Throughout the narrative, Monk kept attributing blame to external forces and individuals, but seeing himself contained in Stagg's body prompts him to recognize his own (ir) responsibility. Even as Monk was rightfully angry about the limited imaginary space available to him as a Black author, his anger response only reinforced the containment of Black subjectivity within well-known scripts about Black identity and Black anger.

Erasure exposes how racial forms of constraint produce emotions of anger, while also uncovering how inhabiting a racialized body increases the difficulty of understanding and expressing one's anger in ways that resist rather than reify the racialized structures in place. Engaging in a double-vectored satirical discourse, the novel indicts its Black protagonist, but it even more importantly engages in "a broader overhaul of the publishing industry and the popular culture that sustains it" (Larkin 2015, 129).[6] As a stand-alone novel as well as a part of Everett's multifaceted fictional oeuvre, *Erasure* fulfills the purpose of "space-clearing" and "space-making" by challenging the containment of Blackness and Black identity. The racial shadows within and against which Monk seeks to assert his subjectivity are deliberately produced and uncritically consumed, but their production is not inevitable. Although neither *Erasure's* nor *We Cast a Shadow*'s protagonists find ways to express anger productively, each story exposes the negative consequences of racial control and confinement on Black psychic space and subject formation.

While my reading of *Erasure* was less concerned with material space, and more focused on the imaginative and discursive space afforded to

Black writers within a white literary and cultural landscape, the pairing with *We Cast a Shadow* shows that imaginative, cultural, and material spaces are closely linked. Indeed, *We Cast a Shadow* lays bare both the emotional and material consequences of reductive images about Blackness, and stereotypical narratives about pathologically angry Black men. As I will show in the next section, an emotion-race-space framework is fruitful for tracing the ways in which the criminalization of Black anger, and Black lives more generally, encourages violent policing and surveillance of Blackness in an alleged attempt to protect white spaces and white lives.

AFFECTIVE FUTURES OF RACE AND SPACE IN *WE CAST A SHADOW*

We Cast a Shadow interrogates the interlinkages between race, geography, and anger in the not-so-distant future. The novel follows a nameless Black narrator—a lawyer, loving father, and husband with a drug problem—who desperately struggles to afford a demelanization procedure for his 11-year-old biracial son. Whereas Monk's revenge-oriented anger stifles his imagination as he attempts to critique the racialized cultural space he is embedded in, the protagonist in *We Cast a Shadow* is emotionally invested in navigating white space as an anger-less and "respectable" subject.

Although the novel captures the thoroughly racialized geographies of Ruffin's native New Orleans, it only vaguely defines the setting as an unnamed Southern U.S. city, which opens up imaginative possibilities for a more expansive worlding of the story.[7] By speculating about the ways in which race is actualized in a place in the near-future South, Ruffin interrogates both the persistence and the elasticity of the link between race and space, using what Thadious Davis calls "the persistent conceptual power of the South as a spatial object and ideological landscape" (2011, 2). Moreover, the protagonist's namelessness gives Ruffin the opportunity to strategically evoke empathy with him individually and simultaneously extend it to others like him, that is, Black Americans who navigate white geographies.

Inscribing himself in a long tradition of African American satire, Ruffin, like Everett, consciously alludes to Ellison's "invisible man" as he satirically and humorously expresses his social critique. In *Comic Rage* (2018), Tucker suggests that "*Invisible Man* is a—if not the—central text in the development of comic rage." While the "novels of the so-called Wright

school, works in the 1940s and 1950s that followed the 1940 publication of Richard Wright's *Native Son* in form and in tone, did possess moments of humor," Tucker contends that these moments "were most often overwhelmed by the formulaic descent of the novels from rage and despair into violence." What distinguishes *Invisible Man* from these works, according to Tucker, is "its consistent separation of black rage from violence … [and] Ellison's immersion in African American folk tradition [which] allows humor to replace the violence of the protest novel as an expression of rage." While the simultaneous expression of outrage and satirical intent is what Monk's *My Pafology* fails to achieve in its parody of the Wright school, Ruffin constructs a narrator-protagonist who avoids anger, confrontation, and resistance. Cognitive neuroscientist R. J. R. Blair notes that anger "is often considered to be a response to a perceived threat to oneself or to another" (2012, 65), which is why "[i]ndividuals placed within threatening environments exhibit higher levels of anger and irritability" (66). In the case of Ruffin's narrator, however, the activation of the fear system seems to entirely override his anger system. In *Killing Rage: Ending Racism* (1995), bell hooks argues that "[t]o perpetuate and maintain white supremacy, white folks have colonized black Americans, and a part of that colonizing process has been teaching us to repress our rage, to never make them the targets of any anger we feel about racism" (14). Ruffin's narrator has internalized this colonial logic to such a degree that anger is completely missing in his narration, which is why there is also no comic rage, as Tucker defines it. In fact, the narration seems strategically sanitized, that is, cleared of anger, which not only reflects the narrator's rejection of anger, but also his goal of passing on the same mindset to his son who is the intended reader of his journal-style narrative.

The satiric and darkly comedic narration emphasizes how the narrator's position as a Black subject in an anti-Black world has shaped his experience and condemnation of anger. In so doing, *We Cast a Shadow* exhibits the "dual-vectored nature of post-soul satire" (Maus 2014, xiii), which is self-critical and, even more importantly, critical of oppressive external forces. By drawing readers into the inner workings of the narrator's mind, Ruffin delivers a searing indictment of the negative effects of white supremacy on self-image, relationships to others, and the understanding and expression of emotions, including and especially anger.

The Dangers of Black Male Anger and Anger's Absence

The novel starts with a costume party at which the narrator competes with two other Black associates to get a promotion at his law firm. In these first pages of the novel, which can be read as a homage to the Battle Royal in *Invisible Man*, the narrator reveals his relationship to anger:

> [W]henever a white person asked me any question just because I was the onliest black guy in the room, the possible responses rattled around my brain like dice in a cup: one, answer with anger; two, answer with humor; or three, answer with a question.
>
> The first, I practically never used. Anger, of course, could get you killed. (Ruffin 2019, 9)

The "you" is not a universal second-person pronoun, but it refers specifically to Black subjects for whom expressions of anger are not only socially impermissible but also dangerous. In her analysis of *Erasure*, Morgan claims that the "power of shadows is endemic to Monk's understanding of blackness and his ability to create and to sustain Stagg R. Leigh" (2014, 165). In *We Cast a Shadow*, the narrator's understanding of the power of his own racial shadow critically defines his relationship to anger. Because Black anger is routinely portrayed as unjustified and alarming, expressions of anger by Black people, no matter how justified, routinely make them targets of white violence. While Monk at least seemingly, though unsuccessfully and destructively, seeks to subvert stereotypes about Blackness, he does get genuinely angry about harmful mainstream rhetoric. By contrast, Ruffin's narrator much more openly and readily embraces a performance of Black stereotypes because it will bring him closer to fulfilling his mission to save his son from having to do the same.

To navigate anti-Black space safely and successfully, the narrator avoids all deeds and gestures that may be interpreted as threatening. He first comes to the firm's party dressed as a Roman centurion, who are known to be "badasses who killed anyone who crossed them" (Ruffin 2019, 6), but he soon realizes that he needs to change his outfit and strategy:

> I had to sink to the level of the shareholders' expectations. My fellow melanated associates fit in better than me because everyone was used to seeing black waiters tending to tourists or black convicts being led to work in neck shackles. There was a comfort in these familiar images, as reassuring as steaming apple pie or drones dropping barrel bombs on terrorists. (10)

The narrator subsequently only wears what he describes as an "African god's loincloth" (9). While his white observers are unlikely to perceive it as godlike, but rather as savage, none of this seems to matter to the narrator as long as nobody perceives him as dangerous. He not only understands that law firms "didn't hire, let alone promote, angry black men" (6), but he accepts that "[i]n a society saturated with mass-mediated iconography and stereotypes of blackness, black peoples in America must, to a great extent, perform their individual subjectivities within … these spectacles of blackness" (Hayman 2017, 19). The reason why the narrator readily engages in racial performance is practical (he wants to earn enough money for his son's whitening procedure), but it is also closely linked to his acceptance of the conditions of his world as unchangeable.

The narrator's perceived lack of coping potential, which is at the root of his rejection of anger, is inextricably bound up with his positionality as an African American male within white space. Frijda argues that anger "implies that behind the obstacle the blocked goal still exists, still is available; and the nature of the obstacle is such that, in principle it can be controlled and modified" (1986, 429). The protagonist, however, has no hope that racial oppression can be overcome. His acceptance of the ideological parameters of his world and his internalization of anti-Blackness make anger and blame-placing useless. Jennifer S. Lerner and Dacher Keltner point out that while "angry people expressed optimistic risk estimates and risk-seeking choices," "fearful people expressed pessimistic risk estimates and risk-averse choices" (2001, 146). The narrator's embodied experiences of anti-Black racism and his appraisal of racial oppression create a pessimistic view about the possibility of external change and shape his conviction that *not* getting angry and/or suppressing anger about injustice is the most effective way to ensure survival and safety. The "protection tendency" typical of fear responses (Lerner and Keltner 2001, 74) drives him to shield his family from inhibitory threats, and it simultaneously galvanizes his hopes for providing his son with whiteness, the ultimate protection. Since the color of his son's skin is in fact alterable within the context of the storyworld, the narrator's pathways and agency thinking—what hope theory defines as the two central aspects determining an individual's capacity and motivation for goal achievement—are oriented toward accumulating enough money for a demelanization procedure, no matter the emotional cost.

At a young age already, Ruffin's narrator understood the dire consequences of expressing Black outrage in white public space. The single

most traumatizing event happened during a neighborhood stroll, when a police officer wrongfully accused the narrator's father of stealing a bike and then pushed the narrator's protesting mother to the ground. In this moment, his father's outrage over injustice made him attack the officer, a reaction that runs contrary to what he tried to instill in his son, namely, that "[r]especting yourself means respecting even those who don't deserve it" (Ruffin 2019, 234). The consequence is a life sentence for attempted murder, leaving the narrator without a father and prompting him "to be better, stronger, a more resilient man than [his father] ever was" (237). The feeling that his father abandoned him, combined with his internalized anti-Blackness, even makes the narrator resort to a language of racial shaming: "My father had been careless, an idiot! All his talk of respect and restraint. When it counted, he became an animal just like a common street thug" (236–237). The anger that belies this sentiment—which is not directed at the system that unjustly incarcerated his father but only at the father himself—exposes the magnitude of white supremacy's affective hold on the narrator. This formative experience in the narrator's life, in fact, lays bare how white supremacy exerts its visceral emotional power by punishing expressions of Black outrage and perpetuating Black grief and Black fear. The father's incarceration is a traumatic grief experience that breaks up the narrator's family, disrupts his sense of stability and safety, and catapults him into a constant state of anxiety, while crucially also forming his view of anger as a harmful emotion.

In addition to the narrator's personal history, his rejection of anger is also shaped by the dire repercussions that follow more collective, public expressions of Black outrage. In fact, white backlash against the rightful moral outrage of Black citizens created the dystopian future of Ruffin's storyworld. Reminiscent of Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993), Ruffin constructs a speculative fictional world that negotiates the consequences that are likely to follow if existing problems are not addressed. The narrator observes that "[h]istory is landscape" (Ruffin 2019, 118) before he gradually reveals the consequences of the "whitelash, which led to the world Nigel and I lived in" (219). Growing up in the Tikoloshe Housing Development (Tiko), which is an intensely policed "complex [that] was surrounded by a tall barbed-wire-rimmed fence" (88), the narrator routinely witnessed and experienced the violence of spatialized racism.[8] The spatial production of anti-Blackness, however, gets even worse after a group called ADZE—which fights for Black liberation and practices armed self-defense—organizes to publicly express outrage about racial

injustice.[9] Ruffin's representation of how the activist group is treated as a terrorist organization alludes to the FBI's reaction to the Black Panther Party in the 1960s. In *The Anger Gap: How Race Shapes Emotion in Politics* (2019), Davin L. Phoenix argues that "[h]istory provides a litany of instances of black individuals feeling the full weight of the state apparatus after they dare to mobilize explicitly on the basis of expressed grievance with the sociopolitical status quo" (15). Phoenix discusses parallels between historical and present reactions to Black protests by comparing the state's labeling of the Black Panther Party as a domestic terror group to a more recent 2017 report by the FBI which classified "any black individual or group that expresses anger over instances of police brutality" as "Black Identity Extremists" (16). This history leaks into the future of Ruffin's storyworld, which shows how "the highest law enforcement agency in the land emphasizes the systematic threat posed by black people who are justifiably disturbed" (17). Rather than engaging with the structural injustices that are the cause of outrage, the rightfully outraged are silenced and attacked.

We Cast a Shadow uncovers the ways in which the government's backlash against Black protest, and its determination to stop ADZE, makes Black neighborhoods "practically unlivable" (Ruffin 2019, 167).[10] They confine Black citizens within the Tiko—extending its parameters and raising its barbed-wire fence—while also increasing surveillance and transforming the housing complex into a carceral geography. Anti-Black spatial practices only become more violent throughout the narrator's life, especially in the aftermath of public expressions of Black outrage about injustice. This, in turn, intensifies the narrator's resolve to both refrain from anger and earn enough money for Nigel's whitening procedure. To achieve this goal, the narrator even serves as the token Black spokesperson for a campaign that allegedly promotes equality while exuding racism. Like many of the characters in Schuyler's *Black No More*, the narrator becomes one of those political figures who purport to fight for racial equality, while only chasing self-serving ambitions. But in contrast to Schuyler's characters, who are interested in accumulating wealth, the narrator's actions in *We Cast a Shadow* are driven by a desperate need to make his beloved son's life easier and give him a chance at safety and success within American racial society. Although he knows that the people he supports "would strip rights from me … and everyone who looked like us" (Ruffin 2019, 178), he becomes complicit in reproducing anti-Blackness both within his hometown and his family home.

Until he has the means to pay for his son's demelanization, he talks him into applying "the skin-toning equivalent of acetone," even as Nigel repeatedly tells him that "[i]t stinks, and it stings" (132). In this moment, and other moments like this in the novel, readers likely empathize with Nigel and share his anger toward the narrator, which is not lost on the narrator who addresses his readers directly:

> Now, I'm perfectly aware of the judgmental thoughts running through your head as you read these words. I suspect your pupils have dilated, your lips are agape, your heart filled with venom toward me. But let me make an attempt to clarify my position as this is neither the time nor the place for the mincing of words or slightest prevarication of any kind.... The world is a centrifuge that patiently waits to separate my Nigel from his basic human dignity. I don't have to tell you that this is an unjust planet.... There may be beauty in my blackness and dignity in the struggle of my people, but I won't allow my son to live a life of diminished possibility. I see a constellation of opportunity that those of my ilk rarely travel to. I see my Nigel at the center of those stars .... What if I can ensure that my boy is not perceived as a black man? What if he is simply a man? (133–135)

The passage begins with a description of the likely effects of the narrative on readers' arousal as they engage with the narrated events and the narrator's harmful actions toward his son. The narrator, then, draws on his legal expertise as an attorney, which is inspired by Ruffin's own legal career, mimicking "the way trial lawyers consciously or unconsciously construct narratives—theories of a case—that they hope will resonate with the jury and induce it to adopt their interpretations" (Delgado and Stefancic 2017, 45). Through his direct address, "the narrator acts as reporter, interpreter, and evaluator of the narrated for the narratee" (Phelan 2005, 12). The intended narratee, as revealed in the final pages of the novel, is Nigel, for whom the narrator has composed this story "to give you access to my fractured psyche to use information as you will. Perhaps you will know me better than I myself" (Ruffin 2019, 320). It is precisely this access to the narrator's "fractured psyche" that Ruffin uses to "condemn his readers to empathize with a protagonist they find morally ambiguous" (Weik von Mossner 2014, 121). This resonates with how Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* (2020) encourages readers to both empathize with and feel angry at the passing protagonist who, driven by her own fear, unleashes the shaming power of white supremacy to drive a Black family out of her

neighborhood. Importantly, Ruffin's breaking of the fourth wall seeks to preserve readers' empathy, which is crucial for the narrative's satirical imagination.

Satirical Critique of Anti-Blackness, Empathy, and Revolutionary Outrage

We Cast a Shadow's satirical critique relies on readers' empathetic identification with the narrator-protagonist's desire to protect the people he loves. While it invites indignation at his methods of protection, the far more "scornful and morally indignant mockery" (Maus 2014, xiii–iv) is reserved for the society that necessitates such methods in the first place. In his 2016 article "'To Soften the Heart': George Saunders, Postmodern Satire, and Empathy," Layne Neeper describes George Saunders "as a compassionate satirist" (285) who exemplifies "early twenty-first-century American satire's new attention to affect—to empathy" (282):

> The necessarily judgmental aspect of satire is evoked but then undermined, and not in a postmodernist display of irony but in empathy. Saunders's satire is not simply ridicule of targets that results in reform but rather ridicule coupled with enough knowledge of the targeted character's psychological motivations to allow the reader to empathize. The effect of Saunders's tactic is a two-step process that first creates comic distance and then crosses that emotional space. (290–291)

Ruffin's satire is similarly compassionate, guided by his belief that literature is "an empathy generator" (Currey 2016). In contrast to Everett's multiply focalized storyworld, Ruffin focalizes his novel solely through the first-person perspective of his unnamed narrator. The close insight into the narrator's psychological motivations enables not only empathetic engagement, but it asks readers "not to disapprove of the deplorable choice[s] … but to recognize a new felt sense of *why* someone would choose to act as he or she does" (Neeper 2016, 296, emphasis mine). Ruffin observes that what he "heard most often from readers is that [his protagonist] makes a lot of horrific choices, but they get it" (Young 2019). While he may be drawing on a limited range of readerly responses, this does suggest that his own authorial strategic empathizing is effective. *We Cast a Shadow* prompts a recognition of the *why* as inherently related to the narrator's lived

experience as a Black man in white supremacist geographies. By satirically exposing the social and political forces that encourage the narrator's devoted yet problematic behavior, the novel triggers a sense of revolutionary outrage in readers.

The gradual revelation of the increasingly harmful consequences of anti-Blackness on the narrator's psyche only contributes to intensify readers' outrage as the narrative progresses. After the narrator's wife, Penny, finds the journal that details his secret demelanization plans for Nigel, Penny rushes out of their house in rage and is tragically killed by a police surveillance van driving through their neighborhood. However, not even the loss of his wife stops the narrator from trying to prepare his son "for the best of all possible worlds" (Ruffin 2019, 136). Ruffin's narrator clearly recognizes the white supremacist system as unjust, but he also regards it as unchangeable, which is why he is unable to conceive of freer ways of home-making, such as the ones Morrison describes in her 1997 essay "Home." Whereas Morrison asserts that if she "had to live in a racial house, it was important, at the least, to rebuild it" (4), Ruffin's narrator seeks to erase those aspects of himself and his son that, in their absence, will make habitation in the racial house safer.

When the narrator is finally promoted to shareholder at his firm, he immediately takes his son to Dr. Nzinga to start the process of demelanization, which he describes as "a six-month procedure, similar in some ways to the cancer treatments they used to give" (Ruffin 2019, 223). Almost a century earlier, Schuyler imagined a comparable procedure in his satirical and (proto-)Afrofuturist novel *Black No More*, in which the Black physician Dr. Crookman develops a treatment that turns Black Americans ostensibly white by altering their skin color, hair, and features within a period of three days.[11] In Schuyler's storyworld, the protagonist's anger over racial injustice and his desire for (sexual) attachment with a white woman, in fact, motivate him to be the very first person to undergo a racial transformation procedure. While much of the novel's satire and suspense come from its representation of the consequences of the "Black No More" procedure on American society, *We Cast a Shadow* focuses less on the aftermath and more on the tumultuous road toward demelanization. The path envisioned by the narrator, however, proves to be immensely harmful to Nigel, who eventually escapes before his father can realize his plan of "sending out millions of little demolition teams [into his body], each crashing a wrecking ball through a ghetto facade" (Ruffin 2019, 223). By

linking Nigel's skin to a ghetto facade, and the process of demelanization to spatial destruction, Ruffin disturbingly but effectively foregrounds the violence of an ideological system that equates melanin levels with human worth and social power. Reading *We Cast a Shadow* proves to be as "disconcerting" an experience as Ruffin intended it to be (Young 2019), since there are countless moments like this in the novel that are related in a matter-of-fact manner by the narrator, but that simultaneously communicate the implied Ruffin's acidic critique of American racial society.

Because of his father's pursuit of whiteness and his transmission of internalized anti-Blackness, Nigel wrestles with painful feelings of shame and anger. Early in the novel, for instance, Nigel locks himself in a closet after his classmates call him a "beauty queen"—racially shaming him for putting on skin whitening cream (Ruffin 2019, 37). The narrator's insistence on Black self-erasure creates a desire in Nigel to conceal his bad self from the eyes of judging others, which is a typical response to the experience of shame. Crucially, Nigel's closest friend and later girlfriend, Araminta—whom the narrator describes as a "dark-as-dung brat" (155)—helps him to recognize his self-worth. Over time, the pain of shame increasingly transforms into anger over his father's violations. As psychologists Tangney, Stuewig, and Mashek point out "shame-inducing situations" (2007, 349) that provoke negative evaluations of the self can lead to "anger and resentment" toward the perceived perpetrator (351). Although readers do not have access to Nigel's consciousness, they can nevertheless observe, through his interactions with the narrator, how his anger at his father develops and grows throughout the narrative.

Eventually, Nigel gets involved with ADZE and disappears for good after the group is associated with throwing a smoke grenade onto a stage during a Martin Luther King Day celebration in the Tiko. Nigel later reveals that he was not aware of what was apparently a one-man mission of attack, but he also admits: "I didn't care. I thought if a few people got hurt, so what. Because I was selfish and angry" (Ruffin 2019, 308). While Nigel recognizes that he joined ADZE for the "wrong" reasons, namely, his personal anger at his father, the novel makes clear that the activist group was not promoting or practicing violence: "ADZE was a community-minded group that tried to build people up" (218), but "[p]eople got so freaked out whenever we showed up, they would stampede and hurt each other" (308). Because their outrage against the status quo represents "a

refusal to play nice or be quiet" and because their riot seeks to "wrench the public away from their banal habits and into a space that questions the arrangements of racialized power" (Corrigan 2020, 84–85), their mere presence is a threat that is met with violence.

In the final part of the novel, many years later, Nigel and the by then demelanated narrator reunite once more. Still unable to understand how his actions harmed Nigel, the narrator embarks on a mission to rescue his long-lost son, thinking that "[t]here was no telling what level of brainwashing he had experienced, or who held him captive" (Ruffin 2019, 287). However, Nigel practices what is unimaginable to the narrator himself, Black self-love. Therefore, the reunion does not go as planned and Nigel tells his father, "I know you're afraid … But that's something you're going to have to figure out how to deal with. I'm not leaving with you. This is where I belong, and I love who I am" (313). Not insignificantly, Nigel's healing from racial shame and internalized anti-Blackness happened away from his father's influence and away from a space in which white supremacy reigns. Nigel has found home in an "expanse where a group of folks of seemingly every race" live and work on a farm (295). The isolated commune in New Rosewood in Appalachia resembles the restorative function that the Valentine farm has for the protagonist in Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* (2016). In *Black to Nature: Pastoral Return and African American Culture* (2021), Stefanie K. Dunning examines how African American texts "carve out space—natural space—for their Black characters to feel at home on the earth in ways that are unimaginable under the regime of white supremacist society" (24). *We Cast a Shadow* does so by depicting how Nigel finds both safety and community in a natural space in which beauty, worth, self- and home-making are no longer anchored to a white racial and spatial imaginary. While Ruffin's narrator himself "had a measure of respect for the people who brought forth the flora and fauna" (2019, 295), his internalization of white supremacist ideology, including mastery over both nonwhite subjects and the nonhuman environment, prevents him from imagining nature as a site in which Black people can live and thrive.

Following Nigel's rejection, the narrator "suffered a kind of social death … I have a name and a country, but I'm no longer a husband or father. And I no longer possess an identity I recognize" (316). Like Ellison and Everett, Ruffin interrogates his Black male protagonist's invisibility and erasure as a consequence of U.S. society's white racial and spatial

imaginary. When the narrator finally acquires the racial identity that is privileged in white supremacist geographies, it does not provide him with possibilities for emotional liberation. The absence of home in his life—and the positive attachment to both place and other people that home entails—undermines his sense of self, identity, and belonging. Perhaps most destructively, he sacrifices "family and community as home" (Morrison 1997, 5) in his quest for a place within America's racial house. While the narrator does admit that "[a] part of me believes that I wronged Nigel by interfering with his so-called natural development" (Ruffin 2019, 319), in the last pages of the novel he once more emphasizes that systemic injustice left him no choice but to try and protect his son:

> the truth of the matter is that I was no normal father, Nigel was no normal son, and America was no normal nation. I sought to arm my boy with magic potions and enchanted swords, or at the very least provide a sturdy wooden shield. (319)

By repeatedly highlighting that the narrator's actions are inextricably bound up with oppressive systems that encourage compliance while they punish resistance and outrage, *We Cast a Shadow* encourages a sense of revolutionary outrage at a society that never fully values and routinely confines Black material, social, and psychological space.

Conclusion

This chapter has turned to Percival Everett's *Erasure* and Maurice Carlos Ruffin's *We Cast a Shadow* to explore intersections between anger and outrage, on the one hand, and the intertwined social and political constructs of race and space, on the other. As Sue J. Kim has argued, cognitive psychological definitions of anger need to be expanded to account not only for "individualistic conceptions of goals and emotions" but also for ideological and political factors (2013, 176). Building on Kim's work, I have examined the ways in which Black male experiences of and relationship to anger are bound up with and constrained by reductive narratives about Black anger and the strategic incapacitation of Black outrage in white space. Neither Everett's nor Ruffin's protagonist can make space for productive anger in a world in which Black emotional expression is too easily objectified, dismissed, rejected, and feared—especially when Black subjects' emotions carry revolutionary potential for a confrontation of the fixity of racial-spatial hierarchies in American society.

What this analysis suggests, more broadly, is that applying an emotion-race-space framework to contemporary African American satirical texts, on the one hand, provides a means for examining the continuing confinement of Black emotions at the confluence of racial and spatial oppression. On the other hand, the inherently hopeful revolutionary outrage espoused by the novels opens up space for storying an alternative world in which Black lives and emotions are fully valued. This revolutionary impulse will also, in part, shape my subsequent discussion of eco-Afrofuturist narratives that negotiate both the consequences and possibilities of Black female grief in the context of ecoscocial injustice.

NOTES

1. See the work of scholars and cultural critics such as Trey Ellis (1989), Nelson George (1992), Greg Tate (1992), Thelma Golden (2001), Mark Anthony Neal (2002), Paul C. Taylor (2007), Bertram D. Ashe (2007), and Touré (2011).

2. For a discussion of Hogan's perceptual-associative, or sub-appraisal, account of emotion, see his *Literature and Emotion* (2018).

3. In the second chapter, I discussed the relationship between maps and stories. As Aritha van Herk points out, "[m]apping, like language, is creation more than representation, and so it is not illogical to think of fiction as cartography. The only way a country can be truly mapped is with its stories" (80). Geocritic Robert T. Tally Jr. similarly notes that "[i]n mapping a place, one also tells a story" (2014, 2). The other way around, one also maps in telling a story, as Imani Perry highlights when she describes Toni Morrison and Edward P. Jones as "theorists of remapping" (2018, 11). On this basis, it is also possible to read Everett's and Ruffin's satirical storyworlds as fictional exercises in remapping that challenge the material, discursive, and emotional borders that confine Blackness.

4. James I. Deutsch notes that the "decade of the 1890s is also when the ballads and legends of Stagolee (also known as Staggerlee, Stackolee, etc.) first emerged, apparently based on the murder of Billy Lyons by Lee Shelton, a pimp known as Stack Lee, in St. Louis on December 25, 1895. However, the stories and songs quickly overtook any historical facts, and it was not long before Stagolee had become a notorious Bad Man, a boastful bully, and a cruel, remorseless killer" (2016, 12).

5. "[M]istaking a visual image for one's own self" is "in Lacanian terms, a spatial error," as Kim points out (2013, 113). Indeed, Guerrero notes that "Everett deliberately signifies on Lacan's 'mirror stage,'" which is the

"psychological stage that Lacan initially identified as occurring during the first few years of a child's life" (2020, 127). Everett, however, "flips the script of the 'mirror stage' having the child hold the mirror and having the adult experience the 'misrecognition'" (128). In addition to that, Michel Foucault's discussion of the mirror as "a placeless place" in his 1967 lecture "Of Other Spaces" is instructive here. Foucault observes, "[i]n the mirror I see myself where I am not, in an unreal space that opens up virtually behind the surface; I am over there where I am not, a kind of shadow that gives me my own visibility" (2006, 96). What gives Monk social visibility—"the hypervisible and hypermediated shadow of 'Blackness' writ large" (Hayman 2014, 149)—is also what renders his own subjectivity invisible. The mirror image that Monk sees is thus simultaneously real and unreal, demonstrating how the "constant repetition" of the Black spectacle makes us "become both comfortable and accustomed to the spectacle, until it takes on the characteristics of what we accept as real" (Guerrero 2020, 9).

6. See Maus's *Jesting in Earnest* (2019) for an insightful discussion of Everett's literary oeuvre through the lens of Menippean satire. Maus points out that, corresponding to the Menippean mode of satire, Everett's satirical attacks are directed at "ideas … rather than at instances of typical human 'folly' or on the moral failings of particular individuals" (53–54).

7. In an interview, Ruffin notes that he consciously "didn't want to get into the trap of creating a city that was so specific" (Okun 2019).

8. John R. Botha explains that "[i]n Zulu mythology, Tikoloshe, Tokoloshe or Hili (from the Xhosa word *utyreeci ukujamaal*) is a dwarf-like, mischievous water spirit" (2014, 31). Ruffin's naming of "Tikoloshe" as an embodiment of spatialized racism, then, speaks to the confinement of potentially disruptive Blackness.

9. Ruffin describes how he came across a farming tool used in Africa called "adze" during his research for the novel, deciding to use the name for the Black protest group "that is opposing what's going on—tilling the soil to make a better crop, so to speak" (Takacs 2019). This speaks to Black geographies' aim to counter spatialized racist oppression.

10. This is reminiscent of the 1985 police bombing of an African American neighborhood in Philadelphia, which was home to the Black liberation group called MOVE. John Edgar Wideman's 1990 novel *Philadelphia Fire* provides a fictionalized account of the MOVE bombing.

11. For a consideration of how Schuyler's satirical and Afrofuturist storytelling interrogates fear, anxiety, hope, anger, shame, and disgust as enmeshed with race, racism, and, racial capitalism, see "Satirical Afrofuturism, Race,

and Emotion in George S. Schuyler's *Black No More*" (Mikić 2022). While the reading of *We Cast a Shadow* in this chapter focuses almost exclusively on its satirical dimensions, the fifth chapter will offer a closer analysis of the contemporary Afrofuturist imagination and its negotiation of ecosocial injustice.

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Grief, Grievability, and Environmental Disaster in Sherri L. Smith's *Orleans* and N.K. Jemisin's Broken Earth Trilogy

Abstract This chapter considers how Sherri L. Smith's *Orleans* (2013) and N.K. Jemisin's Broken Earth series (2015–2017) speculate about the consequences and possibilities of Black female grief in the context of multiple and enduring crises, including the challenges presented by climate change. The eco-Afrofuturist storyworlds expose how overlapping forces of racial, gendered, spatial, and environmental oppression produce grief in Black women, while also foregrounding the radical potential of grief and communal grieving as catalysts for contesting ecosocial injustice. Reading these texts through an emotion-race-space framework, on the one hand, offers reflections on grief as bound up with environmental injustice, which is itself a form of racial-spatial violence. On the other hand, it provides a means for rethinking emotions, geographies, and ecologies in the context of oppression as far more than the sum of adverse experiences.

Keywords African American literature • Afrofuturism • Environmental justice • Climate change • Race • Grief • Outrage • Geography • Intersectionality • Queer

In this chapter, I will consider the consequences and possibilities of Black female grief in the context of racial-geographic injustice and environmental disaster. While this could be explored across various genres and

aesthetic modes, the chapter focuses on Afrofuturist texts because Black speculation, science fiction, and fantasy present perhaps the most obvious and powerful challenge to the idea that the world as we know it "just is." Sherri L. Smith's speculative young adult novel *Orleans* (2013) and N.K. Jemisin's science fiction and fantasy Broken Earth trilogy (2015–2017) not only highlight that existing "rules are alterable" as Katherine McKittrick puts it (2006, x), but they narrate how the pain of grief functions as a resource for pushing back against seemingly fixed structures and systems. As they invite readers to empathically engage with their grieving Black female characters, they expose the emotional pain that is brought on by the uneven and unjust exposure to ecosocial injustice, but they also foreground their characters' oppositional practices as models of ecosocial resistance.

Orleans and the Broken Earth series give insight into Black women's subjectivity, while simultaneously defining their characters through additional, invented or fantastic identity categories. They require readers to engage with defamiliarized social and geographic contexts that nevertheless produce wholly familiar negative emotions, including fear, anger, shame, guilt, and, especially, grief. The texts represent how grief drives individuals to form attachment relationships with other grievers, care for each other, and communally contest the socio-spatial practices that produce environmental harm and emotional pain. An engagement with these narratives highlights that there is much to learn from the contemporary Black literary imagination about the consequences and possibilities of grief in the context of multiple and enduring crises, including the challenges presented by climate change. Grief, Smith and Jemisin tell us, while enduring and painful, endows subjects with speculative potential for imagining and practicing more communal and liberating ways of engaging with the world.

The chapter will examine how *Orleans* represents relationships between grief and environmental injustice, which is itself a form of racial-spatial violence. By juxtaposing the protagonist's grief with the environmental destruction of the space in which she is forced to live, the novel invites readers to empathize with her grief, read it as a critique of environmental injustice and, more broadly, to understand the production of Black female grief in the context of environmental racism. Just as importantly, the novel interrogates the protagonist's marginality as what bell hooks described as a "site of radical possibility, a space of resistance" (1990, 149). Not only does Smith's Black female character possess vast environmental knowledge, but she also acts as what Patricia Hill Collins has defined as an "other

mother" (2000). Taking on the role of an other mother, the grieving protagonist forms an alliance of care with a community outsider in order to rescue her dead friend's baby from environmental harm.

The Broken Earth trilogy—*The Fifth Season* (2015), *The Obelisk Gate* (2016), and *The Stone Sky* (2017)—similarly prompts empathetic engagement with the Black female protagonist's grief as well as an understanding of the intersecting forces of oppression that produce her negative affective experiences. The storyworld simultaneously points to the potential of grief, and communal grieving, as a catalyst for expressing moral outrage against existing world orders and envisioning new world imaginaries that contest rigid boundaries of race, space, gender, sexuality, and a human-nonhuman binary. While the actions of Smith's protagonist contribute to saving one individual victim of environmental racism, Jemisin envisions a more systemic response to injustice. By narrating how her geologically conscious protagonist takes on the role of a planetary other mother, Jemisin's eco-Afrofuturism asserts the grievability of human and nonhuman life on Earth as well as the grievability of Earth itself.

On the one hand, my analysis draws on recent research in African American ecocriticism, which has been concerned with examining both the "intersections between environmental degradation, race, and other forms of oppression" in African American literature (192), while also "contribut[ing] to refuting a primarily 'tragic view' of African American environmental relations" (Klestil 2020, 196).[1] On the other hand, it engages cognitive and econarratological approaches to narrative that explore questions of environment and identity. Drawing on Erin James's econarratological approach, I suggest that Smith and Jemisin's eco-Afrofuturist narratives make possible "rich analysis of representations of identity politics in addition to environments" (2015, xii). By centering Black female subjectivity in their eco-Afrofuturist storyworlds, they imagine the future through the perspective of those routinely deemed non-universal. In doing so, they provide readers with imaginative tools for understanding social and environmental justice as part of the same project.

Additionally, the chapter builds on Alexa Weik von Mossner's "cognitive ecocritical approach to narrative emotion," which asserts that narratives "play a central role in both character and plot development," while "characters are also central to our understanding of narrative environments" (2020, 130–131). This two-way relationship between characters and environments is integral to my reading of Smith and Jemisin's narratives. While *Orleans* presents racial subjugation and environmental

degradation as part of an interlinked system of colonial violence, the depiction of the storyworld's environment predominantly happens in service of a better understanding of her Black female protagonist. The Broken Earth series, by contrast, puts the relationship between human and more-than-human life front and center, establishing emotional parallels between the Black female protagonist's grief and outrage and the experiences of a sentient, grieving, and raging Earth.

Eco-Afrofuturism: Afrofuturism Meets Environmental Speculation

Afrofuturism is an umbrella term used to describe future imaginaries produced by authors of African descent.[2] In their 2020 collection *Literary Afrofuturism in the Twenty-First Century*, Isiah Lavender III and Lisa Yaszek describe "Afrofuturism as an aesthetic practice that enables artists to communicate the experience of science, technology, and race across centuries, continents, and cultures" (2). It is a historical as well as global futuristic aesthetic that centers Black experiences. As Alexis Lothian suggests "black diasporic speculative imagining … [is] a way of creating futures for those rendered futureless by global white supremacy" (2018, 17). The term itself, though, has its origin in a North American context, coined by Mark Dery to describe "[s]peculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture—and, more generally, African-American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future" (1994, 180). Within this specifically American context that I am concerned with, and that Dery's definition addresses, Afrofuturism has established itself as a valuable critical lens over the past decades. It has been used for the study of science fiction and fantasy narratives by African American authors such as Octavia E. Butler, Samuel R. Delany, Steven Barnes, Walter Mosley, Tananarive Due, Andrea Hairston, Nisi Shawl, Rivers Solomon, Sherri L. Smith, N.K. Jemisin, and many others.[3]

One aspect that connects these diverse African American writers—and the African and Afrodiasporic writers who are discussed as Afrofuturist—is that they imagine futures that center Black perspectives, while also producing generative critiques of both historical and contemporary forms of racism. Nigerian author Suyi Davies Okungbowa points out: "For us, the future is always the past is always the present — the embodiment of

Afrofuturist consciousness — and telling our stories means we are always looking through this prism" (2021). This synchronous understanding of time—making past, present, and future simultaneous occupants of narrative worlds—is central to the Afrofuturist imaginary. It is also central to readers' engagement with speculative negotiations of real-world histories, as Lavender notes:

> Confronting this real history in science-fictional terms makes it easier for us to grapple emotionally and intellectually with an amnesiac past that most people want left alone—a defamiliarized history, concerned with familiar facts that are made to feel new to our own racialized experiences through the strangeness generated by speculative contexts. Afrofuturism, like SF, is always in dialogue with the present in which it is written. However, unlike SF, afrofuturism looks to the past to move forward the aspirations of an entire race in all of its cultural complexities. The stakes of merging history, black literature, afrofuturism, and SF require dealing with forms of psychological dislocation/disorientation/trauma/white supremacy from the safe distance offered by science-fictional speculation.[4] (2019, 2)

As Afrofuturist writers prompt readers "to grapple emotionally and intellectually" with historical and continued forms of domination and violence, they use the "strangeness" of speculative worldbuilding for purposes of defamiliarization.[5] By modeling worlds that both are and are not like our own, they invite readers to engage with defamiliarized situations, geographies, and experiences in their worlding of the stories and to use these narrative encounters for storying their own contemporary world (the past that has birthed it and the future that is already in the making). In their Afrofuturist worldmaking, Smith and Jemisin use complex experiences of loss and grief—which involve what Michael Frame describes as a "revising [of] our models of world and self" (2021, 60)—to explore alternative worldmaking possibilities. My readings will discuss how the characters' disrupting experiences of bereavement serve as vehicles for storying and practicing resistance.

As I have discussed throughout the book, many contemporary African American storyworlds demonstrate both the affective consequences of white supremacist geographies and the positive effects of more communally oriented and inclusive Black spatial imaginaries. In a similar vein, but with regard to the Afrofuturist imaginary, Elizabeth A. Wheeler distinguishes between a negative pole that "constructs dystopias that warn of a bleak future if we don't enact racial and environmental justice now" and a

"positive Afrofuturism [which] insists upon a better future" (2020, 129). Smith's *Orleans* and Jemisin's Broken Earth series can both be classified as dystopian. Each embodies the negative pole of Afrofuturism, which is central to my discussion of how ecosocial injustices cause an inordinate amount of grief in Black people. The novels call upon readers to not only empathize with their grieving characters, but to read their grief as a critique of systems of colonial violence that produce racial oppression and environmental injustice. Simultaneously, each storyworld puts forth radical Afrofuturist imaginaries of opposition and possibility. While the characters are confronted with enormous and often irreversible losses, their grief and their communal practices of grieving also drive their insistence on better futures, in relation to an individual victim of environmental injustice, in Smith's case, and in service of a new planetary ecological imaginary, in Jemisin's case.

Their storyworlds are part of a tradition of works that could be called eco-Afrofuturist. In "Global Afrofuturist Ecologies" (2020), Jerome Winter argues that "[t]raditionally speaking, Northern environmental SF authors have often relied on narratives of environmental conquest and expansion while conspicuously omitting their rootedness in the historical realities of colonialism and postcolonialism" (189). Many works by Black fiction writers—including Octavia E. Butler's pioneering fictional worlds as well as more recent narratives by authors such as Nnedi Okorafor, Andrea Hairston, and Sofia Samatar—speak back to such storytelling practices, while also envisioning alternative ways of eco-Afrofuturist worldmaking.

The eco-Afrofuturist storyworlds that I consider in this chapter were written against the backdrop of the movements for Environmental Justice and for Black Lives, offering important reflections on the grievability of Black lives, and Black female lives in particular, in the context of multiple and intersecting forms of oppression. In the 1980s, the Environmental Justice Movement arose out of an outraged grief over the unjust exposure to pollution along racial lines, and the lack of grievability for the lives of "environmental others" (Washington 2005, 22). Several decades later, the Black Lives Matter movement was formed in 2013, in the same year in which Smith's *Orleans* was published and two years before Jemisin's *The Fifth Season* was published. "I can't breathe," the last words of several murdered Black men, made the intersections between the movement for Black lives and the movement for environmental justice clearly legible. The words are a rallying cry against police violence, environmental slow

violence, and the systematic production of Black death and Black grief. As Julie Sze suggests, and this chapter argues, the profound emotional consequences of inhabiting oppressive geographies and toxic environments "can be read and understood not only through the narrow grid of public policy, but through the contours of fantasy, literature, and imagination as well" (2002, 173). Before I turn to Smith and Jemisin's imaginative interrogation of the intersections between grief, grievability, race, space, environment, and gender, the next section will first elaborate on the psychology of grief and the specificity of Black grief.

The Psychology and Politics of Grief

In *Understanding Grief: An Introduction* (2016), Richard Gross defines grief as "a universal reaction to bereavement, involving both psychological and bodily experiences" (5). In "Sadness and Grief" (2008), Bonanno, Goorin, and Coifman further state that "[g]rief is typically a highly emotionally distressing experience, and at a superficial level it appears to share features with specific emotions, most notably sadness," but also "a wide range of [other] negative emotions, such as anger, contempt, hostility, fear, and guilt" (798). Grief, then, is an "elaborate construct" (797) that commonly involves "longer-term coping efforts aimed at ameliorating the enduring emotional upsets as well as myriad concrete disruptions wrought by the loss" (799). This is why grief differs from primary, basic emotions such as sadness or fear, which "are generally implicated in proximal, short-term coping responses aimed at either changing or maintaining the immediate psychological or physical state" (798), and why grief is typically conceptualized as a process occurring in different stages.

Western psychology's conceptualization of grief as a process and a task goes back to Sigmund Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), in which he first introduced the idea of "grief work" that significantly shaped the development of grief research in the twentieth century. While Freud himself did not discuss grief as a pathological construct, his notion of grief work has been used to argue that grief requires "psychological intervention in order for people to heal as quickly as possible" (Granek 2017, 266). This pathologization of grief is closely linked to "the politicization of grief [which] functions to discipline the individual mourner's body into a productive, functioning, and contributing member of a capitalistic society" (Granek 2014, 61). The dismissal of grief and grieving within

capitalism, in turn, cannot be separated from the institution of slavery and its commodification of human beings as laborers. As Paul Outka notes, "[t]he conflation of individual slaves with domestic animals paralleled a larger equation of slaves generally with the Southern landscape" (2008, 53), which not only robbed them of the time to grieve but also denied their personhood and thus the very existence of their grief.

While being a universal emotional phenomenon, grief is therefore inextricably bound up with political, social, and historical contexts. Da'Mere T. Wilson and Mary-Frances O'Connor note that "grief for Black Americans is both different in sheer quantity (because mortality rates are disparate) and qualitatively different (because collective grief is an unstudied but defining feature)" (2022, 2). The individualization of grief and the psychological study of grief in predominantly white, Western subjects tend to obscure such a more contextual view. According to Granek, "[t]he focus on the individual mourner's grief at the expense of the social conditions that caused the losses they are mourning delegitimizes the anger of the mourner, places the focus on the individual body of the griever, and effectively takes away attention from the wider social forces that are producing these losses en masse" (2014, 63). As Wilson and O'Connor argue, we need to pay more attention to "the unique and understudied experience of grief for Black Americans, including the unequal distribution of grief, vulnerability to premature death, and historic and ongoing violence" (2022, 2). Paul C. Rosenblatt and Beverly R. Wallace's *African American Grief*, first published in 2005 and reissued in 2022, does exactly that by studying grief in African American subjects and analyzing the specific contexts surrounding the participants' grief experiences. Their qualitative psychological study with "26 African Americans who had experienced the death of someone important in their lives," aims to be "an approximation to what will some day be that comprehensive picture of African American bereavement" (xvi). Specifically, Rosenblatt and Wallace document and describe "key phenomena in African American grieving and key elements of difference between African American and Euro-American grieving" (xvi). They note that even though African American grief and grieving often *does* fit into contemporary universal theories, it is important to consider African American grief experiences in the context of racism.

Two of the main characteristics identified by the study participants include the prevalence of communal responses to grief and the strong relationship between grief and outrage in African American communities. Since grief experiences triggered by racial injustice are often "not only about the specific loss," but about "collective loss" resulting from both historical and ongoing anti-Black oppression (xxiv), responses to that grief tend to be collective, too. When the participants were asked to describe perceived differences between Euro-American and African American grief, they "emphasized how much more important family and other people are to African Americans" (159). The following participant, for instance, explicitly relates the reason why they are "a little more dependent on one another" to the history of slavery:

> [Y]ou were brought from over there, and away from everything familiar to you, foreign as foreign could be to you, that makes us different. We appreciate family, because you had to then make a family. … You might have been the only person on that boat from your particular family, so you had to make a family. And we make families. (159)

Slavery produced inordinate grief in Black subjects, but Black enslaved subjects also, out of necessity, developed new ways of coping with grief by engaging in communal grieving and forming fictive kinship ties. The participants emphasize that such grief responses are still prevalent today as "Black persons [seek] to thrive rather than merely survive a sociopolitical US climate that is laden with grief producing experiences for them" (Moore et al. 2022, 189).

The second dimension that is emphasized in many of the participants' responses is the outrage of Black bereaved subjects. Anger and outrage may more generally be involved in experiences of grief concerning preventable and unjust deaths, but Rosenblatt and Wallace point out that white American grievers "would not be likely to have stories and meanings coming from centuries of being victimized by racism and from ongoing, personal, familial, and community experiences of discrimination and racism" (2022, 8). Such experiences "add elements of anger, rage, and indignation" (8) to African American grief experiences caused by racial injustice. The combination of grief and outrage "makes it a powerful experience

with the potential to catalyze efforts to 'defend oneself or loved ones' against injustice" (Wilson and O'Connor 2022, 5). It is outraged grief that catalyzed the Black Lives Matter protests as a response to the grief inflicted by contemporary racial violence as well as the prolonged grief inflicted by centuries of racial violence.

Judith Butler's concept of grievability is also instructive for a contextualized understanding of grief. In *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (2009), Butler distinguishes between grievable and ungrievable lives: "An ungrievable life is one that cannot be mourned because it has never lived, that is, it has never counted as a life at all" (38). In his psychological account, Gross similarly differentiates between "grief that is recognised by others as 'legitimate' and 'reasonable'" and "disenfranchised grief," which refers to "a situation where a loss is not openly acknowledged, socially sanctioned, or publicly shared" (2016, 3). Throughout American history, grievability has been allocated along racial lines. The racial violence committed against Black subjects is both cause and effect of a profound lack of grievability. This is also expressed in the process of grieving itself: a culture that practices and normalizes violence against Black subjects also constrains possibilities for Black grieving. Not only are African Americans significantly more likely to experience homicide bereavement than white Americans (e.g., McDevitt-Murphy et al. 2012), but grief experiences may also be exacerbated by lack of access to psychosocial services (e.g., Burke and Neimeyer 2010).[6] While capitalism closes off possibilities for grieving for everyone, the time and space for mourning is even further constrained for Black women. The stereotypical notion of the strong Black woman—parallel to the angry Black man stereotype discussed in the fourth chapter—is a pervasive cultural narrative used to disenfranchise Black female grief.

In addition to determining whose lives are and are not grievable, the racialized politics of grievability also dictate whose living space is and is not worthy of protection and care. *Orleans* and the Broken Earth trilogy provide an outlet for Black women's and Black mothers' grief in the context of ecosocial injustice. Simultaneously, the texts foreground the Black female protagonists' creation of communal geographic and ecological imaginaries as essential strategies for mitigating individual grief and contesting the structural production of grief and ungrievability. This corresponds to the emphasis on communal placemaking as a shame mitigation strategy in Toni Morrison's *Home* (2012) and Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* (2020), while also expanding it through its additional environmental concern.

Black Female Grief and Environmental (In)Justice in Sherri L. Smith's *Orleans*

In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), Rob Nixon asks: "How can we turn the long emergencies of slow violence into stories dramatic enough to rouse public sentiment and warrant political intervention, these emergencies whose repercussions have given rise to some of the most critical challenges of our time?" (3). When Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005, it unveiled the intricate links between spatialized racism and environmental vulnerability with dramatic urgency: On the one hand, the disproportionate consequences suffered by predominantly lower-income and Black communities brought to light the racism that was already baked into New Orleans's built environment. On the other hand, the negligence that the most severely affected spaces and people experienced in Katrina's aftermath further emphasized how intersecting axes of discrimination, including race, class, gender, and power, determine the politics and ethics of grievability. *Orleans* takes Katrina only as a starting point and speculates about how anthropogenic climate change will further decrease the grievability of Black life and Black space, whereby the perspective of the 16-year-old Black female protagonist, Fen de la Guerre, is central to its negotiation of a toxic and violent post-disaster Orleans in the year 2056.

The prologue describes how after a series of increasingly deadly hurricanes between 2005 and 2019, a disease called "Delta Fever" spreads across the U.S. South and "all storm-affected areas of the Gulf Coast region" are quarantined—to protect the rest of the nation from what Heather Houser calls "ecosickness" (2014)—before the senate entirely withdraws governance of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas. Two fictional legal documents, the 2020 "declaration of quarantine" and the 2025 "declaration of separation," state that while "the disease runs its course" in the most affected areas, "Man must follow suit in order to protect the inalienable rights of the majority" (Smith "Prologue").[7] The language used in relation to the disease evokes the common spatiotemporal metaphor "grief runs its course," which according to Ruscher centers "a time-moving perspective" that implies "waiting for negative affect to pass" (2011, 227). Throughout American history, however, the time-moving perspective of progress has always entailed a blatant disregard for how violence, disease, and grief run their course for excluded Others, while a select group of privileged citizens "move forward." According to Nixon,

"environmental slow violence, materializes temporal as well as spatial denial through a literal concretizing of out of sight out of mind" (2011, 20). In Smith's storyworld, the separation of Orleans from the so-called Outer States of America through the construction of a wall establishes a literal spatial boundary between ungrievable and grievable lives. Wheeler points out that the wall is one way in which the "novel makes literal the invisible walls that surround many communities of color" (2020, 131), highlighting how spatial separation protects "(ir)responsible parties not only from environmental risk but from the obligation to care for those trapped inside" (134). Since "everyone left behind seems to be black or mixed race in the postflood world of *Orleans*" (133), the lack of care signifies a lack of grievability for Black and non-white lives. *Orleans* primarily critiques the absence of grievability that is entwined with racial subjugation, while it also more implicitly critiques the lack of eco-grievability for nonhuman urban environments.

The narrative's depiction of a future marked by a systemic denial of Black grievability is rooted in an understanding of racial oppression as cyclical. By disenfranchising Orleans and its Black population—disproportionately subjecting them to physical as well as emotional long-term consequences of environmental change and disaster and denying them access to the care and safety reserved for its white citizens—the government affirms its strategic disregard for Black lives. Like Octavia E. Butler, Smith "exploits the distinctive temporality of extrapolative science fiction in order to capture the novel forms of inequality spawned by global capitalism" (Dubey 2013, 357). While their fiction interrogates contemporary forms of environmental injustice, they simultaneously illustrate that the "mutual exploitation of both racialized peoples and the environment" has grown out of slavery's afterlife (Bruno 2023, 1544). The exploration of past, present, and future in Smith's as well as Jemisin's eco-Afrofuturist storyworlds makes legible how the racial, geographic, environmental, and emotional logics of slavery continue to structure the production of Black grief, along with Black fear and outrage, in the context of twenty-first-century environmental injustice.[8]

Smith invites readers to engage with her speculative storyworld through the prism of U.S. racial history, but she also defamiliarizes the ways in which in- and outgroup categorization takes place. The system of social division in Smith's fictional Orleans rests centrally on blood as people with different blood types seem to be affected differently by the Delta Fever. Fen herself is O-Positive, which means that the disease does not destroy

her blood like that of other carriers who need transfusions to survive. This, in turn, increases her vulnerability of becoming a "blood slave" (Smith 2013, 17). Although the separation of people into distinct blood tribes decreases the fever's spreading, the novel makes clear that the scientists at the so-called Institute of Post-Separation Studies do not research a cure for the fever, but actively "encourage tribalism in the postapocalyptic society and study its effects" (Wheeler 2020, 132). Fen's parents belonged to a small group of scientists who had voluntarily moved to Orleans after the separation, hoping to contribute to the fight for ecosocial justice, but severed their ties to the institute after they learned about its real goals of using Orleans and its population as a lab for "study[ing] intergroup relations … social bias and hate crimes" (Smith 2013, 74). While the differences between the fever's effects on different people appear to be actually rooted in biology, Smith's portrayal of how these differences are framed by the researchers interrogates the historic usage of the one-drop-rule as a mechanism of asserting the fiction of race as a biological category. Like Colson Whitehead's South Carolina chapter in *The Underground Railroad* (2016), the practices of the research institute in *Orleans* evoke the U.S. Public Health Service Syphilis study at Tuskegee, which one of Smith's characters directly addresses: "It's like Tuskegee all over again. They never wanted a cure" (Smith 2013, 207). Additionally, the novel lays bare that the social categories of race and class were central to the transformation of New Orleans into Orleans, which entailed cutting off and rendering invisible those who were already disproportionately experiencing environmental harm. Smith therefore prompts readers to bring their knowledge of racial hierarchies and scientific as well as environmental racism into their worlding of the story. Consequently, the protagonist's grief experiences must be understood in relation to the immediate context of the speculative storyworld as well as the real-world contexts of racial and environmental oppression that it negotiates.

Black Female Grief, Empathy, and Critique of Environmental Injustice

Orleans aligns the Black female protagonist's negative emotional experiences with the dysfunction and violence of her environment, inviting readers to empathize with her grief and to read it as a critique of environmental injustice. The first loss, revealed through the use of flashbacks, is that of Fen's parents, who were killed by blood hunters when she was only nine

years old. Their death is a direct result of the fight over clean blood which is "the principal commodity in the toxic economy of Orleans," in which "people survive by harming themselves and others" (Wheeler 2020, 137). However, the root cause for inter-Orleanian violence is the U.S. government's economic, social, and ethical abandonment of the space and its citizens. In their discussion of key causes of African American grief, Rosenblatt and Wallace emphasize that a "shorter life expectancy for African Americans means that proportionately more African Americans than Euro-Americans will not be adults when a parent dies" (2022, 2), which is what Fen experiences as a consequence of environmental racism.

Research on grief, loss, and attachment suggests that when close relationships are suddenly disrupted, individuals are deprived of someone they have always taken for granted as a means of operating in the world. This can have "a dramatic impact on that person's identity and cognitive understanding of the world" (Bonanno et al. 2008, 798) and on their emotional engagement with others. Katherine Shear and Harry Shair observe that "the set goal for the attachment system is a physically accessible and emotionally responsive caregiver who provides a sense of security that facilitates exploration and learning and minimizes fear" (2005, 257). While grieving individuals may consequently "refrain from becoming attached to others" (257), one "prevalent idea [is] that grief is the process by which one detaches from a lost loved one in order to free up energy to reconnect with a new attachment figure" (260). Following her parents' death, Fen goes through an intense grief experience when a little girl invites her to join her family: "Something move sideways in my chest, and all of a sudden I start to cry. I can't make it stop and don't want to. Like, if I try to hold it in this time, I like to drown" (Smith 2013, 88–9). Hearing the word "family" uttered by the other girl makes Fen realize the irreversibility of loss caused by her parents' death and activates a "deep-seated need to feel connected, to be trusted and loved, and to trust and love in return" (Hutcherson et al. 2008, 720). Fen's yearning to regain a sense of security and safety prompts her to join the stranger, but her vulnerability also makes her susceptible to exploitative attachment relationships.

As the narrative depicts Fen's entry into the "family" of a woman named Mama Gentille, who "take care of all the little kids, and when we grown, we take care of her" (Smith 2013, 88), it critiques the abuse of Black women and girls. In an "old mansion that been a plantation long ago" (89), Mama, a Black woman herself, reinstates and reinvents the gendered and racialized geographies of slavery that assume the Black

female body to be "naturally submissive" (McKittrick 2006, 44). The language that Smith employs to describe blood slavery explicitly likens it to Black female rape during antebellum slavery and its aftermath: "When he enter me, it be through the skin" (2013, 96). After Fen becomes one of Mama's profitable commodities, sold to a gentleman who "rapes" her by harvesting her blood, and later also sexually, she burns her body "near to the bone" to make it impossible to get a needle into her skin again without killing her (98) . This act of self-mutilation, which decreases the profitability of her body and enables a way out of bondage, is steeped in a long tradition of enslaved Black subjects' resistance against violence and exploitation. Jemisin's account of the protagonist's infanticide in the Broken Earth series, as I will discuss later, not only exemplifies one such practice, but it unearths its utterly devastating emotional consequences.

Whereas Fen's attachment to Mama Gentille produces even more grief, her subsequent relationship with Lydia, the chieftain of the O-Positive tribe that Fen joins, demonstrates how newly formed attachment can also mitigate the effects of trauma and loss. Fen repeatedly emphasizes her deep connection to Lydia who "done saved [her]" (34) after she escaped Mama Gentille's bondage, and she often expresses her admiration for Lydia who she thinks "could talk the trees into walking if she wanted" (33). After Lydia's death following childbirth, Fen mobilizes her grief to fulfill her last promise to Lydia and provide her baby girl, Enola, with "a better life than this" (43). According to Shear and Shair, "continued bonds that are symbolic can be integrated into the bereaved person's sense of identity," which is central to understanding the deceased Lydia's continuing importance "as a role model" (2005, 261). Additionally, Rosenblatt and Wallace's study reveals that in the case of bereaved African Americans who seek to meet "the standards of the deceased. … relatively often the person whose standards are referred to as being very important is a parental figure but not a parent" (2022, 77). This also applies to Fen's situation since Lydia was a central presence in the protagonist's life after her parents' death. Directing her hopes and actions toward generating a way out of Orleans for Enola and thereby carrying out Lydia's wishes lessens the enduring and painful effects of Fen's own loss, while eventually also protecting Enola from the pain and suffering that caused her mother's death.

Like outrage as well as hope, grief can be revolutionary in the sense that it functions "as an activating force toward social justice goals" (Granek

2014, 66). Such versions of grief may "range from the personal sphere to the national one, but underlying both is the principle that grief and loss can be a powerful catalyst toward demanding and instituting positive social change" (66). Butler theorizes the relationship between grief, outrage, and social justice: "Our grieving is bound up with outrage, and outrage in the face of injustice or indeed of unbearable loss has enormous political potential" (2009, 39). Black mothers' public grieving following the death of their sons and daughters at the hands of law enforcement is a pertinent example of how "the grief of ordinary citizens" is used "as a political tool of social change" (Meadows-Fernandez 2020).[9] As Celene Krauss notes, the outraged grief of Black women and mothers has also played a pivotal role in the Environmental Justice Movement:

> [Black] [w]omen's reflection on their experience as mothers and protectors of the communities … led them to uncover the problem of toxic waste and challenge the environmental destruction of their families and communities. Their environmental knowledge, derived from mothering under conditions of racial injustice, became a resource of resistance in their political challenge. (2009, 66)

While Smith's Fen is not a mother herself, she represents what Patricia Hill Collins has termed "other mothers." Collins suggests that "[i]n many African American communities these women-centered networks of community-based child care have extended beyond the boundaries of biologically related individuals to include 'fictive kin'" (2000, 179).[10] While it is important to note that fictive kinship is rooted in a traumatic history of family separation, it is equally important to recognize this alternative form of attachment as an embodiment of Black women's radical resistance and their transformation of pain into possibility. In "The Black feminist spatial imagination and an intersectional environmental justice" (2018), Kishi Animashaun Ducre foregrounds that Black women in environmentally degraded geographies must be seen "not simply as victims, but as resilient agents that thrive and actively engage in placemaking despite multiple challenges" (33). As *Orleans* demonstrates, Black speculative ecofiction opens up imaginative space for recognizing and valuing "Black women as critical agents in environmental justice" (22). The novel not only depicts how the protagonist's grief impels her other mothering, but it also highlights how her formation of an alliance of care with a community outsider aids her in the pursuit of taking Enola across the wall.

Grief as Possibility: Environmental Justice Across Ingroup-Outgroup Boundaries

The first four chapters are focalized through the protagonist's perspective, whereupon the novel continuously switches back and forth between Fen's first-person, present-tense narration and a third-person, past-tense account by Daniel, a scientist from the Outer States who illegally crosses the wall into Orleans in the hope of finding a cure for the Delta Fever. Even as the novel does not explicitly pronounce the ingroup-outgroup difference between Fen and Daniel as racial, it uses geography to negotiate race and racial history. In this context, Kenton Rambsy's distinction between "homegrown characters" and "outsider characters" is useful (2022, 14). *Orleans* represents Fen as a homegrown character who is native to a region that was sacrificed by the government and Daniel as an outsider character who visits from a more affluent region. In so doing, the novel establishes a direct parallel to New Orleans's Black and Brown residents who were left to fend for themselves in Katrina's aftermath, and the predominantly white residents of affluent areas that remained largely unflooded. A further consideration of textual cues and narrative strategies strengthens the argument that *Orleans* prompts readers to construct Daniel as white. First, the so-called encounter suit that Daniel wears, and that shields him from the eco-risk and -sickness to which Fen is continuously exposed, establishes his class and racial privilege. Second, the novel contrasts the "standard" English in Daniel's chapters with the African American Vernacular English prevalent in the chapters focalized through Fen. Third, Smith's narration of Daniel strategically encourages the tendency to read characters as white in the absence of explicit racial and/or ethnic markers. In fact, Smith nudges readers into assuming a white identity for the racially unmarked Daniel only to then expose the character as lacking competence, especially environmental knowledge and survival skills.

Orleans brings a Black feminist lens to environmental stories that have traditionally been thought of as the province of white male writers, challenging notions of white normativity and superiority through content and form. James J. Donahue has insightfully written about how narrative voice itself can be used for the purpose of racial critique. In his analysis of Percival Everett's 1994 novel *God's Country*, he argues that Everett's choice of telling a story about a Black character through the perspective of a white, first-person narrator is central to his satirical exposure of the

racism inherent in the genre of the Western. Donahue notes that "just as male narrators were once believed to possess objectivity due to sexist beliefs about female irrationality, racist notions of minoritarian irrationality … might lead many readers to believe that white narrators possess a greater degree of rational objectivity" (2019b, 77). This also applies to third-person narrative situations whose "distancing qualities" (83) may even more strongly suggest the narrator's objective authority. The desired objectivity is precisely why third-person narrative situations have often been used in science fiction to relay the supposedly objective reality of white male heroism. *Orleans*, however, repurposes the third-person perspective to represent how Daniel *cannot* measure up to heroic constructions of whiteness and maleness. As the narrative moves back and forth between Daniel and Fen's chapters, his lack of competence serves to accentuate the Black female protagonist's aptitude and far superior understanding of the environment, while it withholds authority from Daniel until he proves his merit throughout his interactions with the protagonist.

The use of shifting focalization reveals how Daniel and Fen gradually develop a relationship across ingroup-outgroup boundaries. Again, Donahue's critical race narratological work is instructive. In his analysis of James Welch's *Fools Crow* (1986), Donahue asserts that the way in which the novel uses focalization to espouse cosmopolitanism "highlights the ethical work of interracial communication" (2019a, 1). In *Affective Ecologie: Empathy, Emotion, and Environmental Narrative* (2017), Weik von Mossner makes a similar argument with a specific focus on the *environmental* ethics of form that are especially important for my purposes here. Applying Suzanne Keen's concept of strategic authorial empathy (2006) to environmental justice narratives, Weik von Mossner considers how ethnic American writers "use readers' empathy strategically to make a moral argument about people who have been wronged" (2017, 78). She identifies the centrality of narrative perspective for readers' empathetic engagement:

> There are at least two ways in which authors can employ strategic empathizing to help readers to imaginatively experience the situation of a victim of injustice: They can align them with the victim himself—what I have called the *insider perspective*—or with someone who isn't directly affected but learns to care for the victim and his situation—this I have called the *outsider perspective*. (83, emphases in original)

Weik von Mossner reads Helena María Viramontes's *Under the Feet of Jesus* (1995) as a novel that provides an insider perspective on environmental injustice, and Percival Everett's *Watershed* (1996) as one that offers an outsider perspective. I want to suggest that by using shifting focalization, Smith's *Orleans* combines both perspectives, inviting readers to engage with a Black female insider protagonist and a white male outsider character whose evolving relationship to Fen teaches him how to act more responsibly. Daniel and Fen's alliance of care across ingroup-outgroup boundaries functions both as a mode for coping with their own enduring feelings of grief as well as a mode for protecting Enola from future grief experiences.

Like in Fen's case, personal loss drives Daniel's actions. After his brother died of Delta Fever, one of the fever's casualties in the Outer States before the construction of the quarantine wall, Daniel set out to discover a cure. He only managed to bioengineer a vaccine that eradicates both the fever and the host, which is why he plans on advancing his mission by "collect[ing] environmental samples" in Orleans (Smith 2013, 73). Much like the scientists at the research institute, Daniel approaches Orleans as a lab. The irresponsibility of bringing the deadly vials into Orleans only strikes him as he realizes that the city was not "a necropolis" (109) as he had assumed before entering the quarantined geographies. The narrative that exists outside of Orleans about Orleans once again confirms the disregard for environmentally sacrificed non-white geographies and populations. After Fen learns that he not only brought deadly vaccine vials, but also lost them in the ruins of Orleans in an unlucky accident, she calls him out on it: "You come into my town, my *home*, with this mess and be looking to do Lord knows what" (264, emphasis in original). By associating Daniel with a long-standing tradition of white male discovery that is steeped in a politics of ungrievability for the lives and living environments of otherized communities, Fen offers a critique of Daniel's character that inspires outrage.

However, the novel also uses the chapters focalized through Daniel to emphasize that it is not callousness that guides his behavior. His personal history and grief bring him to Orleans, but he gradually becomes invested in the plight of the environmentally wronged. When a character in the novel observes that Orleans has a "fragile ecosystem" that "is healing itself" despite its pronounced death and the U.S. government's disregard, Fen takes note of Daniel's guilt: "'No thanks to me,' Daniel say bitterly, and I hear his guilt. Good. Guilt be the start of knowing right from wrong, Daddy used to say. But that all it be. A start" (265). As Weik von Mossner

points out, "feelings of guilt and the related empathetic distress can be tremendous drivers of prosocial action" (2017, 91). Daniel's guilt and his attachment to Fen and Enola operate in connection to his own grief, as the image of "Enola's little face, so delicate and tender" (Smith 2013, 291) brings Daniel's continued bond with his brother into focus. In parallel to the protagonist's motivations, protecting Enola is a way of making a lost loved one live on not only in his memories but also through his actions.

Whereas Daniel's grieving alliance of care with Fen inspires him to help, his storyline also serves to emphasize Fen's ingenuity. Wheeler notes that "Fen seems miraculous to Daniel, and Daniel seems helpless to Fen because she knows survival strategies he never had to learn" (2020, 143). Writing about Black female geographic experience, McKittrick asserts that "the ongoing geographic struggle of and by black women is not simply indicative of the adverse effects of geographic domination, but that geography is entwined with strategic and meaningful languages, acts, expressions, and experiences" (2006, xxxi). The forces of domination that relegate Black women to the margins also provide them with important forms of knowledge. Fen's environmental knowledge and her survival skills act as a reminder to both Daniel and readers that, as Black feminist theorist Chelsea M. Frazier points out, "Black women are not, and have never been, passive victims of environmental degradation," which is central to Black feminist ecological thought (2022, 316). *The Underground Railroad*'s depiction of how Cora, her mother, and grandmother maintain a garden plot in the midst of the inhuman ecologies of the Randall plantation similarly illuminates "Black women's complex relationships to themselves, their families, and their environments" (Frazier 2022, 317). Both Whitehead and Smith highlight how their Black female protagonists' emotional pain—the fear and grief caused by racial-geographic oppression—functions as a resource for envisaging alternative ways of making space and community. Their geographic and environmental imaginaries not only contest the immutability of the white spatial imaginary, but they also enable a practice of revolutionary hope despite enduring challenges.

Combining a speculative and environmental imaginary, Smith's storyworld speaks back to the unjust disregard for Black female ecological perspectives in both science fiction and environmental discourse. In countless science fiction novels, Daniel would have been the white male hero,

ingenious and adept at survival. *Orleans*, though, repeatedly demonstrates his incapability, thereby "remind[ing] readers that such notions of racial superiority were always constructions, and not based on merit" (Donahue 2019b, 84). To survive, Daniel in fact needs to trust the Black female protagonist and rely on her knowledge of the world, since, as Fen herself puts it, "[h]e ain't got no tribe, no decent map, and nothing but me" (Smith 2013, 174). Because Daniel also "done put his neck out for me like nobody but Lydia'd ever do" (247), a relationship of mutual care develops between them. The two bereaved characters find trust in each other, and they use their personal grief as a catalyst to protect Enola from eco-risk and -sickness. When they finally reach the wall, Fen distracts the guards by tucking Daniel's coat into her arms to make it look like she is carrying a baby, as Daniel takes Enola into the Outer States. The plan works but Fen's assumption that "[t]hey won't shoot a woman carrying a baby" (320) proves to be wrong, as the novel discloses through Daniel's perspective: "A shot rang out. The bundle fell from her hands" (323). Wheeler points out that the "slow violence of toxic water leads to sudden death from a gun…. While an act of heroism, Fen's death also embodies a toxic economy in which care of others requires hurting oneself" (2020, 140). This recalls the cruel punishment that Whitehead's Cora in *The Underground Railroad* receives for protecting a little boy from the master's violence. Two hundred years into the future of Whitehead's story-world, Smith cautions, American geographies are still geographies of Black ungrievability. *Orleans* not only negotiates the ongoing disregard for the value of Black lives in the context of environmental racism, but it also reveals that even when ingroup-outgroup alliances are successfully formed in the pursuit of justice, Black subjects still bear the brunt of suffering and sacrifice.

Throughout the novel, Smith invites readers to empathize with the Black female protagonist's grief and engage with her care for both in- and outgroup others, before she finally forces them to come to terms with her death. In so doing, *Orleans* evokes revolutionary outrage, an enabling type of anger, which directs readers' moral indignation toward practices of environmental injustice that perpetuate Black ungrievability. *Orleans* not only insists that Black subjects and the spaces that they occupy are grievable. It also illuminates the two-way relationship between narrative characters and environments, which is even more explicitly foregrounded in Jemisin's Broken Earth trilogy.

Black Female and Ecological Grief Matters
in N.K. Jemisin's Broken Earth Trilogy

Jemisin's epic fantasy series, the Broken Earth, is set some 40,000 years into the future on a parallel Earth that consists of a single continent called the Stillness—a name of "bitter irony" for an extremely geologically active environment (2015a, 2)—on which human and nonhuman forms of life continuously wrestle with the long-term consequences of anthropogenic climate change. The trilogy begins with the onset of a "fifth season," which means that "[p]lants everywhere will die, and the animals that depend on them will starve, and the animals that eat those will starve. Winter will come early, and hard, and it will last a long, long time" (7–8). Jemisin places her protagonist, Essun, a forty-two-year-old Black woman, whose "skin is unpleasantly ocher-brown by some standards and unpleasantly olive-pale by others" (10), within this environment of constant apocalypse. In her blog, Jemisin wrote that "[t]o Americans, Essun will likely read as black, but that's probably because most African American descendants-of-slaves are multiracial to some degree, too" (Jemisin 2015c). While the protagonist may be read as a Black woman, the form of othering that most centrally defines her social status is her genetic capacity for orogeny, which is the "ability to manipulate thermal, kinetic, and related forms of energy to address seismic events" (462). Jemisin invites readers to understand "the extraordinary ways in which orogenes experience, and act upon, Earth through their neuro-geological organ" (Iles 2019, 16), but she also uncovers how the ruling empire controls and confines orogenes. Their innate geological awareness is widely regarded as threatening, since the energy drawn from the ground can be used to both quell earthquakes or to harm others by "icing" them (which can happen even involuntarily to less well-trained orogenes during intense anger experiences). Tens of thousands of years prior to the events of the novel, orogenes were engineered in the image of what was considered a lesser race to be used as "tools" to colonize the Earth. Similar to *Orleans*, the Broken Earth series makes clear that racial oppression is fundamental to the history of the storyworld.

Jemisin's future imaginary, like Smith's, presents what Delany calls "a significant distortion of the present that sets up a rich and complex dialogue with the reader's here and now" (2012, 47) as well as a significant distortion of the past, including slavery and its afterlives. Whereas the oppression of orogenes depends on behavioral rather than visually

perceivable aspects, which have been and are central to how race is conceptualized in our world, Jemisin's fantastic storyworld nevertheless offers fertile ground for interrogating racialization processes. In a blog post, Jemisin explicitly outlines her process of "creating races" for the Broken Earth trilogy. In addition to orogenes, the series includes other groups of characters, such as stills, non-orogenic characters who most closely resemble real-world humans, and stone eaters, who look like living statues and can move through the earth. Importantly, Jemisin emphasizes that all characters are "obviously people:"

> It used to bug me to see "race" used in lieu of species, particularly when the human race is depicted as consisting of a single race (nearly always white people). That approach seemed to encourage treating orcs, demons, etc., as substitutes for human non-white races, which is super-problematic. But I think using "species" may feed into the tendency of fantasy to treat groups that are equally sapient as somehow lesser because they're different. "Race" emphasizes personhood … where "species" emphasizes inhumanity. And in the case of the Broken Earth trilogy, personhood matters. (2015c)

The trilogy prompts readers to empathically engage with the Black female orogenic protagonist's personhood in order to attest her grievability, but it also urges readers to understand and critique the world which seeks to deny her humanity. The society that Essun lives in casts her difference as both strange and threatening, which is emphasized through the common usage of the derogatory term "rogga." This linguistic analogy to a familiar racial slur establishes parallels between the fantastic storyworld and our own racialized world, thereby inviting readers to bring their knowledge about racial oppression and hierarchy into their worlding of the story. The emphasis on the grievability of othered characters in the Broken Earth series recalls the Black Lives Matter movement's insistence on acknowledging Black life as grievable. As Jemisin noted in an interview, the many unjustified murders of African Americans by police that occurred in the summer of 2014 shaped her writing and worldbuilding process. The relationship between emotion, geology, and race that she explores in her trilogy was inspired by her own response to these events: "I was angry myself. I wanted to throw a mountain myself" (Kehe 2016). Through her fantastic storytelling, she expresses a sense of revolutionary outrage against systemic forces of oppression that weigh heavily on African Americans and other minoritized groups.[11]

Another way in which we might read racialization in the Broken Earth series is through the construction of space. Orogenes have no freedom to decide where or how to live, but they are forcibly contained in so-called Fulcrums, paramilitary institutions in which their powers are honed and their geological labor, which quite literally keeps the Earth in balance, is extracted. Jemisin's "hierarchies of humanness," as McKittrick puts it, are new and imagined, but they evoke the ways in which "past human categorization was spatialized, in ships and on plantations, in homes, communities, nations, islands, and regions" while "also evidenc[ing] the ways in which some of the impressions of transatlantic slavery leak into the future, in essence recycling the displacement of difference" (2006, xvii). The production of social hierarchy and difference in the storyworld evokes real-world patterns of racialized and geographic domination that determine who is considered grievable. By drawing attention to the emotional consequences of such oppressive worldmaking practices, the Broken Earth series critiques the ways in which structural inequality and injustice unevenly subject marginalized individuals and groups to harm. Gross argues that disenfranchised grief includes types of losses as well as types of grievers, such as very young, very old, and disabled people (2016, 3). Within Jemisin's fantasy world, orogenes constitute one such group of oppressed humans whose grief is disenfranchised. However, as Jemisin shows, her characters utilize the pain of grief to collectively map a way out of domination and envision new ecological imaginaries.

Your Grief Matters

The importance of the communal as a mode for coping with grief is already embodied in the trilogy's usage of a second-person narrative situation. The first chapter begins with the words, "You are she. She is you. You are Essun … The woman whose son is dead. You're an orogene" (2015a, 15). Brian Richardson defines second-person narration "as any narration that designates its protagonist by a second-person pronoun. The protagonist will usually be the sole focalizer, and is generally the work's narratee as well" (1991, 311). Matt DelConte similarly suggests that "second-person narration is defined along the axis of narratee—more precisely, by the coincidence of narratee and protagonist … defined not by who is speaking but by who is listening (the narratee)" (2003, 204). Using present-tense narration, a typical feature of second-person narrative situations, Jemisin immediately defines the "you" to be Essun, the Black female protagonist

of the narrative as well as its intradiegetic narratee. The narrator, Hoa, is also a character in the novel and a stone eater, who guides Essun because he wants her to use her orogenic capacities to bring back the Moon, the Earth's child, and thereby end the war between humanity and Earth. The reason *why* Hoa is narrating the story, though, is only unveiled in the last pages of the entire series, at which point Essun herself has already transformed into a stone eater, a consequence of the ultimately successful retrieval of the Moon. The other consequence is complete memory loss. Hoa's usage of second-person present-tense narration, then, serves to offer an intimate and emotionally engaging experience to Essun and help her remember her personal history as well as the Stillness's past. Collectivity is therefore central to Jemisin's second-person narration, which presents a story that is focalized through Essun, giving insight into her actions as well as her thoughts and feelings, but narrated by Hoa to her transformed self.

In his role as a narrator, Hoa engages in what hooks describes as "an effort to remember that is expressive of the need to create spaces where one is able to redeem and reclaim the past, the legacies of pain, suffering, and triumph in ways that transform present reality" (1990, 147). Indeed, grief is a significant part of his narration. In one of many interludes, in which Hoa interrupts his own narration to make additional remarks, he notes: "*Perhaps you think it wrong that I dwell so much on the horrors, the pain, but pain is what shapes us, after all*" (Jemisin 2015a, 361, emphasis in original). On the one hand, Hoa's storytelling reveals to Essun how anti-orogenic oppression was the source of much grief in her life. On the other hand, it foregrounds how she managed to envision new world imaginaries by embracing the revolutionary potential of her orogeny and forming alliances of care across ingroup-outgroup and human-nonhuman boundaries. In addition to the second-person perspective focalized through Essun, Hoa also uses third-person narration focalized through the characters of Damaya and Syenite, who are later revealed to be younger versions of Essun. Throughout *The Fifth Season*, Jemisin strategically invites empathy with three allegedly different characters. When it becomes clear that one and the same person experienced the entirety of the emotional pain that is recounted in the course of the first novel, this conveys to readers the magnitude of grief that quite literally breaks apart the protagonist as she wrestles with multiple, intersecting, and enduring forces of oppression. The use of multiple focalization therefore reveals how the loss of an attachment person disrupts and fragments the griever's sense of self.

As far as readers' own engagement with the "you" is concerned, Monika Fludernik and James Phelan's narratological insights on second-person narration are instructive. Fludernik argues that "as soon as the protagonist becomes too specific a personality, becomes, that is, a fictional character, the quality of the presumed address to an extradiegetic reader in such texts evaporates" (1994, 287). Phelan similarly notes that "the greater the characterization of the 'you,' the more like a standard protagonist the 'you' becomes, and, consequently, the more actual readers can employ their standard strategies for reading narrative" (1994, 351). This happens on the very first page of Jemisin's series, but even though readers are not the intended and primary addressees, in her analysis of the Broken Earth trilogy, Kim Wickham notes that "there still exists a desire to identify, and to respond, to these addresses" (2019, 396). In his function as a narrator, Hoa not only provides Essun with a gateway into her own experiences, but he also provides readers with a gateway into Essun's experiences without making them part of the diegesis itself. By designating the Black female protagonist as the intended intradiegetic narratee, the trilogy resists universalizing the "you." Readers are not invited to access the storyworld as themselves, or to *be* Essun, but they are invited to put themselves in the Black female protagonist's "place" and empathize with her experiences.[12] Jemisin's use of second-person narration is thus neither more nor less empathy-inducing than the first- or third-person narratives I discussed in the previous chapters.[13] Her specific usage of the narrative situation, however, speaks to the ways in which formal and ideological concerns interact.

Black Female Grief, Eco-Grief, and Empathy

Essun's sense of matter, while an ability with enormous potential, disrupts her sense of place in a society that confines and subjugates orogenes. The protagonist first experiences acute grief when her parents reject her and initiate her enslavement in the Fulcrum: "Her family has shown her that love is a lie. It isn't stone-solid; instead it bends and crumbles away, weak as rusty metal" (Jemisin 2015a, 99). For a long time after being sent to the Fulcrum, Essun avoids attachment relationships to protect herself from further grief, but also because she does not think she is worthy of connection and care, having internalized that "[o]rogenes are not people. Weapons have no need of friends" (297). She exhibits what Shear and Shair call "high attachment avoidance," which is the "tendency to refrain from becoming attached to others" (2005, 257). This tendency is not

solely an individual characteristic, but also socially and structurally determined. Practices of geographic containment and the oppressive narratives that accompany them reduce orogenes to the status of the nonhuman, denying and invalidating their need for attachment. The protagonist's abandonment by her mother which occurs after she learns that Essun is an orogene—and thus no longer a daughter who is worthy of protection and love—exposes the detrimental consequences that dominant narratives about the fearful Other can have. Essun's parents do not die, like in Fen's case, but the rupture in familial kinship sets off an equally irreversible loss that fractures her sense of self.

The most acute grief experience occurs many years later when the same so-called guardian, who forcibly relocated Essun to the Fulcrum as a child, tries to take her son, Corundum, who she was ordered to produce with a Black male orogene named Alabaster.[14] To enable readers to better comprehend the enormity of Essun's pain, the narrative visualizes the experience of grief through a reference to the weight of geological matter: "a dark heavy space inside her [opens up] that is heavier than the stone eater, much heavier than a mountain, and it's eating everything else like a sinkhole" (Jemisin 2015a, 441). The subsequent description of Essun's murder of Corundum documents the excruciating emotional pain that is brought on by a world that forces a mother to kill her own child:

> There is such a thing as too much loss. Too much has been taken from you both [Essun and Alabaster]—taken and taken and taken, until there's nothing left but hope, and you've given that up because it hurts too much. Until you would rather die, or kill, or avoid attachments altogether, than lose one more thing.
>
> You think of the feeling that was in your heart as you pressed a hand over Corundum's nose and mouth. Not the thought. The thought was simple and predictable: *Better to die than live a slave.* But what you *felt* in that moment was a kind of cold, monstrous love. A determination to make sure your son's life remained the beautiful, wholesome thing that it had been up to that day, even if it meant you had to end his life early. (2016, 105, emphases in original)

The protagonist's infanticide resurrects and interrogates the history of Black female rebellion during slavery. Jemisin notes that "Margaret Garner's mercy-killing of her own children to keep them out of slavery" inspired her own work, adding that "[a]ctual history is much, much more dramatic than most people seem to realize" (Lavender and Yaszek 2020,

31).[15] Moreover, within the context of the Black literary canon, Jemisin is responding to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), which tells the story of a formerly enslaved Black woman haunted by the spirit of the daughter she killed. In the Broken Earth series, Essun's own embodied experience of "griefs too deep to be borne" (Jemisin 2015a, 446–447) creates a desperate desire to protect Corundum from a world "laden with grief producing experiences" (Moore et al. 2022, 189). The lack of this-worldly hope corresponds to a belief in other-worldly hope, which is also addressed by one of the participants in Rosenblatt and Wallace's study on African American grief: "Whatever the next phase is, it's got to be better than this phase. And hopefully in that phase there's a bit of equality, 'cause there sure wasn't any in this one" (2022, 163). Essun's loss of her son has profound emotional consequences as some immeasurable part of herself is lost in the process of her murderous resistance.

The protagonist's mourning further fractures her identity—marking Syenite's transition into Essun—while the combined forces of guilt and shame impel her to start passing as a non-orogene or "still." Essun experiences a form of transgression guilt that is caused by her act of infanticide and mixed with her internalized shame about orogeny, which makes her perceive her own existence as a transgressive act. In the previous chapters, I discussed how Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* negotiates passing through race as well as nonnormative gender identity, and how the demelanization procedure in Ruffin's *We Cast a Shadow* examines racial passing in a way that is reminiscent of George S. Schuyler's pioneering (proto-)Afrofuturist novel *Black No More* (1931). Through her fantastic storytelling, Jemisin reconfigures the practice of passing in yet another way. There are no visible physical characteristics that distinguish orogenes from stills, which is why they might be said to be passing by default. However, instinctive reactions to seismic events can reveal them as orogenic, which is why they need to be well trained to be able to hide. Whereas orogeny is an invented axis of oppression, the desire to escape it—which is not a desire to *be* non-orogenic, but a desire to possess the same status and worth as non-orogenes—is familiar. Indeed, traditional racial passing narratives typically foreground the passing characters' desire for the privileges and power attributed to whiteness, but not whiteness itself. Jemisin therefore explicitly inscribes herself within a larger African American literary tradition of passing, while also transforming and expanding the canon through her inventive fiction.

By narrating the protagonist's struggle with orogenic oppression, the Broken Earth series evokes real-world histories and ongoing practices of racial oppression, while also using its geologically conscious Black female protagonist to interrogate the complex relationship between Black women and the nonhuman environment. In *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (2018), Kathryn Yusoff argues that geology, as a racial formation, was "a node of extraction of properties and personhood" and instrumental in the historical construction of the "forced intimacy" between Blackness and the inhuman and "thinglike" (xii). Since "Black women, like the land, were colonized and positioned as a natural resource to be exploited," Carlyn Ferrari points out that "[e]cofeminists and ecowomanists rightfully caution against women's assumed connection to the land and the conflation between 'woman' and 'land'" (2020).[16] At the same time, she emphasizes that "for Black women, race, space, and gender are inextricably linked to their lives and knowledge production" (2020). The colonization of Black female bodies and the disregard for Black female environmental knowledge is a source of profound grief, as Jemisin's storyworld shows, but the grief that is produced at the intersection of multiple forces of oppression can also be also a catalyst for imagining more socially and ecologically just worlds.

The historical interconnectedness of "burden and beauty" in African American environmental experiences, as Kimberly N. Ruffin puts it (2010, 16), makes Essun's orogeny—much like Lauren Olamina's hyperempathy in Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993)—both a source of pain and power.[17] Frazier claims that Lauren's empathy "is what shapes her understanding of her place in relationship to not only other human beings but other forms of nonhuman life as well" (2016, 52). Through orogeny, Jemisin extends "Butler's imagining of a 'new' black female subject" (50), renegotiating and reimagining Black women's relationship to the more-than-human environment. In her discussion of *Parable of the Sower*, Frazier draws on Jane Bennett's concept of "vital materialism" (Bennett 2010), which "makes human and nonhuman relationality horizontal … [and] insists on the vitality or aliveness of all matter" (Frazier 2016, 45). While she emphasizes the importance of Bennett's interventions, Frazier rightly points to the "dangers in an approach that seeks to lessen the distinctness between 'humanity' and the 'rest of matter'" with regard to "histories of the violent instrumentalization of black subjects who have struggled for centuries to be recognized as 'human'" (45). Her own analysis "of Lauren's animality resists conceptions of animality that function at the level of analogy"

(53), arguing that there are moments in the novel when "Lauren is not *like* an animal, but instead becomes animal—opening her to a different set of experiences that radically deepens her connection to another form of life" (54, emphasis in original). In her reading of the Broken Earth trilogy, Dowdall similarly argues that Jemisin's "characters become more-than-human by recognizing and drawing on their connections with matter through magic" (2020, 163). This is perhaps most clearly demonstrated by the protagonist's transformation into a stone eater—who are "near-immortal stone-based life-forms" (Iles 2019, 14)—by the end of the trilogy. Essun's awareness of the Earth is a source of knowledge that allows her to experience what non-orogenic humans cannot—namely, that the "*planet* is a living, breathing thing" (Jemisin 2017, 242, emphasis in original). Readers' engagement with Essun, in turn, prompts an unsettling of the fixity of boundaries between human and more-than-human forms of life. Importantly, Jemisin makes productive use of *emotional* analogy to express the relationality between her Black protagonist and more-than-human matter. She shows how racialized forms of subjugation create grief and anger in her protagonist and she uses these same emotions to create parallels between Essun's and the Earth's *experiences* of oppression.

The representation of the Earth's loss of the Moon as a parental loss, in direct comparison to the Black female protagonist's loss of her own child, is one central way in which the trilogy merges an ecological with an Afrofuturist imagination. In the beginning of the first book, Essun's husband Jija kills their son Uche after finding out that he is an orogene, which causes the protagonist to grieve her child's loss and rage at the world that produced her husband's violence: "These people killed Uche. Their hate, their fear, their unprovoked violence. They" (Jemisin 2015a, 58). Neither Jija's emotions nor his actions are purely individual, but the fear, hate, and anger that drive his behavior are bound up with reductive narratives about orogenes and the racial-spatial forms of oppression that contribute to perpetuating these ideologies. Jija's murder demonstrates that fear often drives violence, as I discussed in more detail in my reading of Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad*, whereas Essun's reaction represents a form of anger that recognizes the insufficiency of individual blame-placing. Even as Essun is angry at Jija, she directs her indignation at a collective "them" and, in turn, more broadly the oppressive systems that produce the townspeople and their emotions.

In parallel to that, the trilogy is concerned with subjectivizing Earth's own experiences and foregrounding an understanding of Earth as an animate, sentient, and *formerly enslaved* being. While the expression "Evil

Earth" is frequently used by characters who blame the Earth for the apocalyptic conditions of their world, the following description discloses that the Earth's vengefulness in the storyworld present is a consequence of the sins of past human civilizations:

> According to legend, Father Earth did not originally hate life…. He crafted even, predictable seasons; kept changes of wind and wave and temperature slow enough that every living being could adapt, evolve…. Then people began to do horrible things to Father Earth. They poisoned waters beyond even his ability to cleanse, and killed much of the other life that lived on his surface. They drilled through the crust of his skin, past the blood of his mantle, to get at the sweet marrow of his bones. (Jemisin 2015a, 379–380)

Many thousands of years ago, the Earth lost its child, the Moon, which was flung away amid humanity's attempt to "lock the raw magical flows of the planet into an endless cycle of service to humankind" (2017, 333). The people in this past civilization reasoned that "*someone* must suffer, if the rest are to enjoy luxury. Better the earth … Better to enslave a great inanimate object that cannot feel pain and will not object" (334, emphasis in original). However, the characters in Jemisin's storyworld still pay the price for the past generation's objectification of the Earth. Not only is the Earth angry, but it is grieving its child and it exacts revenge by creating prolonged apocalyptic climate change events. The term Evil Earth, then, signifies not only a pathologizing of the Earth's rightful outrage at how it has been treated by humans in the past, but it also fails to acknowledge that the Earth's responses have been actively produced by human-invented systems. Importantly, Jemisin's use of "enslave[ment]" critiques colonial practices that throughout history have been used to justify human and animal oppression as well as the extraction of natural resources.

Bridging the personal and the planetary, Jemisin's eco-Afrofuturist storyworld depicts how Essun pursues two parallel goals. The first is to find her daughter, Nassun, who is also orogenic, in order to protect her from her father. The second is to bring home the Moon to the grieving Earth in order "[t]o impose equilibrium on the Earth-Moon system" (Jemisin 2016, 171). When Essun asks another character what "the Earth want[s]," he responds: "What does any living thing want, facing an enemy so cruel that it stole away a child?" (207). She then realizes that the Earth wants and enacts "*[v]engeance*" (207, emphasis in original), a vengeance that is driven by grief, which is a more enduring emotion than anger. As the Broken Earth series juxtaposes Essun's task of finding and protecting

her daughter with the planetary task of returning the Moon to "[e]nd the world's pain" (2017, 41), it foregrounds both grief and anger to establish emotional parallels between Essun and the Earth, thereby inviting readers' empathetic engagement with Essun and—via Essun—with the Earth itself. While such an engagement with the Earth is necessarily delivered through "the anthropocentric mold of human consciousness" (Hegglund 2020, 39), the Broken Earth trilogy uses these shared emotional experiences to open up new ways of imagining the interrelatedness of the human and more-than-human world. Not only does this affective strategy prompt readers to think about racial oppression and environmental extraction as part of a larger system of colonial violence, but also to register and engage with the radical potential of conceptualizing nonhuman life forms as sentient and grievable. In doing so, the Broken Earth series extends *Orleans*'s foregrounding of the grievability of Black lives to also make an empathic case for the eco-grievability of the planet itself.

Collective Grieving and Queer Ecological Worldmaking

Jemisin's eco-Afrofuturist imagination engages in a *queering* of kinship imaginaries that cut across boundaries among humans as well as boundaries between the human and nonhuman.[18] bell hooks's definition of the term "queer" captures its expansiveness particularly well: "[Q]ueer not as being about who you're having sex with – that can be a dimension of it–but queer as being about the self that is at odds with everything around it and has to invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live" (2014). hooks, in fact, envisions a queer spatial imaginary that challenges the constraints of different identity categories and the systems that produce them.[19] In the third chapter, I already discussed a form of queer spatial imaginaries in Bennett's *The Vanishing Half*, which is part of an expanding canon of African American literature that explicitly addresses concurrent issues of nonnormative gender identity and sexuality, thereby opening up further imaginative space for conceptualizing Black geographies simultaneously as queer geographies. The Afrofuturist imagination is especially well-suited for such an expansion, as Jess S. Bennett has argued with regard to Octavia E. Butler's work: "Whereas racism and heteronormativity seek to control the family through racist, sexist, and homophobic models, the Butler Family ultimately rejects such rigidity" (2019, 34).

Like Butler, Jemisin provides readers with mental models for imagining what kinship can look like when it actively challenges rigid social structures and narratives.

As Lothian suggests in *Old Futures: Speculative Fiction and Queer Possibility* (2018), "[i]f queer theory deconstructs binary logics of identity and imagines how the world might be changed by their subversion … here it naturally seems to converge with science fiction's imaginative production" (11). Therefore, "queer theory is itself often a practice of speculative fiction," and as such a "practice of speculating futures [that] not only is enacted in fiction but also forms an approach to the world at large" (12). Indeed, the understanding of both speculation and queerness as opening up imaginative space for challenging "structures that seemed immutable" (5) is instructive for thinking about the possibilities of grief itself. Since grief prompts a "revising [of] our models of world and self" (Frame 2021, 60), such emotional experiences may also serve as resources for generating "a potential way out of … normativities" (Lothian 2018, 6). Smith and Jemisin each illuminate the speculative and queering potential of grief as they narrate how their Black female protagonists create alliances of care with other grievers. Such alliances enable them to communally imagine trajectories toward liberation and justice that contest the perpetuation of future grief.

The Broken Earth trilogy highlights the healing potential of communal grieving, by showing how bereaved characters lessen the effects of their pain through relationships with other grievers. The coerced sexual relationship between Essun and Alabaster, for instance, gradually transforms into a healing alliance of care. The protagonist in Morrison's *Beloved*, Sethe, emphasizes the notion of communal and potentially transformative grief and grieving when she explains why she wants Paul D, a character who shares her traumatic slave past, in her life: "The mind of him that knew her own. Her story was bearable because it was his as well – to tell, to refine and tell again" (2006, 117). Essun and Alabaster both suffer the consequences of a system that profits from the usability of their ungrievable bodies. The representation of their forced union critiques the exploitation of the Black female body, while simultaneously exposing the violence of heteronormativity through its depiction of Alabaster as a homosexual orogene forced to produce almost a dozen children with female orogenes. Alabaster's expression of his emotions and his confrontation of the system that objectifies orogenes makes Essun confront her own grief, as "he

refuses to allow her any of the polite fictions and unspoken truths that have kept her comfortable, and safe, for years" (Jemisin 2015a, 348). Living in an environment in which constant large-scale disasters coupled with social injustice produce loss and grief, Essun, as is the case for many Black women, has never had "time to mourn" (2017, 362). Together with Alabaster, though, she grieves her losses and rages against the world that caused them. Latinx grief specialist and psychotherapist Sonia Fregoso echoes Morrison's emphasis on collectivity and storytelling, as well as the insights gained in Rosenblatt and Wallace's study of African American grief, when she suggests that "[a]s much as the western culture tries to teach us that our pain and suffering should be dealt with in private, it is quite the contrary. Grief is meant to be felt collectively" (Forneret 2021). By sharing their grief experiences and empathizing with each other, Essun and Alabaster carve out a communal affective space that enables them to lessen the painful effects of their individual losses.

Fueled by the speculative and queering potential of their grief, Essun and Alabaster practice both collective grieving and alternative kinship. They form what is described as a "love triangle" with a bisexual Black character named Innon, with whom they collectively raise their son Corundum (Jemisin 2015a, 372). The narrative specifically mentions Alabaster's transformation from an excessively and visibly traumatized individual into someone who "looks nothing at all like the half-mad monster [they] sent her off with" (421). His healing demonstrates, as Bennett suggests, that "queer identity flourishes in queer kinship" (2019, 18). Through Essun's relationships with others, the narrative reveals how alliances of care evolve and how they give rise to a radically altered sense of self and the world, even as the guardians' destruction of their nonnormative kinship structure—they murder Innon and try to take Corundum (before Essun kills him)—points to the fragility of such alternative visions of love and family within an oppressive system.

Both Smith and Jemisin underscore that communal spatial imaginaries are not merely "democratic and inclusive ideals" (Lipsitz 2011, 13), but survival necessities. While in *Orleans* tribes are ingroup communities only, consisting of people who share the same blood type to increase the likelihood of survival, so-called comms in the Broken Earth series are explicitly intersectional, focusing on the usefulness of each member, because "humans can only strive to survive fifth seasons through comm-building, rather than by competition and exploitation" (Iles 2019, 7). Orogenes are

excluded from comms, though, since they are considered to be nonhuman and dangerous, which is why Essun could only be part of a comm when she was passing as a still, married to a respected comm member, and proving her use by teaching at a local school. However, when Essun travels the Stillness in search of Nassun, she joins a revolutionary comm called Castrima, which defies existing rules of comm-building by including orogenes as a use caste. The orogenic leader of the comm, Ykka, "thinks Castrima is something special: a comm where rogga and still can live in harmony, working together to survive" (Jemisin 2016, 201). Whereas Essun initially thinks that all orogenes in the comm "need to be prepared for the inevitable day that Castrima turns on them" (201), Ykka's experiment of a new spatial imaginary that bridges in- and outgroup differences turns out to be successful. By expanding traditional and parochial comm-creation practices through "horizontal place-making," which Herman Beavers describes as "a collaborative gesture that hinges on characters' realization that interdependence is a key element" (2018, 7), Castrima enables alternative ways of being and surviving.

Such practices of community creation also constitute healing alliances of care for orogenes. Essun's inclusion in the comm counters existing scripts about "what counts as a livable life and a grievable death" (Butler 2004, xiv-v), which, in turn, helps her to finally reject her internalized "belief that orogenes will never be anything but the world's meat" (Jemisin 2016, 296). Castrima turns into a home for Essun as she finds belonging in a diverse community of people, including trans and queer characters, whom Jemisin writes into the future without turning nonnormativity into the defining aspect of their identity. Such representations of diversity exemplify and foreground the important role that African American story-worlds in the twenty-first century play in expanding readers' empathetic circles.

Above all, the Broken Earth series foregrounds how the diverse people who comprise Castrima are more than friends to Essun, they are chosen kin. In a world that has shown the Black female orogenic protagonist again and again that emotional attachment to others, including biological kin, can only ever end in pain, Castrima provides a new sense of hope and possibility. When Hoa realizes how attached Essun has become to the people in the comm, he tells her that he will understand if she chooses not to sacrifice her newly found sense of home, and not to sacrifice herself, in the attempt to bring back the Moon (since that will turn her into a stone

eater). Crucially, though, "Castrima is *more* reason for [her] to do it, not less" (Jemisin 2017, 283–284, emphasis in original). The local and communal ties that have provided Essun with her personal sense of place on Earth importantly also spur her commitment to fight for ecosocial justice. With the help of Hoa and Alabaster, who make her realize the scale of her orogenic abilities, Essun wants to create a better future for her biological daughter, her chosen kin, the people outside of her own community, and the planet itself.

The preceding chapters have considered how Black characters envision and create space amid and despite the oppressive systems that subjugate and confine them. In so doing, these characters attest their own sense of place and individually, communally, and locally contest broader oppressive geographies. The Black female protagonist in Jemisin's eco-Afrofuturist storyworld, though, rewrites and reimagines planetary ecologies. Essun practices what Heise in her 2008 book *Sense of Place, Sense of Planet* terms "eco-cosmopolitanism," which is the "attempt to envision individuals and groups as part of planetary 'imagined communities' of both human and nonhuman kinds" (61). Whereas Fen acts as an "other mother" by protecting her beloved dead friend's baby from environmental harm, Essun takes on the role of a planetary other mother who acknowledges and asserts the grievability of human and nonhuman life on Earth as well as the grievability of Earth itself. Making reparations to the Earth, then, is a necessary first step toward ecological restoration.

In the final pages of the trilogy, there is a stand-off between Essun, who wants to rebalance the Earth-Moon equilibrium, and her daughter, Nassun, who wants to drag "the Moon into a collision course … for the Earth to be smashed apart" (Jemisin 2017, 344). The reason for her wish to destroy everything, as Hoa tells Essun, is her own grief: "There is such sorrow in her, your little girl" (395). A significant part of the story concerns Nassun's own grief that is to a great extent triggered by her strained relationship to her mother. In my reading of *We Cast a Shadow*, I discussed the gap between protective intent and painful impact that defines the father-son relationship. In a similar way, Essun's overprotectiveness causes "this reproduction of trauma, of identity suppression, that strains the mother/daughter bond" (Wickham 2019, 406). Whereas Essun did not know how to demonstrate her love throughout her daughter's life, she ultimately gives up in their fight for the fate of the Earth because "more than anything else, you want this last child of yours to *live*" (Jemisin 2017, 385, emphasis in original). When Nassun sees how "even as you died, you

were reaching for the Moon. And for her. She screams … crushed beneath the weight of grief as if it is an entire planet" (387). In addition to her personal loss, it is indeed the Earth's grief that rests on her shoulders, which is why Nassun chooses to bring back the Moon and honor her mother's final wish. While this shows the potential of grief as a catalyst for ecosocial change, Nassun's initial plan captures the destructiveness of too much grief, which—in the absence of community and love—produces rage and potentially harmful blame-placing that creates the desire to turn one's own pain into everyone else's.

In her 2014 talk, "Speaking of Rage and Grief," Judith Butler describes such a response as "an effort to bring [one's sense of] grief to a full stop through taking aim at the world in which such a grief is possible, rolling over into a form of destructiveness that furiously proliferates more loss, wantonly distributing the unbearable." At the same time, Butler speaks of the enormous political potential of grief as a catalyst for revolutionary outrage:

> A loss might seem utterly personal, private, isolating. But it also may furnish an unexpected concept of political community, even a premonition of a source of non-violence. If the life that is mine is not originally or finally separable from yours then the we who we are is not just a composite of you and me and all the others, but a set of relations of interdependency…. What follows is an ethical injunction to preserve … which means precisely guarding against those forms of destructiveness that take away our lives and those of other living beings, and the ecological conditions of life.

The Broken Earth series exemplifies how grief drives individuals to form positive connections to both place and others, and it simultaneously illuminates how locally formed spatial imaginaries that emphasize communal interdependence produce an eco-cosmopolitan desire to be part of and act on behalf of a planetary ecological community.

While individual choices and actions will rarely bring about systemic changes, as is the case with Jemisin's characters, the narrative engages readers' own capacity for revolutionary outrage against existing orders. The legacies of colonialism and the consequences of our own neo-colonial and high-tech present have long materialized in Jemisin's future world and they have left the planet broken. As Dowdall notes, "[t]he Broken Earth series harnesses the tools of Afrofuturism to reimagine relationality on a planetary scale," whereby "sedimentation becomes a useful concept here—suggesting that the future is not hypothetical but is being created in

the present" (2020, 165). Jemisin asks readers to engage with the violence and grief produced by ecosocial injustice, but she also emphasizes that different worlds always have been and always will be possible. Through Hoa's words to Essun, she also addresses her readers: "Don't be patient. Don't ever be. This is the way a new world begins" (Jemisin 2017, 398). In their final conversations as stone eaters, Hoa tells Essun that he wants them to move forward as friends and family and Essun asks, "[w]hich am I, to you?," to which Hoa responds, "[b]oth and more. We are beyond such things" (398). The Broken Earth series itself moves beyond rigid, traditional notions of friendship, family, and home to foreground the possibilities of queer worldmaking. Its emphasis on collectivity and interconnectedness prompts readers to recognize the radical potential of a more expansive understanding of grievable lives, spaces, and ecologies.

CONCLUSION

The twenty-first-century African American literary canon includes many examples of placemaking practices which are inherently linked to the formation of communities that help mitigate the negative emotional consequences of racial-spatial oppression. What happens, though, when such storyworlds additionally negotiate environmental disaster and harm? Smith and Jemisin's eco-Afrofuturism demonstrates how the possibility of forming ties at a local level is constrained in a climate-changed world. Their characters respond to these challenges in different ways: whereas the racial ingroup-outgroup alliance of care in Smith's novel is dedicated toward saving an individual victim of environmental injustice, the characters in Jemisin's storyworld envision expansive eco-imaginaries that cut across boundaries among humans as well as human-nonhuman boundaries. In each case, communal responses to loss enable the Black female protagonists' personal healing, while also driving their contestation of ecosocial harm.

Like several of the other narratives that I considered in the book, *Orleans* and the Broken Earth trilogy emphasize the importance of communal place- and worldmaking as a mitigation strategy for emotional pain. Their combination of ecological and Afrofuturist imaginaries makes them valuable sources for examining how grief operates in the context of ecosocial (in)justice, while also prompting us to think about grief in more systemic and collective terms. As is the case with the negative emotion of

shame, acute grief can fracture individual identity. However, such experiences can also push individuals to not only find ways of ameliorating their own enduring pain, but also care for others who are unevenly subjected to grief-triggering events and to contest the very conditions that produce grief.

The defamiliarization inherent in readers' worlding of eco-Afrofuturist storyworlds opens up imaginative space for a storying of our own world that pushes back against destructive notions of familiarity that are environmentally unsustainable and socially unjust. As Erin James has argued, narrative engagements with the environmental imagination of different communities and cultures can play "an important role in a more sensitive and sustainable international response to today's environmental crisis" (2015, xiii). Eco-Afrofuturist literature in the twenty-first century, then, can provide readers with mental models for engaging in an ecosocial storying of the world that is directed toward affirming the grievability of Black lives as well as the grievability of more-than-human life.

Notes

1. For works at the intersection of African American studies and ecocriticism, see, for instance, Kimberly K. Smith's *African American Environmental Thought: Foundations* (2007), Paul Outka's *Race and Nature from Transcendentalism to the Harlem Renaissance* (2008), Kimberly N. Ruffin's *Black on Earth: African American Ecoliterary Traditions* (2010), Sonya Posmentier's *Cultivation and Catastrophe: The Lyric Ecology of Modern Black Literature* (2017), John Claborn's *Civil Rights and the Environment in African-American Literature, 1895–1941* (2017), Lindgren Johnson's *Race Matters, Animal Matters: Fugitive Humanism in African America, 1840–1930* (2018), Anissa Janine Wardi's *Water and African American Memory: An Ecocritical Perspective* (2011) and *Toni Morrison and the Natural World: An Ecology of Color* (2021), Stefanie K. Dunning's *Black to Nature: Pastoral Return and African American Culture* (2021), Matthias Klestil's *Environmental Knowledge, Race, and African American Literature* (2023), and Sharon A. Lewis and Ama S. Wattley's *Bodies of Water in African American Literature, Music, and Film* (2023).
2. Afrofuturist aesthetics can be found across different media, such as literature, music, film, television, fashion, and digital art. I focus on what Lavender and Yaszek call "literary Afrofuturism."

3. While these writers are central to contemporary Afrofuturism, "a number of scholars have also looked backward to map a history of Afrofuturism that is as old as SF itself" (Lavender and Yaszek 2020, 3). In *Afrofuturism Rising: The Literary Prehistory of a Movement* (2019), Lavender argues that the "very foundations of afrofuturism—as a literary genre, a cultural aesthetic, and a philosophy—predate the 1993 neologism and extend back centuries to the writings of enslaved blacks in the New World" (3). Sheree R. Thomas's anthology *Dark Matter* (2000) as well as essays by Yaszek (2005, 2006) and Mark Bould (2010) have also centrally contributed to a broader trend of (re-)reading Black authors such as Martin Delany, Sutton E. Griggs, Pauline Hopkins, Charles W. Chesnutt, W.E.B. Du Bois, George S. Schuyler, and Ralph Ellison as (proto-)Afrofuturists.

4. Lavender's observation about "the safe distance offered by science-fictional speculation" (2019, 2) relates to a common argument in cognitive literary scholarship concerning fictionality more generally. Blakey Vermeule, for instance, encourages us to "[t]hink of narrative as an emotional prosthesis" (2010, 47), that is, "a vehicle by which people test various scenarios without risking too much" (41). Keen herself suggests that "readers' perception of a text's fictionality plays a role in subsequent empathetic response, by releasing readers from the obligations of self-protection through skepticism and suspicion" (2006, 220).

5. The notion of "defamiliarization" or "estrangement" goes back to the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky, who defines it as an artful removal of an object "from the sphere of automatized perception" (1990, 6). According to Shklovsky, the ultimate goal of defamiliarization is making a "stone feel stony" (6). Darko Suvin's notion of "cognitive estrangement" (1979, 4) similarly captures the centrality of defamiliarizing the familiar in relation to science fictional storyworlds that depict an "imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (7–8). Cognitive estrangement is central to Afrofuturist storyworlds that seek to illuminate readers' understanding of their contemporary world as well as the past that produced it.

6. Consistent with Rosenblatt and Wallace's research, Laurie and Neimeyer (2008) argue that communal support networks often replace professional mental health services within the African American community. They observe that grieving African Americans are "significantly less likely than Caucasian participants to use professional services following bereavement" (186) due to the long history of medical racism and the stigmatization of mental health care within the African American community.

7. In *Ecosickness in Contemporary U.S. Fiction: Environment and Affect* (2014), Houser suggests that "contemporary novels and memoirs deploy affect in narratives of sick bodies to bring readers to environmental con-

sciousness" (2). She argues that by "[u]niting earth and soma through the sickness trope … ecosickness fiction attests that an array of stories and narrative affects is necessary for apprehending the material and conceptual relays between the embodied individual and large-scale environmental forces" (3–4). *Orleans*, then, can be defined as an ecosickness narrative that gives readers insight into the affective experiences of a character who is part of a disenfranchised community that bears the brunt of the general society's environmental pollution.

8. Frazier points out that in Butler's fiction "environmental justice themes [are] elucidated through an engagement with slavery" (2016, 49), which also applies to Smith and Jemisin's eco-Afrofuturist storyworlds. Indeed, Melanie A. Marotta argues that "Sherri L. Smith creates a neo-slave narrative and thereby sends a positive message about the strength of African American females to her readers" (2023).

9. The mothers of Emmett Till and Trayvon Martin, Black boys who were killed by white police officers, used their "grief as a tool of systemic change"—expressed in the form of an open casket funeral for her son, in the case of Till's mother, and in the formation of the "Circle of Mothers," an organization that seeks to practice healing through communal empowerment, in the case of Martin's mother (Meadows-Fernandez 2020).

10. Hazel M. Johnson, often referred to as the mother of environmental justice, powerfully exemplifies the radical potential of Black female environmental thought and practice. Krauss notes that "Hazel Johnson's concern about her children and others in her neighborhood led to her leadership role as a 'community mother'…[who] reflect[s] the nonbiological concepts of mothering immanent in the African American community as resources of survival" (2009, 71).

11. One of the many reasons for the series' critical acclaim is its usage of a second-person narrator. Jemisin won three consecutive Hugo awards for the Broken Earth series, making her the first author to win three years in a row as well as the first author to win for each novel in a trilogy. Jemisin's success, however, also inspired attacks of overt racism by right-wing groups opposed to the "politicization" of science fiction, that is, novels written by non-white, non-male authors that explore race, gender, sexuality, and social justice. Dowdall notes that these groups "have attempted to load Hugo nomination ballots with the work of conservative white men in response to what they see as the hijacking of the genre by 'social justice warriors'" (2020, 149). This is a clear example of the violent responses that routinely arise in reaction to achievements by marginalized individuals and groups. Koritha Mitchell has aptly called this phenomenon "know-your-place aggression" (2020, 2). Jemisin, too, captures this sentiment when, in a response to the attacks on her blog, she writes that "women and brown

people and gay people … in the business side of the genre get publicly shamed for … well, existing, while white men can be sexual predators or white supremacists and still end up on awards juries or editorial staffs, unquestioned" (2015b).

12. In an interview, Jemisin observes that she chose to use second-person narration because she wanted to replicate the experience that she had while reading second-person stories, namely, that "[y]ou can't be this person, but you can understand her" (Scalzi 2015).

13. Narratologists have noted, as Fludernik does, that "one of the more prominent emotional effects of second-person narration … [is] its decidedly involving quality, which provokes much greater initial empathy with second-person protagonists than with first- or third-person characters" (1994, 286). Keen cautions, though, that such claims "should be subjected to careful empirical testing before any aspect of narrative technique earns the label of 'empathetic'" (2006, 225).

14. *The Fifth Season*'s appendix defines a guardian as a "member of an order said to predate the Fulcrum. Guardians track, protect, protect against, and guide orogenes in the Stillness" (2015a, 461).

15. See, for instance, Nikki M. Taylor's *Driven toward Madness: The Fugitive Slave Margaret Garner and Tragedy on the Ohio* (2016).

16. Dowdall succinctly outlines Essun's intersecting identities: "Both Essun's biological and her social identities are entwined with the geologic. Geology shapes every interaction she has with the world, from her ability to discern the mineral composition of her environment to her decision to hide her orogeny from her husband" (2020, 161). In addition to that, she also suggests that "[i]n Jemisin's world, humans must destroy these false dichotomies [between the biological and the geological] to salvage their world" (164). In her discussion of Black Anthropocenes, Yusoff, however, reminds us that geology and biology have always been inextricably linked in the production of Blackness as "thinglike and inert" (2018, 9) and thus as "nonnormative" (19). She argues that geology was "a racial formation from the onset" that was used as an instrument to establish Black people's "forced intimacy with the inhuman" (xii–xiv). Therefore, the dichotomy between the biological and geological, false as it may be, is not universal. Instead, as Yusoff notes, "[g]eology is a mode of accumulation, on one hand, and of dispossession, on the other, depending on which side of the geologic color line you end up on" (3).

17. According to Ruffin, "the ecological burden-and-beauty paradox serves as the foundation … of African American ecoliterature" (2010, 3). She argues that "African Americans struggle against the burden of societal scripts that make them ecological pariahs, yet they enjoy the beauty of liberating them-

selves and acting outside of these scripts. Their ecological outlook is informed both by the collective experience of being placed among those at the bottom of human hierarchies and their visionary responses to nature itself. This has resulted in traditions of figurative and actual ecological care that extend not only to fellow humans but also to nonhuman nature" (16).

18. Ecocritical scholars, such as Catriona Sandilands, have made important observations about the shared agenda between queer ecology—which "is a cultural, political, and social analysis that interrogates the relations between the social organization of sexuality and ecology" (2002, 131)—and environmental justice activism and scholarship. Sandilands notes that "racialized and other communities facing hegemonic cultures … share an agenda: They are marginalized communities involved in crafting new cultures of nature against the dominant social and ecological relations of late capitalism" (2002, 132). For research that models a "queer and intersectional reading practice" (25), see, for example, Nicole Seymour's *Strange Natures: Futurity, Empathy, and the Queer Ecological Imagination* (2013). Seymour argues that "a queer ecological focus on sexuality and environment should open out onto other foci … not just the central queer-theoretical tenets of anti-heteronormativity and anti-essentialism, but also the principles of social and environmental justice, anti-racism, -classism, -capitalism, -sexism, -xenophobia and -colonialism" (25).

19. For work at the intersection of Black geographies, race, and sexuality, see, for instance, Marlon M. Bailey and Rashad Shabazz's analysis of how "black gender and sexual minorities confront marginalization and create new spaces of sociality, community, desire, pleasure, support, and love" (2014, 449) and Latoya E. Eaves investigation of a "queer Black South" (2017).

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Conclusion

Abstract This chapter first reflects on the contemporary U.S. political landscape, arguing that African American literature can help us become better readers of emotions in the context of historical and ongoing forms of race, geography, and power. Second, it summarizes the main arguments of *Emotion, Race, and Space in Contemporary African American Literature*. Third, it outlines possibilities for further research.

Keywords African American literature • Emotion • Empathy • Race • Geography • Black geographies

The framework that I have put forward in this book allows us to name and describe the interplay between emotion, race, and space. As I am writing this conclusion in late 2024, Donald Trump was elected president for the second time, and we are already witnessing an increase in racial hatred in on- and offline public spaces. Only two weeks after the election, on November 16, 2024, a group of neo-Nazis walked through Columbus, Ohio, carrying Nazi flags and chanting racist slurs. It was the kind of power exercise that Trumpian politics embolden—a power predicated on the ability to incite fear in Black people, people of color, women, queer people, and trans people, and the ability to violate their emotional and physical safety. Only one day after the white supremacist march, a group

of Columbus Black men staged a counterprotest. Brian Winston, one of the organizers of the reclamation of public space, noted that the goal "was basically bringing Black men together to allow our Black women, children and anyone else who were fearful or scared of what they saw … just to be able to redirect them with unity and love" (Adams 2024). They marched to collectively reaffirm love and hope, and not fear and shame, as the prevailing emotional geographies of *their* Columbus. While these events are enmeshed with contemporary politics and local geographies, they are also indicative of centuries of white terror, hatred, and rage as well as centuries of Black communal resistance, outrage, and hope expressed in and through space.

Emotion, Race, and Space in Contemporary African American Literature has proposed that contemporary African American literature can help us become better readers of emotions in the context of historical and ongoing forms of race, geography, and power. While emotion, race, and space have been studied in a variety of ways before, the intersections between all three aspects have not. The book has argued that applying an emotion-race-space framework to contemporary African American writing, on the one hand, enables an examination of the ways in which Black fear, shame, guilt, anger, and grief are inflected by parochial racial politics and their enforcement through spatial exclusion, subjugation, and confinement. On the other hand, it offers a means to articulate Black emotions as far more than the adverse effects of racial and geographic oppression, and to consider the possibilities for hope and affective liberation provided by Black place-, community-, and homemaking. The duality of this framework captures the intimate link between pain and possibility that continues to shape African American experiences and African American literature in the present era.

Margo Natalie Crawford has argued that the "simultaneity of African Americans not being able to breathe and occupying positions of power (such as being President of the United States) generates a mood of melancholic hope in African American literature of the twenty-first century" (2024, 31). This refusal of romantic hope in white progress is baked into contemporary African American literary genres, such as the neo-slave narrative, the neo-segregation narrative, the neo-passing narrative, the satirical narrative, and the Afrofuturist narrative. As I have discussed in the preceding pages, Colson Whitehead, Edward P. Jones, Toni Morrison, Brit Bennett, Percival Everett, Maurice Carlos Ruffin, Sherri L. Smith, and

N.K. Jemisin do not only engage all of these aesthetic modes, but they use them to interrogate historical, present-day, and futuristic sites in which racism takes place. While they all critique the Black emotional pain and confinement produced by historically specific and yet transhistorically continuous racial-geographic formations, many of them also interrogate how Black characters mobilize both negative and positive emotions as affective resources for the creation of alternative geographies and, vice versa, how alternative and communal ways of placemaking provide opportunities for an unmaking of personal and collective trauma. Therefore, the book has paid particular attention to the important and understudied relationships between Black emotional and geographic responses to oppression. As I hope to have demonstrated, combining research on emotion and narrative with concerns that are central to African American studies and Black geographies yields significant insights for the study of African American literature, while also pointing to fruitful interdisciplinary interlinkages between diverse scholarly fields.

Throughout my analyses, I have also paid specific attention to the way in which African American authors strategically invite and sometimes disinvite empathy. Most of the writers considered in the book provide possibilities for empathic engagement. They entreat their readers to feel with a diverse range of Black characters, and to indict the social, political, and historical causes of these characters' emotional struggles. In doing so, they prompt a contextual version of empathy as well as a capacious understanding of Blackness, whose urgency cannot be overstated in the face of the ongoing assault on Black lives in the contemporary era. Those narratives that complicate and disinvite empathy with Black characters who in one way or the other contribute to reproducing anti-Blackness importantly also prompt an understanding of the broader conditions that have produced these characters' questionable affective orientations, choices, and actions. Such novels direct their ethical critique at the immeasurable violence of the white affective imaginary that sustains its power by incapacitating Black outrage and Black hope for equality and justice.

One central aspect that my readings have revealed is how the universal and specific are interlaced. While I have drawn on research in the cognitive sciences to discuss the representation of emotion in African American storyworlds, I have simultaneously examined how the social production of race, space, and identity shapes individual psychology. On the one hand, the study of African American narratives allows for an in-depth

investigation of the emotions of Black subjects, who are often not sufficiently represented in psychological studies. On the other hand, such a theorization of *emotions in context* allows us to reconceptualize the individualist focus that has been central to psychology as a discipline and Western thought more generally. It forces us to pay more attention to the social, political, and historical systems, processes, and narratives that shape emotions as well as the collective ways in which Black subjects respond to, address, and understand emotions. The Black literary imagination is therefore key for examining the complexity of Black emotional experiences and responses in the context of American racial and geographic projects, and for examining the subversive intersections between Black emotions and Black geographies that have always existed amid and despite white violence.

Although the narratives that I explored have made possible variegated textual analyses, an investigation of the relationships between emotion, race, and space is by no means limited to the storyworlds that were discussed in this book. Considering specifically the chapter on neo-slave narratives, equally exemplary texts might include James McBride's *The Good Lord Bird* (2013), Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2016), and Ta-Nehisi Coates's *The Water Dancer* (2019). One might also turn to neo-segregation narratives such as Delores Phillips's *The Darkest Child* (2016) and Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys* (2019). The same is true for the other chapters: texts like Paul Beatty's *The Sellout* (2015) and Rivers Solomon's *The Deep* (2019) could be used to expand the discussion of African American satirical and (eco)-Afrofuturist storyworlds, respectively. Additionally, studying how emotions are inflected by race and space—and how we might understand the relationships between race and space better by paying attention to emotion—does not have to be limited to African American literary production in the twenty-first century. It would be equally productive to consider, for example, twentieth-century texts by authors such as Nella Larsen, Jessie Redmon Fauset, James Baldwin, Ernest J. Gaines, Ishmael Reed, Samuel R. Delany, Gayl Jones, Gloria Naylor, and many others.

Furthermore, it is also worth noting that the aesthetic modes that I have chosen to frame my discussion of the individual chapters—the neo-slave narrative, the neo-segregation and neo-passing narrative, African American satire, and (eco-)Afrofuturism—constitute only one way of approaching the narratives. While I have examined Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* through the literary framework of the neo-slave

narrative, it would have also been possible to include it in the chapter on African American satirical storyworlds or discuss it as an Afrofuturist text. There certainly are other viable choices that could have been made in this regard. Importantly, though, the current selection of texts and organization of the book have made it possible to follow a temporal trajectory from one chapter to the next and, in doing so, appreciate the breadth of American history that contemporary Black writers imaginatively interrogate.

There is a parallel argument to be made about the consideration of emotions. I have chosen to investigate a number of different emotions—fear, hope, shame, guilt, anger, and grief—which has increased the analytical range of the book. However, this has not made it possible to exhaustively inspect the operation of one emotion across several different narratives. One possibility for future work would therefore be to focus on a single emotion such as hope in relation to race and space (similar to Sue J. Kim's 2013 *On Anger: Race, Cognition, Narrative*). Moreover, there are also different ways in which conversations across the chapters could be created, that is, for instance, reading shame and guilt in Jemisin's Broken Earth trilogy, reading grief in Morrison's *Home*, reading fear in Ruffin's *We Cast a Shadow*, and so on.

Since my hope is that the work in this book contributes to the ongoing scholarly conversation at the intersection of cognitive narrative theory and ethnic American literatures, another way in which it could be expanded would be to apply the same analytical focus to narratives from different literary traditions, asking, for instance: How do texts by Latinx, Native American, Asian American, Jewish American, and Arab American authors negotiate linkages between emotion, race, ethnicity, and space through narrative content and formal properties? As I have tried to show, a contextualized cognitive narratological practice is especially useful for such work, offering an entry point into a deeper understanding of narrative, emotion, and empathy as well as the material and cultural geographies in which they take form. Cognitive approaches to emotion that take seriously the broader contexts that shape lived realities—integrating insights from fields such as race and ethnic studies, geography, affect theory, queer theory, and ecocriticism—not only enable generative ways of reading literary texts that are engaged in social critique, but they also make legible the complexity and capaciousness of the lives of those routinely categorized as emotional, racial, and geographic Others.

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[1] Note: Page numbers followed by 'n' refer to notes.