REDEFINING THE BLACK ATLANTIC: MODERNITY AND DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS IN ANDREA LEVY’S THE LONG SONG

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By

Annabelle E. Haynes, M.Sc.

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Annabelle E. Haynes, M.Sc.

Thesis Advisor: Angelyn Mitchell, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) positions the African diaspora, created by transatlantic slavery, as a counter-culture to modernity and in a permanently irreconcilable relationship with Western nationalisms. However, Andrea Levy’s liberatory narrative, *The Long Song* (2010) undermines Gilroy’s black Atlantic claims. *The Long Song* offers a redefinition of modernity that centers the experiences of previously enslaved 19th century women, whose commodification predicts the spread of global capitalism. Rather than representing the African diaspora as a counter-culture to modernity, Levy’s novel reveals the experience of transatlantic slavery as foundational to modernity itself. Furthermore, Levy’s mulatto protagonist portends the rise of creole nationalism in the Caribbean, counteracting Gilroy’s claim that double consciousness is a relationship between race and nationalism, thus reorienting double consciousness as a conflict between black positionality and global white supremacy. *The Long Song* also undermines Gilroy’s rejection of nationalism by foregrounding narrative plurality – the existence of contesting narratives within all nationalisms. Ultimately, *The Long Song* dismisses Gilroy’s black Atlantic, offering a more robust and useful definition of the Black Atlantic.
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INTRODUCTION

In his 1993 publication *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Paul Gilroy presents his theory of the African diaspora in the Western Hemisphere, a theory that he posits can be taken as “one single, complex unit of analysis,” and which could “produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective” (15). Gilroy distinguishes his black Atlantic in its relation to modernity and nationality. His theory positions the African diaspora, created by transatlantic slavery, as a “distinctive counterculture of modernity” (Gilroy 36). Gilroy claims that this “counterculture,” as a “politics of fulfillment practiced by the descendants of slaves,” “demands… that bourgeois civil society live up to the promises of its own rhetoric” (37). So this “counterculture,” demands the fulfillment of the West’s long debunked promises, but is content to operate alongside Enlightenment claims and practices of modernity. Gilroy’s black Atlantic also dismisses nationality as a satisfactory mode for understanding modern identity and relations. However, this dismissal is predicated upon an understanding of nationalism as singular, exclusive and ethnocentric, and an assumption that nationalism and transnationalism are oppositional forces. Paul Gilroy relies on W.E.B Du Bois’ double consciousness, which dismisses Western nationalism (specifically American nationalism) as incompatible with black subjectivity. This incompatibility creates a fragmented black subject who simultaneously views himself through the perspective of the white mainstream as well as through his own experience. Gilroy rejects all nationalisms (including Black Nationalism) based on Du Bois’ double-consciousness, but retains the transnational orientation that Du Boisian double-
consciousness adapts to resolve the conflict between American nationalism and black identity.

Gilroy’s theory is inherently contradictory, particularly considering its aspirations towards any significant political intervention. Gilroy’s black Atlantic\(^1\) is characterized as emerging out of the experience and memory of transatlantic plantation slavery—an experience that is foundational to modernity (Gilroy 15). Yet, Gilroy’s black Atlantic offers a counterculture of modernity, rather than a redefinition. His transnational, hybrid, cultural configuration counteracts, but still lives within enlightenment ideas about the spread of rationality and scientific reason. Without revising these already established ideas, how does Gilroy expect his black Atlantic not to be subsumed by Western Enlightenment? Also, Gilroy’s dismissal of nationalism in favor of transnationalism, mirrors his critique of the ethnocentrism and essentializing involved in Black Nationalist claims; yet his criticisms rely on reductionist definitions of nationalism(s). Gilroy claims that “ideas of nation, nationality, national belonging, and nationalism” are always supported by “cultural insiderism” and that “the essential trademark of cultural insiderism, which also supplies the key to its popularity, is an absolute sense of ethnic difference” (Gilroy 3). He characterizes nationalism as always singular and ethnocentric, a definition wielded by fascists to reinforce the ‘authority’ of white nationalist narratives—a definition, which grants white nationalists the authority to define and control territories. Again, why is Gilroy’s black Atlantic content to concede these points?

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\(^1\) In this exposition, I will make a distinction between Gilroy’s black Atlantic, as outlined in his book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, and the Black Atlantic, a revision of his theory which includes a redefinition of modernity, and clarity about the positionality assumed in any theory on double consciousness.
Gilroy’s black Atlantic loses its political clout because, in many ways, it theorizes around, but neglects the lived experience of the African diaspora—particularly the lived experiences of enslavement in the West, which produces the very diaspora he theorizes about. Nevertheless, Gilroy argues that in his black Atlantic “artistic expression” becomes the primary means of individual and collective liberation, with “poiesis and poetics” coexisting in novel forms, which cannot be bound or explained by the nation state (Gilroy 40). These artistic works are bonded by their ‘rememoration’² of slavery. As such, contemporary fiction about transatlantic slavery, should feature prominently in Gilroy’s black Atlantic, and provide substantial evidence for his claims. Although he includes Toni Morrison’s Beloved and references a few male-centered slave narratives, Gilroy’s black Atlantic is not attentive enough to narratives about slavery and their intentionality in acts of rememoration. Furthermore, evidence for his generalizations rely heavily on American and British contexts.

Consequently, it should come as no surprise that a neo-slave narrative, particularly one that centers the experiences of an enslaved woman in the Caribbean, counters many of Gilroy’s claims. Andrea Levy’s The Long Song (2010) is a Jamaican neo-slave narrative published in Britain, three years after the commemoration of the

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² ‘Rememoration’ is similar to what Marianne Hirsch calls ‘postmemory’ or intergenerational, cultural trauma. In Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory, Hirsch originally uses postmemory to refer to the residual trauma experienced by the children of holocaust survivors. In this case rememoration as used by Claudia Marquis in her essay “Contested Identities: Literary Negotiations in Time and Place,” refers to the memory-work, by the African diaspora in the West, involved in creative work about transatlantic slavery (Marquis 163). In Toni Morrison’s Beloved the concept of “re-memory” is explicitly used in relation to suppressing the pain of slavery and the memories lost from the trauma that slavery produces. In Beloved, Sethe’s process of re-memory is an important part of her healing process as she learns to construct and embrace an appropriate freedom for herself and her family as a formerly enslaved woman. Her process or rememory implies that both personal and collective memories can only be repressed as a result of extended trauma, but not lost: the traces of people, places and events remain long after they are gone. Although Sethe has physically emancipated herself, Morrison positions the process of re-memory as crucial to Sethe’s metaphysical and spiritual liberation.
bicentenary of Britain’s abolition of slavery. Levy’s novel, in its attentiveness to reimagining the life of a woman enslaved in the Caribbean in the 19th century, highlights some of the problems with Gilroy’s theory, specifically his refusal to redefine modernity and his generalization of Du Boisian double-consciousness. The Long Song, because of its specific designation as a liberatory narrative, within the genre of neo-slave narratives, blurs the line between fiction, historiography and theory in challenging many assumptions foundational to Gilroy’s black Atlantic.

While slave narratives are the most reliable documents for providing insight into the enslaved subject’s experience, neo-slave narratives, as contemporary reimaginings of the lives of enslaved subjects, allow for a more holistic examination transatlantic slavery, drawing on all available evidence. In his 1987 publication, The Afro-American Novel and its Traditions, Bernard Bell describes ‘neo-slave narratives’ as “residually oral, modern narratives of escape from bondage to freedom” (289). This definition creates a distinction between historical novels about slavery, and those that are attentive, in form and language, to the oral tradition of displaced, enslaved Africans, as well as their emancipatory journeys. In Ashraf Rushdy’s more contemporary definition of the genre, “neo-slave narratives” include “contemporary novels that assume the form, adopt conventions, and take on the first-person voice of the antebellum slave narrative” (Rushdy 3). Although the genre came out of the study of primarily African American texts, as indicated through the use of ‘antebellum’ in Rushdy’s definition, it has been more broadly applied to texts dealing with slavery from all over the world. Rushdy’s definition is more attentive to the influence of the original primary source documents, written or dictated by former slaves, and the formerly enslaved person’s investment in
telling his/her story.

Angelyn Mitchell recasts this genre through a framework of critical liberation, by labeling the 20th century neo-slave narratives by African American women authors, as “liberatory narratives.” These historical novels “do more than narrate the movement from bondage to freedom,” but rather, “these narratives analyze freedom” (Mitchell 3). Although the neo-slave narrative, in its attentiveness to the perspective of the enslaved subject, already subverts the ‘master narrative,’ or the dominant historical viewpoint, the liberatory narrative is even more deeply invested in the fulsome, imaginative development of the enslaved woman’s subjectivity. Furthermore, the liberatory narrative is developed as a meditation on the nature of freedom (rather than bondage), which intends on having “a liberatory effect on the reader” (Mitchell 150). To this end, the liberatory narrative is also more explicit in its relationship to its source text, often revealing the continuity or persistence, from the past into the present of the struggle for and (re)conceptualization of freedom. Mitchell emphasizes that these novels “are self-conscious thematically of [their] antecedent text,” and are “informed by their intertextuality, their resonance, with prior texts of slavery” (4). The source texts for liberatory narratives are female slave/emancipatory narratives, written as first hand accounts of previously enslaved women’s lives, or legal documents that foreground the enslaved black woman’s experience in the Americas.

Mitchell’s intervention into the discussion about neo-slave narratives highlights the importance of that form of historical novel as a “weapon against forgetfulness,” and also points to the importance of the liberatory novel as a lens for understanding the present and a possible intervening tool for the future. The Long Song can be categorized...
as a liberatory narrative, joining a tradition of work, primarily by African-American women authors of neo-slave narratives, based on its overt relationship to contemporary subject matter. The novel works on various levels. As metafictional historiography, the text recasts historical events, most likely known the 21st century reader, and alienates the reader from her assumptions, which have most likely been formed through access to Eurocentric historical accounts.

Of particular importance is Mitchell’s observation that “the primary characteristics of postmodernism –fragmentation, non-linearity, discontinuity, and cognitive disruptiveness –are also the primary characteristics of the enslaved person’s sense of self, memory, history, and culture in the liberatory narrative” (Mitchell 11). In *The Freedom to Remember: Narrative, Slavery and Gender in Contemporary Black Women’s Fiction*, Angelyn Mitchell defines the liberatory narrative as:

a contemporary novel that engages the historical period of chattel slavery in order to provide new models of liberation by problematizing the concept of freedom… the liberatory narrative is self-conscious thematically of its antecedent text, the slave narrative; is centered on its enslaved protagonist’s attainment of freedom; is concerned with the protagonist’s conception and articulation of herself as a free, autonomous, and self-authorized self. In other words, the liberatory narrative is primarily concerned with the nature of freedom –of affranchisement –for those who were formerly enslaved. The contemporary narratives are certainly informed by their intertextuality, their resonance, with prior texts of slavery (4).

*The Long Song’s* liberatory aspects come from the text’s emphasis on its main character, July’s articulation of liberation, and her journey towards freedom (even post-
emancipation), rather than a mere focus on the conditions of slavery. In displaying July’s right to tell her story, the text also emphasizes the enslaved woman’s experiences and her ideas about liberty, implying a gendered distinction in the experiences of both enslavement and emancipation. Levy’s liberatory narrative is attentive to the material world that shapes July’s life and her articulation of a fragmented subjectivity. It considers the institutions that shape and restrict the enslaved woman’s social life and her modes of resistance; the commodification of her reproductive functions and experiences of motherhood; as well as the contrast between her perspective and the dominant narrative. Ultimately, *The Long Song* presents an enslaved 19th century woman with a distinctly modern subjectivity that portends the possibility of a creole nationality and constantly reminds her reader of narrative plurality.

Levy’s *bildungsroman* follows her protagonist July from her birth into enslavement on the Amity Plantation in Jamaica to her post-emancipation life. July, who identifies as a mulatto, is the product of rape: her mother, an enslaved black woman named Kitty is raped by her biological father, the overseer Tam Dewar. As the narrator of her tale, July exercises her artistic license, even against the wishes of her son, the editor, with whom she has been recently reunited. In order to save her dark-skinned son, who is born into slavery, from life on the plantation, July gives her son over to Baptist missionaries who adopt and raise him in Britain. July and her son are eventually reunited when he repatriates to Jamaica as an adult. His involvement, as July’s editor, means that the trauma of slavery, and its rememoration, becomes intergenerational: there is continuity between the past and the present. July’s writing of *The Long Song* is a process in which textual history is made real to her son, Thomas Kinsman.
In telling her tale, July sidelines historical accounts of pivotal historical events, which would be recognizable to a 21st century reader. Although the events mark the climax of the novel, July insists on sidelining accounts of the 1831 Baptist War (otherwise known as the Sam Sharpe Rebellion) and the associated uprisings, in favor of more intimate accounts of her journey. The reader knows that Sam Sharpe will become an official national hero, and a symbol of Black Nationalism, in an independent Jamaica. Similarly, July narrates the celebrations of the Emancipation Proclamation, only to later admit to the reader that she was not a participant since she remained on the plantation with her mistress to endure the “false-free of apprenticeship” (Levy 169). In prioritizing July’s lived experience over historical accounts of significant events of decolonization and nation formation, the liberatory narrative emphasizes the enslaved woman’s embodied experience as a legitimate source of knowledge.

Central to the novel is July’s relationship with Robert Goodwin, who arrives from England to assume his role as the new overseer at Amity plantation in the apprenticeship era (1834-1838). A clergyman’s son, and fervent abolitionist with a deathly fear of roaches, Goodwin is attracted to July, which challenges his British mores. Their courtship reveals the racism and paternalism within the British abolitionist movement. Goodwin marries the Caroline Mortimer, inherited owner of Amity plantation, but he and July live as lovers beneath the estate’s Great House. Besides her son, Thomas Kinsman, July is separated from, a second child, her daughter Emily, who is taken away to England by her former mistress and her lover. The book ends with a plea from Thomas Kinsman, for any information on the whereabouts of his sister Emily Goodwin, who may be “in England, unaware or the strong family connection she has to this island Jamaica” (Levy 338). The
*Long Song* not only sidelines Jamaican national narratives, but the novel confronts the contradictions behind many British nationalist claims by revealing their wide spread complicity in slavery and colonization. Although *The Long Song* is peppered with humor, it boldly tackles the individual and collective consequences of slavery and colonialism, while maintaining an allegiance to first hand accounts of the experiences of enslaved women in the Caribbean.

Specifically, *The Long Song* complicates assumptions about constructions of freedom from postcolonial theory, including the modern subject and nationalism. I posit that Levy’s twenty-first century liberatory narrative, through the articulation of the subjectivity of the 19th century enslaved Caribbean woman, reveals ways in which Paul Gilroy’s black Atlantic is inevitably colonized and potentially colonizing: colonized because the theory in many instances, relinquishes its political clout and potentially colonizing because it inadvertently privileges the imperial metropolises and assumes that cultural mixing occurs in a neutral plane. This thesis does not intend to take Gilroy’s work comprehensively, but is both grounded in and working against his two foundational aspects: his assertion of a ‘counterculture of modernity’ and his re-articulation and generalization of Du Boisian ‘double-consciousness.’ Without dismissing the formulation of a transatlantic, cultural formation of the African diaspora in the West (that will henceforth be distinguished as the Black Atlantic) this analysis questions the ‘route’ taken, as well as the emphasis placed on Gilroy’s characterizations of his black Atlantic.

*The Long Song* makes the case for materialist and socio-economic critique of Gilroy’s black Atlantic that accounts for the role of the body, capital, as well as the intersection between nationalisms, which influence power relations. Andrea Levy’s, July,
a mulatto woman enslaved on a plantation in Jamaica, complicates Paul Gilroy’s enlightenment bound definition of modernity, as well as his allegiance to theories of creolisation, which persist at the expense of continued materialist critique. July’s mulatto subjectivity reminds us of the power dynamics involved in the cultural formations that come out of plantation society. Furthermore, if transatlantic slavery is foundational to modernity, then so is capitalism, the precipitating force behind slavery in the West. Gilroy’s black Atlantic is obedient to the concepts of “creolisation, métissage, mestizaje” which are not attentive to the power relations involved in cultural mixing (Gilroy 2). Consequently, his exposition also neglects the impact of capital on the formation of his black Atlantic. Ultimately, clinging to creolisation, without materialist interventions, overlooks the privileging of whiteness (as aesthetics and capital) in cultural mixing; it overlooks some of the deeply colonized aspects within Gilroy’s black Atlantic. July’s mulatto subjectivity calls for a redefinition of creolisation, which is attentive to the role of the most predacious forms of capitalism in the cultural mixing on the plantation. Shona Jackson’s revised definition of creolisation in her work *Creole Indigeneity: Between Myth and Nation in the Caribbean*, highlights that “creole material and metaphysical belonging (indigeneity) to the New World evolved” through the real and figurative displacement of Indigenous Peoples and the introduction of a “new more socially viable mode of being to which political and material right are attached: labor” (2-4). Thus, creolisation in the Caribbean occurs as a result of participation in and attachment to plantation labor, which produces cultural mixing underlined by the

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3 Although Gilroy conflates creolisation and hybridity, the connotations are somewhat different. Hybritity is mixture comprised of various elements, but this mixture does not assume neutrality. On the other hand the “rhizomatic,” association with creolisation theory assumes a central structure, with several offshoots, de-emphasizing the fact that cultural mixing does not occur on a neutral plane.
influence of whiteness. July’s articulation of her subjectivity as a mulatto woman reminds us that cultural mixing does not occur in neutrality, but in contexts of hierarchy and predacious institutional forces.

Levy’s liberatory narrative unveils the 19th century enslaved Caribbean woman as an already modern subject, articulating a fragmented and politicized, yet ambivalent subjectivity. July’s self conception allows for a more accurate (re)defining of modernity (‘talking back’ in the spirit of Gilroy’s black Atlantic and Henry Louis Gates’ signifying) rather than a counter-culture. The novel also challenges Gilroy’s reluctance to expand his understanding of ‘nationalism’ from the myopic, exclusionary and ethnocentric definition that he concedes to the imperial West, but which is incompatible with the inevitable plurality of emerging Caribbean nationalisms. The protagonist’s ambivalence towards symbols and narratives of Jamaican nationalism (especially that aspect of Jamaican nationalism that heralds a black identity) reminds us that nationalism is never a singular narrative, but a multiplicity of co-existing and contested narratives and that Du Bois’ ‘double-consciousness’ may not apply to Caribbean subjects whose nationalisms emerge from the incorporation of anti-colonial, Black Nationalist narratives. Furthermore, Gilroy underestimates the utopianism of his own project, which privileges the experience of blackness within imperial metropolises and assumes that blackness, as a cultural expression is always anti-capitalist. While the narrative does not reject the idea of the Black Atlantic, it reincorporates the specificities of experience from socio-economic and legal contexts that Gilroy’s black Atlantic ignores or generalizes.

Instead of a counterculture to modernity, Gilroy’s black Atlantic could have been positioned as a new theory of modernity. Likewise, what Gilroy’s black Atlantic really
seeks to contradict are essentialist, ethnocentric or racially bound versions of nationalism, but the theory makes the mistake of lumping all definitions of nationalism under the essentialist umbrella, rather than engaging with and reclaiming broader notions of nationalism. As a result, Gilroy’s black Atlantic retreats from critical engagement and yields to the forces of Euro-centrism.

**Context and Outline**

Chapter one will explore the fragmented subjectivity of the 19th century enslaved Caribbean women, to affirm and revise some of Gilroy’s more salient and controversial assertions. The chapter will call for a total revision of the enlightenment bound theory of modernity (applicable within and outside of the Black Atlantic), highlighting that the Caribbean woman’s awareness of her own commodification is a key aspect of her self-conception. Furthermore, the post-modern aspects of her articulation of her subjectivity require an acknowledgement of alternatives to Gilroy’s generalization of the ‘death drive’ as the underlying force of the experience of slavery, particularly as this death drive theory is bound to assumptions about social death and slavery, which Gilroy uncritically borrows from Orlando Patterson’s *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*.

Chapter two of this thesis will expound on the ways in which July’s acknowledgement of her mulatto identity influences how nationalist narratives are treated in the novel. In the first place, her mulatto subjectivity, as well as her mulatto identity, highlights the need for examining social and legal constructions of race, which underlie the relevance of national (i.e. nation-state) contexts. While *The Long Song* consciously challenges aspects of British nationalism that de-emphasize the country’s complicity in slavery, in favor of its role in abolition, the text also challenges aspects of Jamaican
national narratives. July’s mulatto identity produces ambivalence to events that would later constitute key aspects of Jamaican Black Nationalism, raising questions about the applicability of double-consciousness to the Caribbean (specifically Jamaica in this instance), which emerges from the acknowledgement of narrative plurality (racial plurality specifically). Also crucial to chapter two will be a discussion on creolisation in the Caribbean, which will foreground Shona Jackson’s revised definition in her work *Creole Indigeneity: Between Myth and Nation in the Caribbean*.

Each chapter is organized around topical issues in *The Long Song*: “the generative possibilities of enslaved society”; “motherhood”; “commodification”; and “narrative plurality.” Levy’s historically grounded, reimagining of slavery, counteract many of Orlando Patterson’s claims about the ‘social death’ of enslaved persons, which Gilroy incorporates into his exposition. The liberatory novel’s attentiveness to the gendered aspect of the enslaved and previously enslaved woman’s experience, particularly her experience with motherhood, reminds us of the role of patriarchy within racial slavery, as well as the embodied experience of dispossession. Contradictions around the commodification of enslaved persons in racial slavery also provide an entry point into understanding subject/object dichotomy that informs the subjectivity of enslaved women, as well as the socio economic conditions that’s persist post-emancipation –conditions which recreate internal local class divisions, as well as the construct of ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ nations. Finally, narrative plurality reminds us that both personal and national identities incorporate various contentious narratives. While colonialism as a transnational operation, gives rise to ‘developing world’ nationalism as an oppositional force, not all nationalisms emerge as singular, ethnocentric, or even, for that matter,
geographically bound. The novel portrays Jamaica in the 19th century as already cultivating a transnational, pluralist, nascent nationalism.

This analysis will be grounded, first and foremost in postcolonialism which Robert Young, in *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, defines as a “theoretical and political position” that intends to untangle, highlight and intervene in “oppressive circumstances” (57). Postcolonialism is predicated upon the acknowledgement that global power structures have not fundamentally changed since the end of the colonial era. It utilizes postcolonial critique,4 which “involves the reconsideration of history, particularly from the perspectives of those who suffered its effects, together with the defining of its contemporary social and cultural impact” (4).

Used here, subjectivity “implies a degree of thought or self-consciousness about one’s identity, allowing for a myriad of limitations and often unknowable and/or unavoidable constraints on one’s ability to fully comprehend identity,” while identity refers to a “particular set of traits, beliefs and allegiances that can give consistent personality and mode of social being” (D. Hall 3).

Slave narratives were the first documents that give insight about how objectification affects the subjectivity of the enslaved or the oppressed person. Liberatory narratives, while staying true to historical evidence, take the raw material and, still grounded in the subjectivity of the enslaved woman, use it to illuminate the historical prescience of the enslaved subject’s experience. Since “postcolonial theory always intermingles the past with the present,” all liberatory narratives can be considered

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4 Postcolonialism is distinct from anti-colonialism because anti-colonialism (not to be conflated with provincial nationalism) is as old as colonialism itself. But postcolonial critique is comprehensive in “its research into the colonizing cultural and political ramifications of colonialism in both colonizing and colonized societies” (Young 6).
instruments of postcolonialism\(^5\) because of their historical examinations of the past and their additional concern with its relevance in the present (Young 4).

In its intimate relationship to its source text, *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself*, *The Long Song* historicizes part of the political, economic and cultural contexts out of which the Black Atlantic might emerge. In a gesture towards new historicism, this thesis will not only further address the historical and cultural context of 19\(^{th}\) century slavery and emancipation in Jamaica, but it will also address the cultural context of the liberatory narrative itself by exploring its relationship to another contemporary Jamaican neo-slave narrative, Marlon James’ 2009 publication, *The Book of Night Women*. The incorporation of additional texts should validate the analysis by bolstering the historical accuracy of the representation in Levy’s work, as well as the contemporary resonance of the subject matter.

The specificity of the black woman’s experience in the transatlantic slave trade, as well as the legal, economic and cultural context of her enslavement, challenges and revises many aspects of Gilroy’s theory. Since Gilroy’s black Atlantic is a theory that claims to be rooted in questions about identity and social relations emerging from transatlantic slavery, using the liberatory narrative’s attention to enslaved female subjectivity as a critical tool highlights the complexity and continued relevance of postcolonialism in general, as well as, more specifically, the need for incorporating the black feminist perspective in postcolonial critique.

In his exposition, Gilroy credits the black, feminist scholar, Patricia Hill Collins, “whose argument for the existence of a black women’s standpoint epistemology,” is a

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\(^5\) *The Long Song* may also be considered an instrument for ‘postcoloniality’ in its emphasis on the emphasis structural conditions in which the postcolonial nation must operate (i.e. the condition of the postcolonial nation).
model for his “critical, reconstructive and revisionist” thinking throughout Gilroy’s black Atlantic (Gilroy 51). Hill Collins’ essay "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought," validates the experiences of black women’s experiences as marginalized subjects, who also occupy a unique positionality due to their critical roles within dominant culture, as sources of knowledge that can enhance the humanities (she argues specifically for sociology) (Collins S32). Yet Gilroy chastises Hill Collins for pointing out the separation of women’s lived experiences from theory, and acknowledging black women’s bodies and their experiences. He states:

Though I concur with most of Hill Collins’ diagnosis of this state of affairs, I disagree with her responses to it. Her answer to the Western separation of thinking (and thinking about thinking) from being is to collapse them back into each other so that they form a functional unity that can be uncritically celebrated. She utilizes a feminist version of this reasoning as an analogy for understanding what black women can do to produce a critical theory capable of addressing their experiences of marginalization from truth-seeking and interpretive activities. This begins in an argument for the social construction of “race” and gender…There is no open counter-argument from Hill Collins for the superior value of an essentialist understanding of black female subjectivity. However, another version of racial essentialism is smuggled in through the back porch even as Hill Collins loudly banishes it from her front door. In her transposition, the term ‘black’ does a double duty. It covers the positions of knowing and being. Its epistemological and ontological dimensions are entirely congruent (52).
Gilroy interprets Hill Collins’ epistemological argument that positionality results in knowledge, as an ontological one because he avoids recognizing the relationship between physical characteristics and positionality. It seems to me that Gilroy repudiates Hill Collins’ acknowledgement of the fact that bodies are raced and gendered. Hill Collins’ inclusion of the body as socially and legally marked, thus influencing positionality, solicits a reactionary criticism from Gilroy, who eschews essentialism at the expense of his comprehensive understanding of the model he adopts. Yet, Gilroy accepts a similar argument from Du Bois. In his adaptation of Du Boisian double consciousness Gilroy acknowledges a black positionality influenced by projected racial constructions (lived/embodied experience). Yet, he rejects Hill Collins’ assertion that the unique positionality of black women in white spaces can produce valuable perspectives that significantly augment mainstream theory. The very difficulty of defining blackness arises from the specific social, economic and legal powers that define and assign race, and which operate nationally as well as transnationally.

Gilroy also admits that “answering the nationalism if not the racism and ethnocentrism of English and cultural studies has itself become a directly political issue,” yet he backs away from the “difficulties involved in attempts to construct a more pluralistic, post-colonial sense of British culture and national identity” (Gilroy 11). The Long Song demonstrates that these pluralisms are already there and need to be unearthed and asserted as part of the political urgency of postcolonialism. In her 2014 interview with Charles Rowell, Levy discusses that part of the impetus for writing The Long Song, was to counter the British nationalist narrative which proclaims “how proud they are to be British because we abolished slavery”: a narrative she likens to “someone saying how
proud they are that they stopped beating their wife” (Rowell 264). While Gilroy might emphasize the transnational nature of the project, the author emphasizes the national particularities of the project, as well as the influence of her British nationality on her project, while also acknowledging her transnational identity as a British citizen of Jamaican descent. The text engages in criticisms of national narratives that constitute the nationalisms of both countries.

Stuart Hall a contemporary of Paul Gilroy, in his work *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies*, reminds us that globalization is not a modern phenomenon since “modernity is inherently globalizing” (S. Hall 619). Paradoxically both the concepts of national autonomy (sovereignty of the nation-state) and globalization are deeply rooted in modernity. So, “instead of thinking of national cultures as unified, we should think of them as constituting a discursive device which represents difference as unity or identity,” since, in reality, “modern nations are all cultural hybrids” (617). Furthermore, for Arjun Appadurai, the modern nation extends beyond the territorial borders of the nation-state, to include its diasporas. In his 1996 book *Modernity at Large*, Appadurai builds on Benedict Anderson’s concept of the nation as an “imagined community,” a theory developed in his book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. For Anderson, citizens must create camaraderie with other citizens they have never met, and will never meet. The construction of nationhood is the work of the imagination, assisted by the existence of newspapers and novels which reflect, inspire and regenerative this imaginative work (as well as make it real, that is in the form of an object –newspaper, novel, political pamphlet) (Anderson 5-22). Whereas Anderson specifically references the territorially
delineated nation state, Appadurai extends the idea to apply to nations in a globalized world. For Appadurai, modern nations, resist geographical boundaries and so the “work of the imagination” extends beyond the territory of the nation state (Appadurai 3).

In mischaracterizing nationalism as ethnocentric, territorially bound and monolithic, Gilroy, despite his affinity for processes of creolisation misses the possibility of creole nationalism. Perhaps this is because Gilroy’s theory focuses on British and American contexts, while ideas about creolisation are particularly significant to the Caribbean region. The word creole, takes on various meanings in disparate contexts: language, person, style and culture (C. Allen 34). Carolyn Allen, discusses the many theories of the origin of the word ‘creole.’ One theory positions the word as originating in the Caribbean, and referring to those born in the Caribbean, to distinguish between those born elsewhere (Africa or Europe) –so in this sense, creole refers to a person who is considered a native, but is not a member of indigenous populations (35).

Paul Gilroy’s interest in creolisation is specifically concerned with cultural identity. Scholar, Kamau Brathwaite, using the example of the Caribbean, defines culture as “a complex of voices and patterns held together by geography, political force, and social interaction,” so “in a dynamic, working sense, each culture becomes definitive not only in itself, but in relation to others on which it impinges” (Caribbean Critics 114-115).

So creolisation is defined as “a process in which the arrivants and their progenitors forge a complex dynamic of group identity and interrelations” (C. Allen 33). That group identity becomes native and distinct from the influencing strains, in the context of Levy’s novel, both African and European. Even so, Brathwaite rightly maintains that “there will be no ‘one West Indian voice,’ because there is no one ‘West Indian voice’” (Caribbean
While the process of creolisation is a fusion or osmosis that creates a culture that is distinct from its constituents, that culture is never singular, ethnocentric or unitary.

However, the process of creolisation takes place with a context of historically rooted, local, regional and international relationships of power, subjugation. Cultural mixing does not occur in neutrality. Very often the champions of this theory, like Gilroy, neglect the racial and economic inequalities involved processes of creolisation. Even Brathwaite, in his articulation of a type of double consciousness, concedes that the process of creolisation is not an equitable process of neutrality, particularly for the literate subject, since “because of the processes of imperial education, [the Caribbean writer] has often come to absorb/reject this image of himself and in both ways then come to see himself as Other: the classic case of alienation” (“African Presence” 226).

If we view ‘New World’ plantations as early sites of consolidated capitalist production, we can define the process of creolisation or becoming native differently. The use of creolisation and creole in this thesis will account for its historical uses while including fact of power relations. Scholar Shona Jackson, in her work Creole Indigeneity: Between Myth and Nation in the Caribbean, posits that ‘creolisation’ is predicated upon a relationship to capitalist production and a subject’s identification as labor. Jackson’s theory of Creole Indigeneity suggests that:

modern Caribbean history and discourse are driven dialectically not only by external forms of conflict or even internal conflict between majority groups. They are also driven by the opposition between settler practices of belonging (in this case Creole) and indigenous ones and the ways in which they reproduce the
conflict between labor and capital, and between idealist and materialist critical practices and cultural forms of expression. (4-5)

While this theory is developed for Guyana, a country in where the indigenous population survives, but is marginalized, creating a contrast to those imported populations that become indigenous through their marginalization, I posit that Jackson’s theory is relevant to processes of creolisation in Caribbean countries where the indigenous populations have been decimated. Creolisation in the Caribbean begins at the site of the planation, where “settler practices of belonging” are constructed (4). In this way, creolisation is always rooted in and oriented towards whiteness, especially if we understand capital to be one of the main features of whiteness.

Gilroy, in articulating a theory of the African diaspora that dismisses nationalism, fails to incorporate the ways in which creole nationalism and modern national diasporas complicate his black Atlantic. The problem with Gilroy’s black Atlantic is that the supposed ‘anti-capitalist’ cultural expressions that define the configuration are materially bound, and power relations restrict accessibility. Gilroy’s theory runs the risk (through its intentional avoidance of referencing any potentially ontological aspects of blackness) of being reductive: suggesting, even while gesturing towards diversity, that black, is black, is black. The 19th century Caribbean black woman’s narrative reminds us of the very thing Gilroy, in his impressive intellectual agility, almost successfully escapes: the body. The body in Gilroy’s critique, becomes a stand in for essentialism, but in black feminist critique this is not so. Considering material representation of the self, like the materiality of capitalist technologies (advances in communication, travel, and other technologies) is essential to any understanding the Black Atlantic. Gilroy’s de-territorialized,
transnational, rhizomatic suspension leaves materiality behind, to the detriment of the usefulness of his concept.
CHAPTER 1

Redefining Modernity: The Subjectivity of the 19th Century Enslaved Woman in

Andrea Levy’s The Long Song

In his work The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness, Paul Gilroy positions his black Atlantic as a ‘counter-culture’ to modernity. Gilroy argues that this counter-culture, as a “philosophical discourse…refuses the modern, occidental separation of ethics and aesthetics, culture and politics” (38-39). The already politicized existence of enslaved black people in the Western hemisphere exposed the illogic of ‘Enlightenment’ claims to the inevitability of progress and the spread of ‘objective,’ ‘scientific’ reason, which became complicit with racial slavery and colonialism. Gilroy’s theory is predicated upon ideas about slavery, the memory of which provides the root and route of cultural expression in his black Atlantic. Gilroy invokes Orlando Patterson’s Social Death theory to point to “the value of seeing the consciousness of the slave as involving an extended act of mourning” (Gilroy 63).

Although contemporary imaginings of slavery have already been named neo-slave narratives, the availability of emancipatory narratives6 from the United States resulted in a distinct tradition of neo-slave narratives, produced primarily in the 20th century, by female African American authors. Labeled “liberatory narratives,” these historical novels

6 Although the Caribbean produced significantly fewer slave narratives than the United States, most of which were published in England, these narrative share common features with their North American neighbors (Aljoe 2004). These narratives, written from the enslaved subject’s perspective, chronicle the enslavement of black victims of the transatlantic slave trade. Rather than strictly focusing on the conditions of slavery, many of these narratives are also stories of escape and self-emancipation, so they are more accurately referred to as ‘emancipatory narratives,’ in order to shift the focus from slavery to the freedom journey. Emancipatory narratives are the most reliable historical documents for granting us insight into the self-conceptualization of enslaved African subjects: how enslaved persons formulated their subjectivity in relation to their immediate communities, as well as the governing social and political institutions of the era (religious, national and transnational). Many of the original emancipatory narratives (source/antecedent texts), particularly those that were written as religious, abolitionist documents, pander to the racist sensibilities of white, 18th and 19th century audiences. Nevertheless, these are the historical documents that provide the raw material for neo-slave narratives.
“do more than narrate the movement from bondage to freedom,” but rather, “these narratives analyze freedom” (Mitchell 3). I will link Andrea Levy’s novel, *The Long Song* to this genealogy of liberatory narratives because in its development of a multi-dimensional, previously enslaved woman, it offers a meditation on the nature of freedom, rather than bondage, which intends on having “a liberatory effect on the reader” (Mitchell 150). Liberatory narratives, like *The Long Song* should be critical to buttressing Paul Gilroy’s claims since they are the kinds of artistic work which do the ‘memory-work’ of (re)discovering the slave past, which Gilroy foregrounds as foundational to his black Atlantic. Rather than accessing this past through any one specific “disciplinary body of knowledge,” they illuminate the experience of racial enslavement in the Western world as “experiences in the body” (Marquis 161).

However, the liberatory narrative exposes the problem with positioning Gilroy’s black Atlantic as a counter-culture of modernity; Gilroy’s black Atlantic mollifies what it intends to be political work. Gilroy’s ‘counter-culture’ is content to remain alongside, rather than critically intervene in the dominant historical narrative. Furthermore, the generative capacity of Gilroy’s black Atlantic is stymied by its allegiance to the “death drive” (Chrisman 83). It does not extend itself to imagine what the experience of the enslaved subject might offer, beyond death and mourning. Although Andrea Levy’s *The Long Song*, affirms many of Gilroy’s insights into modernity, the novel’s exposition of the enslaved Caribbean woman’s subjectivity in the 19th century, as well as its intertextuality with its source document, complicates Gilroy’s ‘counter-culture’ argument to modernity by redefining modernity altogether. The text reimagines the generative possibilities of the experience of enslavement and, like all liberatory narratives, is

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7 And similarly Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, a foundational text for Gilroy’s exposition.
intentional in its historical intervention: it is deliberately revisionist. *The Long Song* re-imagines the generative possibilities of the social lives of enslaved persons, is attentive to the enslaved woman’s experiences of motherhood and her relationship to her own commodification, while highlighting the fact of narrative plurality which Gilroy neglects in his exposition. Taken together, these themes undermine foundational aspect of Gilroy’s ‘counter-culture’ theory, particularly those parts of his argument that uncritically incorporate assumptions about the social death of enslaved persons.

*The Long Song*, as a metafictional historiography, is characterized by its post-modern elements. It is important to note that it is the subjectivity of the 19th century enslaved woman that requires these elements within the liberatory narrative, rather than the post-modern elements of the text resulting in a modern character. The text reveals “that that the primary characteristics of postmodernism – fragmentation, non-linearity, discontinuity, and cognitive disruptiveness – are also the primary characteristics of the enslaved person’s sense of self, memory, history, and culture in the liberatory narrative” (Mitchell 11). So in many ways, Levy’s July aligns with Gilroy’s assertion that “much of what is identified as post modern may have been foreshadowed, or prefigured, in the lineaments of modernity itself,” particularly in the enslaved subject’s experience of racialized slavery” (Gilroy 42). In Levy’s novel the enslaved woman’s subjectivity is distinctly modern and foretells the arrival of the post-modern.

*The Long Song*’s intertextuality with its source text historicizes the 19th century enslaved woman’s claims to modernity. Since there is only one surviving female slave narrative from the Caribbean, any liberatory narrative focused on the region will be dependent, to some extent, on the same source text. *The History of Mary Prince, A West
Indian Slave, Related by Herself is the only surviving female slave narrative from the West Indies. Mary Prince was born into enslavement in Bermuda, in 1788. In 1827 she travelled to England with her masters, the Woods, where she emancipated herself. However, Prince could not return to the West Indies as a free woman. Subsequently the Antislavery Society, a group of Christian British abolitionists, sponsored her narrative. The History was published in 1831, two years before the Emancipation Act of 1833, and seven years before the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1838 (Ferguson, Prince 2-5).

Although Mary Prince was enslaved in Bermuda, Turks Island and Antigua, while Levy’s fictional character July was enslaved on Amity Plantation in Jamaica, the representation of July’s subjectivity mirrors the historical evidence from its source text. The Long Song, intervenes and builds on Mary Prince to highlight that “nineteenth-century constructs of womanhood could not openly accommodate, for racist, sexist, and political reasons, the Black woman’s story,” and corrects this by amplifying the formerly enslaved woman’s voice (Mitchell 9). Importantly, however, the focus is not merely the articulation of her sociological observations, but her inner life and self-conception. Both texts highlight gendered experiences, which are often neglected in Gilroy’s exposition.

The Generative Possibilities of Enslaved Society

Andrea Levy’s metafictional historiography provides insight into the self-conceptualization of an enslaved woman, living in the 19th century on a plantation in Jamaica. The text complicates popular assumptions about the condition of slavery that Gilroy depends on for his black Atlantic—one of which is the theory of “social death.” In his 1982 publication Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study, Orlando Patterson
articulates the theory of ‘social death’ to describe the condition of enslavement across historical contexts. His sociological study examines sixty-six slave-holding societies and concludes that, in all instances, enslaved persons suffer wholesale social and political alienation; their humanity is not formally recognized by society. The study identifies the four constituent elements of slavery as: a) violence (or the threat thereof), b) violations of personhood, c) dishonor and d) namelessness (Patterson 1-14). As such Patterson defines slavery as “the permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonored persons,” resulting in complete “social death” (13). As historian Vincent Brown points out, Patterson’s “distillation” does little to help us explain “the actual behavior of slaves,” or for that matter, the persistent political and cultural formations that emerge from slave life (Brown 1233-1234). To be clear, the contestation of Patterson’s theory of ‘social death’ is not a denial of the horrors and injustice of slavery in the Caribbean, or the former British West Indies; on the contrary, it is an attempt to respect and bring into focus the total humanity of the enslaved subjects. Can a ‘counter-culture’ theory of modernity, predicated on generalized assumptions of social death, adequately reflect cultural formations within the Black Atlantic (or even, for that matter, within Gilroy’s black Atlantic)?

Gilroy’s counter-culture of modernity is grounded in his re-conceptualization of the slave’s role in the Hegelian struggle between master and slave, using historical evidence from enslaved black people in the Western world (primarily the United States). He presents Frederick Douglass’ description (from several versions of his autobiography) of his struggle with his master Covey, as a reversal of Hegelian assumptions that the enslaved person relinquishes total control to the master. To Gilroy, Douglass’ “distinctly
masculinist,” assertion of his power –his insistence on fighting to the death in order to retain his manhood –becomes a “transformation of Hegel’s metanarrative of power into a metanarrative of emancipation” (Gilroy 64, 60). Recognizing the obvious gender-bias of Douglass’ example of violent resistance, and its allegiance to constructions of masculinity, Gilroy includes the example of Margaret Garner, who escapes slavery with her family and attempts to kill her children when her former master comes to reclaim them. Garner only successfully kills one daughter. So even Gilroy’s generalization of the “death drive” is gendered, with Douglass’ resistance representing a desire to risk death to protect his masculinity, while Garner’s resistance is tied to her desire to protect her children from the conditions of enslavement.

The liberatory narrative’s grounding in the embodied experience of previously enslaved women necessitates re-imagining the social life of enslaved subjects in order access all possible influences on her subjectivity. Thus, the liberatory narrative allows us to imagine alternative responses to the condition of enslavement. Gilroy’s unexamined acceptance of Patterson’s social death theory forecloses the possibilities of alternative responses to the terrors of slavery, and the survival of bonds and cultural forms that survive the plantation. While Black Atlantic art, like the liberatory novel, are dedicated to keeping the “the closeness to the ineffable terrors of slavery” alive, and expressing the “topos of unsayability produced from the slaves’ experiences of racial terror,” these works of art are not the only sites of creation (Gilroy 73, 74). It is impossible to imagine the existence of these current cultural forms, without exploring the possibility of generative slave culture, beyond mourning and death.
Gilroy’s forced generalization about the “death drive” of the enslaved subject in his black Atlantic also eclipses the overwhelming evidence of other forms of resistance, including sabotage and humor. *The Long Song* presents various forms of resistance to slavery, besides confrontation and violent rebellion. Levy’s protagonist July is playful in her engagement of her reader, implying the possibility that even humor, as a part of the human experience, can survive the horrors of slavery. July views herself as a trickster figure, but she does not act alone. Her community conspires and collaborates in feigning ignorance and outsmarting the whites as a form of resistance. July often exhausts her missus’ patience waiting till the last moment to respond to her summons. For Caroline Mortimer’s much anticipated Christmas dinner, Godfrey, the headman, instructs July to spread the dinner table with bedding, intentionally playing into the missus’ racist conceptions about their ignorance and incompetence. When Mr. Godfrey gives July the bed sheet, she “scented Godfrey’s mischief,” understanding that although “the difference between a fine quality linen for a table and a simple cotton sheeting for a bed was within a field nigger’s grasp to understand,” revealing their intelligence would ruin the joy they derived from outsmarting their enslavers (Levy 73). The sabotage continues when Godfrey is charged with the responsibility of sourcing a band of skilled black musicians for the occasion. First, Godfrey overstates the costs of materials and pockets the profit. Then the band Godfrey employs also plays into the whites’ assumptions. The guests remark that “niggers cannot render civilized music,” while the band members dose off in the midst of producing their cacophony, content with the one shilling bribe that Godfrey used to bribe them from the Johncanoe masquerade (76). These instances of trickery serve many purposes –they are meant to sabotage the Masters’ endeavors as well as
reinforce the humanity of the enslaved persons to themselves. Even the mention of John canoe here, a Christmas time celebration, which is very much a part of contemporary Jamaican (and Caribbean) culture, hints at the generative possibilities of slavery beyond death and mourning. The fact of the retention of the trickster figure in Africanist art forms is a reminder of the social life of enslaved subjects and the generative possibilities thereof.

*The Long Song* builds on its antecedent text, *The History of Mary Prince*, to amplify the possibility of the social life of enslaved persons. In spite of restrictions to Mary Prince’s ability to tell her story in 1831 – like her need to cater to a British audience and the fact that she dictated instead of wrote her own story – Prince’s narrative highlights a number of formal and informal relationships that are instrumental in her development of her sense of self. Prince articulates a subjectivity that is grounded in a very strong identification with her family. She begins her narrative with an origin story that reveals her understanding of herself in terms of locality (belonging), her objectification (owners), and parentage (relation):

I was born at Brackish-Pond, in Bermuda, on a farm belonging to Mr. Charles Myners. My mother was a household slave; and my father, whose name was Prince was a sawyer belonging to Mr. Trimmingham, a ship builder at Crow-Lane. (Ferguson and Prince 57)

Prince then describes the innocence of her first twelve years when she was in her mother’s own care, and surrounded by her siblings. She highlights the fact that she has her father’s name and knows the whereabouts and general condition of each of her parents. Prince definitely suffers from what Patterson describes as “natal alienation”: she
is born into slavery. However, she inherits her father’s name. While the name may not be a reflection of the family’s African heritage, reflecting the “symbolic act of stripping a person of his former identity,” and distancing slaves from their origin, Prince’s emphasis on the fact of her inheritance of her father’s name, gives her a sense of identification with and belonging to her family (Patterson 55). The small island geography, and the fact that Bermuda “never became a plantation economy,” might account for the existence of such familial bonds; in her first twelve years she was in her mother’s own care, and surrounded by her siblings (Ferguson and Prince 3). However, reflecting the master’s power to “remove a slave from the local community in which he or she was brought up,” she is separated from her family in her twelfth year, when she is sold to a “strange house,” and suddenly surrounded by “strange people” (Patterson 6) (Ferguson and Prince 58).

Likewise, July’s community of enslaved persons allows her to know herself as a subject rather than an object. She knows herself to be “Miss Kitty pickney,” and one of her first acts of liberation was to have Robert Goodwin (the new plantation overseer who will become her lover) demand that Caroline Mortimer call her by the name given to her by her mother: July (Levy 136, 239). Furthermore, as the author, July refers to herself as July all throughout her novel – she never calls herself Marguerite.

The social experience of the enslaved subject, grants her opportunities to experience and express her subject- hood despite her objectification. July’s bildungsroman is an artistic act of self-creation that allows her to assert an authentic identity. Her community reinforces her personhood, despite her objectification. In writing
her biography she represents the simultaneity of her experiences of subjecthood and objectification during slavery, and the resulting bifurcation.

So, *The Long Song*, as historiographic metafiction, presents an inevitably fragmented subject, July, whose self-conception also necessitates a split between her identity as author and the subject of her work. As the writer of her tale, July addresses herself in the third person creating distance between herself as the writer and her past self, representing a fragmented subjectivity. July must represent her previously enslaved self and her emancipated self, as well as her simultaneous experiences of her subjecthood and objectification during enslavement.

**Motherhood**

The liberatory narrative clearly reveals that the experience of motherhood amplifies this ontological crisis of the enslaved woman’s simultaneous experience of subjecthood and objectification. Motherhood for July and Kitty, is a contentious issue, it is both a strong binding force and a reminder of the totality of both their objectification. July displays a clear understanding, from the opening scene of the novel, that she is the product of socially and systematically sanctioned rape. She writes of how her father, the overseer Tam Dewar, berates her mother Kitty during her arduous delivery and threatens to whip her for screaming out in pain. His first acknowledgement of his child is to warn Kitty to “be careful with that wee baby –it will be worth a great deal of money” (Levy19). July is aware that she comes into this world as a commodity (an ‘it’) and she writes her tale in resistance to this commodification.

Her tale foregrounds the importance of her social ties even as an enslaved woman. No relationship is more foundational to July’s sense of self (specifically her subjecthood)
than her relationship with her mother. Caroline Mortimer, the widowed sister of the owner of Amity Plantation decides that the young mulatto girl will be the cure for her loneliness and takes July from her mother at the tender age of nine (Levy 37). When July’s mother Kitty “stepped to snatch July form Caroline’s grasp…Caroline slapped at Kitty’s hands shouting, ‘What’s she doing’” (41). Mortimer takes July away from Kitty, to live as her personal pet and changes her name to “Marguerite” (49). As a black slave Kitty has no claim to her offspring, affirming Patterson’s theory. But Kitty never relinquished her role as July’s caretaker in spite of the great risk to her own safety:

   every night Kitty would creep along the rutted path, sneak through the cultured garden, scale a low stone wall to crawl through that matted vegetation. At that glass she would strain to keep her leaf shape and not be revealed as an ugly negro field slave who was so out of place that the cat-o’-nine tails would surely be sent if she were caught. And there she would wait –staring in upon a room so sublime that she dared not take a breath for fear the air would prove too noble for her. (44)

So despite the debasement and disregard for the familial ties of the enslaved, Kitty’s mother-love persists, and July seems to build much of her sense of self from this awareness. In fact, Kitty meets her demise when she saves her daughter from Tam Dewar. Kitty commands July to run, as she overpowers the overseer, but July “upon seeing her lost mama again, stood so aghast that, apart from her mouth slowly gaping, all her movement ceased. Kitty has to stamp her foot to wake her daughter to start her flight” (148). Kitty murders Tam Dewar, her rapist and July’s father. July witnesses her mother being hanged for her crime. Despite July’s relatively luxurious life in the “big house,” she never forgets her mother, the sight of whom stops her in her tracks.
Benjamin, the knowledgeable witness to Kitty’s murder of the overseer, had worked side by side in the fields with Kitty when July, as a baby, was strapped to her back. He did not question Kitty’s risking her life for a “lordly house slave,” since he knew that “July was overseer Dewar’s pickney”; “many times him bent Miss Kitty over—many, many times when him first come upon Amity” (147). Indeed, Benjamin, who recognized July’s scream from her screams as a baby, may even have been one of the narrators of July’s origin story. Benjamin is representative of enslaved members of the Amity plantation, who may be forgotten, or silenced, in a purely historical narrative or in fictional work influenced by Orlando Patterson’s sociological theory of social death—a theory that stymies the imaginative possibility of the social life of enslaved persons.

Furthermore, July understands that as an enslaved woman, the white colonialists own her entire being, including her sexual reproductive function. Black motherhood in the West is, from the very beginning, an experience of heightened commodification. July’s first child Thomas Kinsman is a dark-skinned black boy born into slavery. So, in an act of resistance and love, July gives her first born to a Baptist abolitionist couple in order to ensure his freedom. July hides her pregnancy well enough to deny the plantation owner the legal right to her child—a move that can be regarded as an act of sabotage. In fact, even her son’s conception—the fact that she chooses to mate with a free man—is another act of resistance to the condition of slavery that does not reflect a death drive.

Yet, Gilroy characterizes this ‘death drive’ as a “fundamental part of slave culture,” obscuring other foundational aspects of cultural formation in the Black Atlantic (Chrisman 83). Gilroy, not only generalizes the ‘death drive’ of the slave, using select historical examples, but he characterizes it as being outside of the realm of rationality. He
relegates this instinct mostly to the realm of spirituality, most notably, the belief in the after-life. Gilroy claims that these stories remind us that:

in the revolutionary eschatology which helps to define this primal history of modernity, whether apocalyptic or redemptive, it is the moment of jubilee that has the upper hand over the pursuit of utopia by rational means. The discourse of black spirituality which legitimizes these moments of violence possesses a utopian truth content that projects beyond the limits of the present. The repeated choice of death rather than bondage articulates a principle of negativity that opposed the formal logic and rational calculation characteristic of modern western thinking and expressed in the Hegelian slave’s preference for bondage rather than death. (68)

The relegation of the death drive to the realm of religion distracts from the possibility for the choice of death to be a logical option, particularly in a framework or experience of an enslaved subject who knows she will not know freedom.

It is worth considering that Gilroy ignores the longstanding European tradition (“early modern” era), which considers the fear of death an irrational fear. For example, Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar postulates that:

Cowards die many times before their deaths;
The valiant never taste of death but once.
Of all the wonders that I yet have heard,
It seems to me most strange that men should fear;
Seeing that death, a necessary end,
Will come when it will come. (Shakespeare 32-37)
Why is Gilroy, who wages a relentless battle against all forms of essentializing, particularly the essentializing of blackness, content to position his black Atlantic entirely outside of the sphere of rationality, even where European claims to ‘rationality’ have been integral to the horrors of the Western World and so have been proven to be false? In accepting and negotiating around already disproven, Eurocentric definitions, Gilroy reasons himself into the very corner he runs from. The claim that a foundational part of slave culture, demands that we “leave room for a liberatory, aesthetic moment which is emphatically anti- or even pre-discursive,” is an odd claim for a theorist whose main goal is rescuing blackness from the illogical blight of Afrocentric essentializing (Gilroy 71). Of course, the liberatory narrative and other forms of Black Atlantic art, must find an expression for the unspeakable terrors of slavery. However, to assert that there must be a “moment” that this “anti-discursive,” or “prediscursive” and “emphatically so,” weds Gilroy’s theory to familiar conceptions of essential blackness. In spite of the forcefulness of his resistance, it seems that Gilroy’s black Atlantic finds an unlikely bedfellow in Negritude⁸ (71).

If transatlantic slavery is truly foundational to modernity (as Gilroy claims, invoking Toni Morrison), it follows that even modernity’s claims to reason must be re-examined and revised. Before Gilroy’s black Atlantic can claim to be a counter-culture of modernity, we need to establish a true definition of ‘modernity,’ that accounts for the evidence, which arises from the subjectivity of enslaved persons. The contradictions of ‘modernity’s’ claims, rather than the claims themselves, must be viewed as a grounding premise to revisionist work, as they are in liberatory narratives.

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⁸ Negritude, as used here, is a theory of the metaphysical essence of blackness measured by the compass of the geography of suffering, made popular by postcolonial theorists like Aime Cesaire.
In grounding his theory in totalizing claims of social death, Gilroy also misses the ways in which experiences of social death varied according to territory (which will be further explored in chapter two) and how this might affect responses to enslavement in particular. Furthermore, the liberatory narrative’s foregrounding of the enslaved woman’s experience of motherhood also emphasizes the ways in which emancipation is fraught with dangers. Women, specifically, become disposable within the framework of white patriarchy. July is finally able to experience motherhood as a free woman when she bears a child for Robert Goodwin, the post-emancipation overseer on Amity Plantation. Despite their domestic relationship, Goodwin, a Baptist abolitionist from England dutifully marries Caroline Mortimer, although he lives with July below the house. Mortimer and Goodwin eventually steal July’s daughter Emily and take her with them to England. Molly, the cook, who jumps at the opportunity to accompany the Goodwins to England, is complicit in the theft as she unassuming takes Emily, under the guise of caring for her, as is routine. Elias informs July that Molly has taken “the massa’s pickney with her,” emphasizing the white patriarchal ownership of July’s child (Levy 299). So July is dispossessed of her right to motherhood, even after emancipation.

This opens up the possibility that the experience of white colonization, rather than enslavement alone, should be foundational to any conceptualization of the Black Atlantic, since it is colonial discourse that creates racial categories. In Gilroy’s theory on a diasporic experience linked to transatlantic slavery, he strangely leaves continental

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9 Like Toni Morrison’s Sethe, from *Beloved*, (a text frequently cited by Gilroy) conditions of enslavement encroach on July’s emancipation experience. It is important to note here, although it will be further addressed in chapter two, that legal and territorial distinctions play a major part in their experience of dispossession: Sethe’s claim to freedom, thus her claim to motherhood, in the north is challenged by the legality of slavery in the south, while July’s claim to motherhood cannot be enforced in England, as she lacks the privilege (which Molly jumps at) to take the journey. Gilroy’s exposition often overlooks legal and territorial variations in privilege and access within his black Atlantic.
Africans out of his theorizing (unless of course they have the privilege of living in any of the imperial metro poles). It is worth considering that many Africans also become black because of the experience of colonialism. While they do not experience the same estrangement from their heritage like descendants of Africans enslaved in the West, any full consideration of a Black Atlantic should account for the continuity of conditions between enslavement and ‘freedom’ under colonialism that liberatory narratives reveal.

**Commodification**

While the physical and emotional experience of motherhood as enslaved women, heighten July and Miss Kitty’s experience of their objectification, July must understand and (re)negotiate her commodification, even as a free woman, foretelling the arrival of the post-modern. The enslaved woman already experiences her complete commodification, and warns of the commodity fetishism on the horizon with the continued spread of global capitalism, luxury goods and advertising.

Although July writes herself as a proud and self-assured woman, capable of asserting her subjectivity and constructing a sense of self that rejects parts of the racist British conceptions of her, there is one aspect of her objectification that she carries into her life as a free woman. Even in freedom, July is unable to escape the lure deriving self-value from the commodification of her labor. Even in the assertion of her subjecthood as a free woman writing her life’s story, July highlights her understanding of her own commodification even after her emancipation. Directly after emancipation, July becomes aware that her mistress has been compensated “thirty-one pounds…for the loss of… her property” (Levy 178). July was “pleased with the price” and relays, with some glee that “Florence and Lucy were worth much less –being inferior slaves that could only wash,
launder and thump the missus’ dresses to rags” (178). But July expresses her ire when she finds documents indicating that Molly, the cook, was valued at the same thirty-one pounds as her. She considers her literacy and proximity to the Mistress more valuable. So despite her resistance to slavery, July internalizes and identifies with the commodification of her labor, which persists beyond emancipation.

July’s inability to create a meaningful, sustained, life after emancipation is also a great source of shame for her. The arrival of emancipation is anti-climatic for July. It greets her still “confined within the tedious company of her missus” (Levy 167). July and her counter-parts were still bonded to work, without pay, on Caroline Mortimer’s inherited estate during apprenticeship. Thus, emancipation arrives without freedom from the logic of capitalism. July, like many other enslaved persons who did not set off to find dispersed family members, remained on the plantation even after the end of the apprenticeship period in 1838. When the new overseer Robert Goodwin, arrives at the plantation, he arrives as a pious, do-gooder intent on extracting as must profit as possible from the former slaves, to justify his abolitionist stance. She collaborates with Goodwin to convince the ex slaves to continue working the land, just as they had done as enslaved persons. However, the formerly enslaved, unconvinced by July and Goodwin’s efforts, refused to work for more than forty hours a week, so Robert Goodwin dispossesses them of any land that they could use to sustain themselves, and destroys their homes forcing them of the land. While July’s post-emancipation life is relatively privileged because of her “house-keeper”\textsuperscript{10} relationship with Goodwin, the socio-economic dynamic remains the same. Dispossessed of her daughter, and any legitimate means of making a living, she

\textsuperscript{10} During slavery in Jamaica, where miscegenation was never outlawed, it was common for enslaved women to enter into socially recognized domestic partnerships with white men on the island. These women were often referred to as “housekeepers.”
becomes a squatter, and her son eventually rescues her outside of the courtroom where she is tried for theft.

In *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy claims that for “blacks in the West, social self-creation through labor is not the center-piece of emancipatory hopes... work signifies only servitude, misery, and subordination,” and artistic expression “becomes a means towards both individual self-fashioning and communal liberation” (Gilroy 40). While her self-creation foregrounds the liberatory aspects of her artistic work (writing her autobiography), July also has dreams of being a business owner. She reveals this desire in her preferred, alternative ending to her tale: an ending, which her editor son highlights, veers ostentatiously from her actual biography. (This is one of the few instances in which her editor son is victorious in cajoling her to re-route her narrative). In July’s preferred ending, she owns a little boarding house, which competes with her nemesis, Miss Clara’s lodging, where “travellers of the highest rank did lodge,” when visiting the region (Levy 306). This counteracts Gilroy’s claims that for the ex-slave, labor always represents bondage (quite an odd claim for a theory concerned with the examination of the often commodity obsessed, capitalistic, hip-hop). July’s story is a reminder that not all resistance to slavery is anti-colonial, and not all anti-colonialism is anti-capitalist.

**Narrative Plurality: History versus Herstory**

As previously implied, *The Long Song* is a polyvocal text that includes frequent interjections from the editor and printer. The novel opens and closes with a foreword and afterward from July’s English educated son Thomas Kinsman. Yet, despite his intrusions, July’s voice clearly dominates the story. In the first chapter, July begins by rebuffing her son’s editorial suggestions that her opening scene, which describes the moment of her
conception (her enslaved mother Kitty’s brutal rape by the overseer) “is too indelicate a commencement of any tale” (Levy 9). The inclusion of the rape scene is the first of July’s many artistic victories over her editor son. The tussle between mother and son at the extradiegetic level, assures the reader of July’s agency in telling her tale.

The Long Song’s metafictional aspect emphasizes and corrects the restrictions to the enslaved woman’s articulation of her subjectivity. It reveals the possible mediations of the enslaved subject’s voice by making the struggle for narrative control visible to the reader. These mediations mimic characteristics of the source text, Mary Prince.

Firstly, in The History of Mary Prince, Mary Prince’s full authorial agency is restricted in the telling of her own life story. Originally published in the “Anti-Slavery Reporter,” the propaganda arm of the Antislavery Society, The History was dictated by Mary Prince, transcribed by Susanna Strickland and edited by Thomas Pringle. The mediated nature of Mary Prince’s narrative does not allow for an analysis of the text that ignores Strickland or Pringle’s influences, or for the treatment of Prince’s testimony as a stand-alone entity from its paratext. Since Prince’s authorial voice is mediated by her transcriber and her editor, questions about the representation of her subjectivity arise.

But Andrea Levy’s July interrupts The Long Song’s opening scene to relay an argument with her son over the artistic direction of the retelling of her birth—a tall tale with several variations, which range from mundane to fantastical. In the first telling of her birth, July is born in a cane piece. She “slips” out of her mother, whom she presents as a mythical figure with arms as “robust as the legs of a horse in full gallop,” and unto cane trash (Levy 14). July inserts her thoughts and observations as a newborn into this improbable tale, which she describes as “more thrilling than anything the rascal spider
Anancy could conjure” (14). Indeed, July’s repetition of her origin story highlights another victory over her editor for narrative control.

In fact, many of the post-modern elements of the text are exemplified in her ostentatious performance of her authority. July lets her reader know outright, that she is a “woman possessed of a forthright tongue and little ink,” and banishes those whose sensibilities might not appreciate her artistic endeavors (Levy 9). She has no interest in pandering to her audience, but establishes herself as the commander to whom her audience must adjust. She banishes those who are not interested in indulging in a “tale of [her] making” (10).

Her narrative is not only an act of representation, but of self-creation, through the articulation and re-articulation of her subjectivity. As July writes the story of her life, she also writes herself into a liberated subject-hood. The performance of her struggle for agency at the extradiegetic level is a reminder of the restrictions of the enslaved female subject’s agency in the 19th century, which must be taken into consideration when developing any theory that is grounded in the enslaved person’s experience.

Liberatory narratives “...construct alternative versions of the enslaved female’s life through transformative revisions of antecedent texts” (Mitchell 7). As a twenty-first century liberatory narrative, *The Long Song* revisits questions of narrative plurality, truth and sovereignty that arise in *The History of Mary Prince*, but retains the prioritization of the voice of the previously enslaved woman—a point of contention within the source text.

*The History*, as a composite text and anti-slavery propaganda is compiled to withstand scrutiny in in two arenas – the court of public opinion as well as the legal court. Strickland and Pringle’s mediations, and possibly Prince’s narration itself, pander to a
white, nineteenth century British audience, and carefully reinforce their beliefs and pander to their sensitivities. Prince’s original narrative does not appear as a stand-alone text, but rather is accompanied by Thomas Pringle’s preface and other supplementary materials, added in subsequent editions of the narrative. Thomas Pringle’s preface and his editorial additions of supplementary materials (including a postscript to the second edition and an Appendix to the third edition as well as the addition of Narrative of Louis - Asa, a Captured African) are his attempts to validate Prince’s narrative. Most of these accompanying texts are meant to convince the British audience of the “legality and veracity of Prince’s claim to freedom from the Woods” (Aljoe 359). In fact, Pringle’s additional supplement to Prince’s narrative is an affidavit of her good character and trustworthiness. In his editorial supplement Pringle defends Prince against her former owners’ allegations of misconduct and impropriety by stating: “she is remarkable for decency and propriety of conduct – and her delicacy… has been a trait of special remark” (115). But this need for validation reminds us that Prince’s story is being told within the framework of white racism and imperialism. Ironically, the accompanying documents that verify Prince’s testimony and validate her character, only point to the need for this verification in the first place. Also, although Prince is a free person in England, she is dependent on her white abolitionist colleagues to maintain that freedom and enable her to return “home” to her husband as a free person. Within this context, The History cannot and should not be exempt from the power dynamics of white racism particularly considering Strickland and Pringle’s mediation.

Because of its legality The History of Mary Prince becomes concerned with revealing a stable and convenient ‘truth,’ that can be definitively identified and fairly
adjudicated. Of course, the judges in the court of law as well as public opinion are first and foremost the British readers. Indeed, the weight of her mission to “let English people know the truth” about slavery, demands a rhetorical strategy that considers and caters to a white British audience (Ferguson and Prince 94). So Mary Prince’s ‘truth’ is also shaped by the culture and expectations of that audience –the “English people.” Prince’s own awareness of and pandering to her white, legalistic, religious, British audience produces several silences in her narrative.

Specifically, Prince encodes silences concerning pre-marital sex or sexual abuse in her narrative. While we are allowed access to her understanding of herself in relation to her family, except for the mention of her marriage to her husband Daniel James in 1826, Mary Prince’s sexuality is censored from her life story. This omission is confirmed by later investigations into the veracity of her story, which found that Prince did indeed have a relationship with a white Sea Captain (probably the Captain Abbott mentioned in her story).

Unlike Mary Prince, The Long Song’s July does not aim to create an exposition of the brutality of slavery, or to cater to the mores of a British audience. In fact, July utilizes her creative license to craft a narrative that reinforces her dignity and humanity in the telling of her tale. Each version of her birth story marks her entry into the world as an important and mythical event. Despite being born into enslavement, she constructs narrative(s), which match her self-conception as a free woman. Besides the fact that the book opens with a rape scene, (an obvious affront to any 19th century British audience with Victorian sensibilities) July also describes her first consensual sexual encounter with her lover Nimrod (Levy 114). July displaces Prince’s silences, which cater to a British
audience, and intentionally uses omissions to indicate unresolved trauma. But Nimrod is killed because Caroline Mortimer decides to blame him for her brother’s death, rather than face her disinheritance as a consequence of his suicide. After witnessing her mother’s hanging, July skips over the details of the fall out from the uprising at Amity Plantation, and her reader is left to speculate about the missing events that turn “that mischievous girl,” we have come to know, into “a withered and mournful girl” (Levy 163) (Muñoz-Valdivieso 41). Her trauma is evident as she relays that “in her sleeping dreams, each tree she did gaze upon saw her lost-found-lost mama dangling there within the rustling leaves and sagging fruit” and “every mouthful she ate tasted only of Nimrod’s blood” (Levy 164).

Most of July’s silences, her most painful memories, are attached to her being dispossessed by the British Empire, specifically the loss of her children to England. July gives her son with Nimrod to Baptist missionaries (the Kinsmans) who take him to England, but she attempts to skip over this part of the tale. At first she refuses to discuss this in detail, despite her son’s particular emotional investment in the details of that story, because July wishes to suppress the pain of that part of her life. Again, she admonishes her editor son’s prodding for facts without regard for his mother’s trauma: “for he believes his mama should suffer every little thing again. Him wan’ me suffer every like t’ing again!” (Levy 164) Although she provides clues that allow her editor son to understand her decision to give him away, she never apologizes or expresses regret: her son was born very dark-skinned, a year before the Emancipation proclamation of 1833, to a very young July, still reeling from the loss of her mother and lover.
July’s various origin stories also highlight that the oral tradition embedded in the text, which relies on repetition and variation. July is not only the narrator but also the writer of her tale, a move that is not meant to privilege the written over the oral, but rather asserts the previously enslaved woman’s agency. In fact, Thomas Kinsman’s foreword, explains that July’s role as the author, stems from her sense of urgency to relay:

a story that lay so fat within her breast that she felt impelled, by some force which was mightier than her own will, to relay this tale … [so] the fable would never be lost and its several recitals, might gain a majesty to rival the legends told whilst pointing at the portraits or busts in any fancy great house upon this island of Jamaica (Levy 3)

July follows her son around the household blurting out her tale. Yet despite her deepest desire to immortalize story, she initially rebuffs her son’s suggestions that, as a literate woman, she write her own tale. July, is not only firmly grounded in the oral tradition, but she “began her life as a person for whom writing the letters ABC could have seen her put to the lash, for she was born a slave” (4). So although The Long Song is written instead of a narrated, it is still (in many ways, including its representation of Jamaican dialect) a “residually oral” text (Mitchell 3). She uses her retelling of multiple origin stories to indicate her grounding in the oral tradition, which in turn, and most importantly indicates the instability (and plurality) of narrative, all narrative, which is a useful foundation to establish, for intervening in the master narrative.
Before relaying yet another, less fantastical birth story, July tells us all the versions of her birth which have been told and retold to her, colored with improbable and fantastical elements:

with some tellings it was not rain that beat down upon July’s tender, newborn body, but the hot sun, whose fierce heat baked the blood from her birth into a hard scabrous crust upon her naked flesh. Other times, it was a wind that was blowing with so fierce a breath that her mother had to catch July by one leg before her baby was blown out of the cane field, over the big house and off into the clouds. While a further version had a tiger, with its long, spiky snout and six legs, sniffing at the baby July, thinking her as food. No matter what glorious heights her tall tale acquired, July always avowed that she had been born upon a cane piece. (Levy 15)

She relays all the possible versions of the story that she has received and, immortalizes them in script. With this, July proceeds to give her reader a less fantastical more grounded birth story, in which “Kitty, July’s mama, gave birth to her in a dwelling hut” (15). Our narrator is not actually concerned with the documentation of facts in her text; her real concern is with the revelation of her personal truth. In this way, the liberatory novel is overtly post-modern, counteracting notions of one absolute, stable truth. It destabilizes the racist master narrative, by enforcing alternatives.

However, July does preempt her reader’s suspicion that she is an unreliable narrator, by justifying the inclusion of this final “humdrum” tale, because she fears that “upon some later page you may feel to accuse me of deception when, in point, I am speaking fact, even though the contents may seem equally preposterous” (Levy 15). Here,
Julie confronts the difficulty of writing about slavery as an emancipated woman: narrative for her is an act of self-creation, using the raw material available to her from the oral tradition, but slavery is too weighty a subject to write about without some credibility, since she is aware of the dominance of the written master narrative, which excludes the enslaved persons perspective. Her use of the third person is both distancing and seductive, enticing the reader to stick with an obviously unreliable narrator. Thus, she begins again, this time with “the actual truth of July’s delivery into this world –” she gives us her word (15). So while *The Long Song* rejects objectivity and is more concerned with “disclosing the subjectivity and interiority” of an enslaved woman and her world, in order for the project to make the necessary historical interventions July reasserts her credibility to achieve her objective of narrative plurality (Mitchell 11).

July’s insistence on asserting her agency is specific to her need to intervene in the master narrative about slavery. (Chapter 2 will discuss her intervention in multiple master narrative(s) plural: we will see that she intervenes in both British colonial and Jamaican nationalist narratives). July is specifically disinterested in having anyone vouch for her account of her life, and asserts the authority of her embodied experience. Thus, *The Long Song* highlights the impossibility of accurate historical accounts of slavery from the perspective of the colonizer. So why accept the colonizer’s definition of modernity as an accurate representation?

**Conclusion**

In *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy rightly acknowledges that:

there is little attention given to the possibility that much of what is identified as post modern may have been foreshadowed, or prefigured, in the lineaments of
modernity itself. Defenders and critics of modernity seem to be equally unconcerned that the history and expressive culture of African diaspora, the practice of racial slavery, or the narratives of European imperial conquest may require all simple periodization of the modern and the postmodern to be drastically rethought. (42)

Indeed, the enslaved subject's experience is often overlooked in Euro-centric conceptualizations of modernity. Thus, as Gilroy himself states, we expect enslaved subjects to articulate subjectivities that are out of synch with the expectations of their time-periods. Yet, even as he presents evidence of the fragmented subjectivity of enslaved persons, he resists redefining modernity. Although he acknowledges that “the time has come or the primal history of modernity to be constructed from the slaves’ point of view,” Gilroy is content to articulate a counter-culture that exists alongside the same Eurocentric claims (55). Yet, *The Long Song*, as a liberatory narrative presents an already-fragmented, enslaved woman, living in the nineteenth century, who expresses the generative possibility of the culture of enslaved persons, and who is quite aware of her commodification and thus her fragmentation, counteracting assumptions about the unified modern subject.

Despite Gilroy’s hesitation, the work of revising modernity has long begun. Kwame Appiah, in his seminal essay, “Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?” published in 1991, two years before Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic*, offers a revision of modernity based on “the incorporation of all areas of the world and all areas of even formerly ‘private’ life into the money economy” (Appiah 34). Appiah is clear that this is the phenomenon that Max Weber mistook for the spread of ‘Enlightenment
reason.’ Andrea Levy’s *The Long Song*, shows the ways in which the 19th century woman, enslaved in the Caribbean, portends the absolute spread of commodification, which will come to be the foundation for all aspects of life. Indeed the spread of commodification necessitates regulatory instruments, in the form of family law, property and intellectual property law, for the designation of parts of, or whole bodies as capital. The *Long Song’s* offers a redefinition of modernity that positions the racialized terror of transatlantic slavery as the catalyst for the global spread of capitalism, thus producing the fragmented and commodified subject. While racialized slavery is not the only experience of racial terror, the experiences described by enslaved subjects themselves, point to transatlantic slavery as the harbinger of post-modernism. In failing to redefine modernity, Gilroy misses an opportunity to examine the ways in which, the grounding experiences and cultural formations of the Black Atlantic, foretell all current and future forms of existence for humanity.
CHAPTER 2

Questioning Double Consciousness: Mulatto Ambivalence in Andrea Levy’s *The Long Song*

Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* is based on two principles: the African diaspora’s inside/outside relationship to Western modernity, as well as the same diaspora’s inside/outside relationship to Western nationalisms. Gilroy launches this second claim through an appropriation of W.E.B Du Bois’ “double consciousness,” which, in the early twentieth century, questions whether one can be both a ‘Negro’ and an American. This question relies on the premise that there is an American nationalism that is exclusionary and contrary to the American black person’s experience. In short, Du Bois laments that to be black in America means that one must view oneself through the lens of the racist dominant perspective, as well as from point of view that is grounded in one’s experience as a racially marked, black person. “Double consciousness” is consistent with the concept of the fragmented modern identity –a sense of double-ness that comes from being an oppressed group living within the dominant and dominating society, and the inability to reconcile an African Heritage with a European one.

Gilroy identifies that double consciousness emerges from:

the unhappy symbioses between three modes of thinking, being, and seeing. The first is racially particularistic, the second nationalistic in that it derives from the nation state in which the ex-slaves but not-yet-citizens find themselves, rather than from their aspiration towards a nation state of their own. The third is diasporic or hemispheric, sometimes global and occasionally universalist. This
trio was woven into some unlikely but exquisite patterns in Du Bois’ thinking…Guided by the apparatus of his pan-Africanism and in explicit opposition to a mode of analysis premised on the fixity of the modern nation state as a receptacle for black cultures, Du Bois developed an approach to comprehending the political and cultural history of blacks in the west which was capable of focusing upon their conspicuous differences from one another and from blacks in Africa—past and present. (Gilroy 127)

Here Gilroy appropriates double consciousness to describe the conflict between three orientations: racial identity, national identity, and a transnational, diasporic, and sometimes Universalist perspective. Gilroy thinks that the conflict between race and nationality propels Du Bois to an outer-national pan-Africanism that is distinct from a pan-African nationalist outlook. However, Gilroy is misguided in using Du Bois transnationalism as a counteracting force to nationalism, particularly because many national narratives are transnational in their reach and not territorially bound. Grounded in this interpretation of double-consciousness, Gilroy positions his black Atlantic as fundamentally anti-nationalist, characterizing nationalism as necessarily monolithic and ethnocentric, thus making double-consciousness, in relation to national identity, inevitable for the black subject. However, Gilroy misses the fact that the true conflict occurs between black identity and white supremacy, which is already transnational, despite being woven into national narratives.

Andrea Levy’s liberatory narrative *The Long Song*, published in 2010, features a biracial character, July, who writes her autobiography as a formerly enslaved woman. She reconnects with one of her children, Thomas Kinsman, who grew up as a black man
in Britain in the 19th century. Kinsman becomes the editor of her tale – a tale in which July refers to herself as mulatto. This binary (mulatto/biracial) perspective should be emblematic of Gilroy’s articulation of double consciousness.

But while Andrea Levy’s *The Long Song* affirms Gilroy’s claims of double-consciousness, the novel dislocates the concept’s original articulation as a fracture between blacks and the nationalisms of their host countries in the West, and reorients Du Bois’ double consciousness as a transnational product of colonialism. July intervenes in British nationalist narratives to re-center Britain’s role in slavery and colonialism and to make room for its black subjects. However, July’s experience as a racially marked black subject, together with her aspirations towards whiteness, produce a mulatto subjectivity that is also ambivalent towards Jamaican, Black Nationalist narratives. Furthermore, her mulatto subjectivity also exposes Gilroy’s neglect of the influence of power relations in cultural mixing on the plantation or creolisation. Like many champions of the theory, Gilroy presents creolisation as a neutral process.

If Levy’s July, whose mulatto subjectivity signals aspirations toward whiteness, rejects the colonial perspective and is also ambivalent to the forms of black resistance necessary for decolonization, what new outlook does this Jamaican mulatto character foreshadow? I posit that *The Long Song* (supported by its contemporary, *The Book of Night Women*) portends a Jamaican nationalism that is distinctly creole. This creole nationalism emerges from the process of cultural mixing that takes place on the plantation, a process that remains intimately bound to the relationship of labor to capitalist production as well as socially and legally enforced racial hierarchies.
Ideas about creolisation are particularly significant to the Caribbean region, and the concept has evolved through various dissatisfying definitions. Creolisation, used here will refer to Shona Jackson’s definition in her work *Creole Indigeneity: Between Myth and Nation*. Jackson posits that creolisation is a process of cultural mixing as well as the means by which populations become native, and is predicated upon a relationship to capitalist production and the group’s identification as labor (Jackson 4-5). The Caribbean, formulated artificially for capitalist production, is comprised of cultures from all over the globe. Caribbean nationalisms, in most instances, emerge as creole, incorporating colonial, Black Nationalist and other narratives that reify diversity and plurality. However, this plurality is unmistakably grounded within capitalism. The plantation is the first point of contact for many (not all) of the cultures that comprise creole Caribbean identities. This attachment to the plantation (or other “nation-forming” sites of labor) grants imported populations an entitlement to indigeneity (even at the expense of marginalized indigenous peoples, where these native populations have not already been eradicated). One of the many valuable features of liberatory narratives is their ability to take us to the historical point of contact, the plantation, while projecting current resonances for the reader.

Levy’s liberatory novel questions Gilroy’s claim that “the essential trademark of cultural insiderism, which also supplies the key to its popularity, is an absolute sense of ethnic difference” (Gilroy 3). Double consciousness, although originally articulated by Du Bois as a relationship between the American ‘negro’ and his nation, is in fact a transnational phenomenon, experienced by most people who were colonized, particularly where that colonialism leaves an impact on the legal and education systems (that is those
institutions which manage class advancement and permanently inscribe the project of empire even within resistant narratives). Furthermore, many national narratives spring from a transnational orientation and account for the presence of national diasporas. Gilroy’s argument that nationalism is fundamentally incompatible with the rhyzomatic, creolisation that he identifies as a key characteristic of his black Atlantic, is unconvincing since it denies the plurality and contradictions within all nationalisms. The “there already” nature of the Caribbean diaspora, as emphasized by Andrea Levy’s *The Long Song*, highlights this point. Furthermore, although white supremacy emerges transnationally, its specific mutations demand analysis at the level of the nation-state, specifically regarding the socio-legal creation of racial subjects.

First, this chapter will examine how a black positionality is established in *The Long Song*, as well as its relationship to whiteness as an internal and external force. Then it will examine how nationalism (and local or territorial particularities) affects dynamics within Gilroy’s black Atlantic and question whether a black positionality is necessarily in opposition to nascent Jamaican nationalism.

**The Generative Possibilities of Enslaved Society**

In the first place, Du Bois’ double consciousness assumes a black positionality, which results in a collective psychological orientation that is in conflict with the narrative of the nation-state. Ultimately, any analysis of Gilroy’s black Atlantic, or the Black Atlantic, must account for how blackness is created as a social and legal designation. Orlando Patterson’s generalization (foundational to Gilroy’s black Atlantic) that the enslaved subject was “alienated from all ‘rights’ or claims of birth,” or that he/she “ceased to belong, in his own right to any legitimate social order,” disregards the role of
the culture, law and commerce in shaping the colonial project in the British West Indies and the complexities produced therein (Patterson 5). Andrea Levy’s *The Long Song* reveals that the legal and cultural fragmentation of the British Empire, as well as the global spread of capitalism facilitated by law, produce contradictions and paradoxes for the black person in the Caribbean in the 19th century. The instances in which the enslaved person’s subject hood is recognized, not only within slave society but also by society at large, produce possibilities for enslaved society, which shape the generative cultural potential for these groups. The factors influencing these instances of social and legal recognition begin as international (through the spread of colonialism), but become locally and territorially specific. Post-colonial nations and nation-states emerge on top of and in conjunction with these particularities, which Gilroy’s anti-nationalism dismisses.

In accordance with Patterson’s theory about the absolute power of the master over the slave, Caroline Mortimer, the mistress of Amity Plantation in *The Long Song*, builds a prison dungeon under the estate. In fact, there are many instances of brutal whipping and punishment in the novel, including when Caroline Mortimer had July “pinioned within the stocks,” as punishment for her alleged part in the Christmas riots (Levy 163). In Mortimer’s second year as sole caretaker for the estate, she “permitted a new dungeon to be created near the burnt-out hospital for the correction of those negroes who proved to be incorrigibly feckless” (173). Caroline Mortimer falls ill upon her “discovery” of the terrible conditions within her dungeon prison and July is able to influence her to instruct the overseer to close it (174-176). Slave owners had absolute rights to punish the person’s they enslaved, as they saw fit. However, public opinion and culture feature in their
decision-making as Caroline Mortimer is embarrassed that her Christian mores might be challenged upon the discovery of the conditions within her prison.

But what is the purpose of imprisoning an already enslaved person? Is this just an extended exercise of the master’s/mistress’ sovereign power? In her work *No Bond but Law: Punishment, Race, and Gender in Jamaican State Formation, 1780-1870*, Diana Paton highlights the contradiction involved in imprisoning enslaved persons. It is reasonable to assume that imprisonment is only effective in contrast with freedom since:

The penal theories of the Enlightenment rested on assumptions that derived from a free labor society. They assumed that the individual was a (masculine) free agent who calculated the costs and benefits of everything he did. He thus has the ability to make rational choices about whether or not to commit a crime…This concept of the individual was incompatible with the idea of the slave as entirely dependent on the owner’s will. Of course, slave societies had always circumvented this contradiction to the extent that they acknowledged the personhood of the slave sufficiently to hold slaves criminally responsible. (Paton 46)

The exercise of sovereignty in the slave owner’s imprisonment of the enslaved person, mimicking the penal code, lays the groundwork for the contradictory subject/object experience of enslaved persons.

At the same time in the 19th century, within slave territories in the British Empire, nascent state infrastructure begins to mitigate the sovereign power of slave owners. In response to Nimrod urging him to steal from his owners to but his freedom, Godfrey expresses his fear of “magistrates, treadmills and floggings” (Levy 99). Godfrey’s
mention of magistrates means that he understands himself to be a legal subject, even as an enslaved person. This is a contradiction that existed in many territories built on racialized slavery, including the United States. In *The Long Song*, this contradiction reveals that the dispersion of bureaucratic power to the state/colonized territory dissipates the absolute power that many owners have over the persons they enslave. The role of the magistrate in arbitrating disputes demands an acknowledgement of the enslaved person under the law. In many instances the enslaved person must be acknowledged as a subject, rather than just object. Since the court grants enslaved persons a “socially recognized existence outside of (her) master,” then that enslaved person is not, as Patterson asserts, “a social non-person” (Patterson 5). The simultaneous subject-object recognition of the enslaved person complicates the idea of wholesale social death.

Furthermore, *The Long Song’s* July identifies herself as mulatto in her narrative, which becomes a legal allocation in Jamaica from the eighteenth century. Colonial legal systems, which mutate territorially, make and unmake the subject hood of enslaved persons, but also make and codify racial categories. The tenth clause of the 1769 *Acts of Assembly Passed in the Island of Jamaica* clarifies “who shall be deemed Mulattoes” by stipulating that “no Person who is not above Three Degrees removed in a lineal Descent from the Negroe Ancestor exclusive,” shall be granted the privilege of whiteness (Act 1.179) (Salih 1). A person had to be at least three generations removed from the black ancestor, to no longer be considered mulatto. The choice of three generations removed from the black ancestor, besides being arbitrary, defines whiteness as its removal from black ancestry. This arbitrary designation is most likely influenced by ideas about the
interaction between ancestry and phenotype—an assumption that the physical characteristics assigned to blackness would no longer be visible.

In colonial Jamaica, the racial designation of mulatto was codified into law mainly to determine enfranchisement. The 1769 Acts of Assembly Passed in the Island of Jamaica was primarily used to ascertain who would be able to serve in Assemblies: “to qualify Persons elected to serve in future Assemblies in this Island; and to ascertain who shall be deemed Mulattoes for the future” (Acts 1.179) (Salih 1). Not only are race and citizenship inextricably linked in Jamaica under the British Empire, but race becomes a legal allocation, as well as a social one. It is important to note here, that Jamaican-born individuals, who are deemed white, become enfranchised (British citizens). This positions the black person (non-white person) as being in a permanently contentious relationship with the colonial state—the entity that eventually assumes the master’s previous right to sovereign power.

Considering the transfer of the slave owner’s sovereignty to the state, and race becoming a qualification for citizenship, it is not surprising that one of the most central issues of The Long Song is the issue of internalized racism that persists post-slavery. When July tries to gain entry to Miss Clara’s post emancipation dances intended for mulatto and quadroon women to meet and mingle with white men, Miss Clara accuses her of lying about her parentage. Miss Clara, a “quadroon,”¹¹ scoffs that July “is too dark for (her) papa to be white,” despite her repeated assertion to Clara saying “me is a mulatto” (Levy 204). Despite July’s knowledge that she is a product of rape, she invokes

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¹¹ A “quadroon” is a person who has one “mulatto” and one “white” parent; a person who is one-quarter black by descent.
her overseer father, Tam Dewar, to gain entry into a club that will lift her social class.

Her social class is directly linked to her racial designation.

Miss Clara, then goes on to examine July to verify her mulatto status. Miss Clara’s “scientific” examination of July considers “how far (her) nose lifted from her face…for no broad, flat nose was tolerated;” she lifted July’s hair to see if it “fell back or stayed up like fright,” because “straight with a little curl was best, be it fair, brown, red or black” (Levy 205). Race and class intersect making colorism a guide for socialization within black society. Miss Clara’s examination of July highlights the fact that the physical manifestation of racial features, or phenotype, is consequential to the individual’s social experience, a fact that in its fear of essentialism, Gilroy’s black Atlantic ignores.

July’s role as lady’s maid to her mistress Caroline Mortimer, and the fact of her biracial identity, influenced her interactions with other enslaved persons, even her collaborators. Her assigned race determines her rank in slave society. But while class, ethnicity and occupation divided slave society, these categorizations were even more important for dividing the enslaved and formerly enslaved populations from the whites (both British colonizers and creole/native whites).

Despite the legal and social frameworks that influence interactions within the society of formerly enslaved persons, the legal designations of mulatto, and social designations of “mustee” and so forth, were less consequential in their social interaction with whites, who preferred black and white as the only racial categorizations. When July insists to her former mistress Caroline Mortimer that she is “not a negro,” but a mulatto, Mortimer responds with scorn. She asks July “who on earth cares about that silliness?
You are a negro…” (Levy 296). Here, black positionality is influenced by the social acknowledgment of white society.

Despite July’s aspirations towards whiteness, she acknowledges her black positionality. While July insists on her mulatto identity to Miss Clara and Caroline Mortimer, there are other instances in her narrative, both during and after her enslavement, when she refers to herself as black. For example, while she being painted alongside the Goodwins, she asks: “Am I not the loveliest negro you ever did see” (Levy 242)? July displays the fragmented subjectivity of Du Bois’ double consciousness in referring to herself by the racial identity she assumes from a legal designation, as well as the racial identity allocated to her by whites on the island. In The Long Song double consciousness is in relation to the colonial state apparatus, and white society specifically.

**Motherhood**

Henrice Altink, in his essay "Deviant and Dangerous: Pro-slavery Representations of Jamaican Slave Women's Sexuality, c. 1780–1834," examines the way the sexuality of female slaves was represented in materials produced by Jamaican planters as well as metropolitan defenders of slavery, produced between 1780 and 1834. The documents emerge from the fact that abolitionists’ attacks on slavery usually centered on the treatment of slave women. In the metropolis at that time female purity was invaluable, so sexual abuse of female slaves was a main area of contention between abolitionists and defenders of slavery (Altink 272). Slave women’s sexuality was also a main concern regarding the viability of the slave system, particularly after the end of the slave trade in 1807.
The Long Song, through July’s sexuality and experience with motherhood, shows the force of whiteness within the process of cultural mixing. July’s mulatto subjectivity revolves around her sexuality – she is confident in her attractiveness to Robert Goodwin, and aware of the benefits of such a relationship. Of course, the significance of mulatto sexuality is determined by the specific, territorially distinct, legal and socio-economic context. Although Goodwin lives beneath the Great House in a domestic partnership with July, he marries Caroline Mortimer to elevate his rank from a lowly overseer to the master of the estate – a propertied gentleman. Levy no doubt draws inspiration for her plot from legal and sociological documents and data, including census reports, if not from direct historical documents. Towards the end of the 18th century and into the 19th century, there were very few white women who were permanently settled in Jamaica. It was too expensive for planters to encourage employees (overseers etc.) to travel with families and most planters didn’t settle. Slave women had both voluntary and involuntary sexual relationships with white men. Some slave women had “housekeeper” or live in relationships with white men that were socially recognized relationships. Altink highlights the fact that high numbers of colored offspring (especially those who gained freedom for various reasons) threatened to destabilize the racialized society during slavery. Enslaved and free blacks were at the bottom of society, but those free persons of mixed parentage had a middle position or a rank similar to or exceeding whites, especially when they acquired economic status or skill. On the plantation colored slaves were “generally exempted from heavy labor in the fields and employed around the house” (Altink 274). “Housekeepers” in particular were a danger to the plantation system
because of their influence on white men, and their ability to get inheritances for their sons.

For the female mulatto in 19th century Jamaica, the possibility of increasing the social status of her progeny by outbreeding blackness is linked to her sexuality. July is exact in calculating the benefits of her whiter skin:

For a mulatto who breeds with a white man will bring forth a quadroon; and the quadroon that enjoys white relations will give to this world a mustee; the mustee will beget a mustiphino; and the mustiphino…oh, the mustiphino’s child with a white man for a papa will find each day greets them no longer with a frown, but welcomes them with a smile, as they at last stride within this world as a cherished white person. (Levy 203)

Although “mustee” and “mustiphino” are social and pseudo scientific designations, rather than legal ones, these nominal identifications emerge through the absolute importance of racial designations to the organization colonial society. July’s fears of producing “a retrograde child,” a child for a mulatto and white man or a quadroon and white man, who appears “blacker” than expected, reminds the twenty-first century audience that while race is a legal and social allocation, these designations are also constructed around bodies (as mentioned above regarding Miss Clara’s physical examination of July) (203).

These various terms, which create and refer to persons of mixed raced ancestry, were particularly important for enslaved and formerly enslaved women, who could not benefit from the benevolence of white fathers who might devise their sons. So their reproductive functions become very important to the generational possibility of social mobility. Furthermore, the fact of July’s existence as a mulatto, born as an enslaved
person, (as well as her procreation with a white man) undermines any British claim to an ethnocentric nationalism: July is a direct product of the project of empire, which cannot be erased from British history.

The novel, in its focus on the experience of the enslaved and formerly enslaved woman, as well as the legal constructions of race, highlights the embodied experience of blackness. Yet, despite the physicality/embodied aspect of blackness, the fact of ancestry complicates the idea of a black positionality. July’s daughter, Emily Goodwin, because of her fair complexion and fine features, is stolen by Caroline and Robert Goodwin and taken to England. Based on Emily Goodwin’s ability to ‘pass’ as white, she may never discover her heritage. But if she does, can she be denied participation in Gilroy’s black Atlantic? After all, Gilroy states that the “politics of fulfillment,” with regards to the black Atlantic as a “counter-culture” of modernity, is “practiced by the descendants of slaves” (Gilroy 37). Hypothetically, how might Emily Goodwin, having lived as a white woman in England, come to participate within Gilroy’s black Atlantic, based on revelations about her heritage? More importantly, will the revelation of her heritage cause Emily Goodwin to assume a black positionality, even if her body still signifies whiteness?

If double consciousness is dependent on a black positionality that results in a group consciousness, there must be an experiential, embodied aspect that produces this black particularity. In his Black Atlantic, Gilroy is particularly keen to reject the ethnocentricity he identifies in Black Nationalism, in favor of:

a pluralistic position which affirms blackness as an open signifier and seeks to celebrate complex representations of a black particularity that is internally
divided: by class, sexuality, gender, age, ethnicity, economics, and political consciousness. There is no unitary idea of black community here, and the authoritarian tendencies of those who would police black cultural expression in the name of their own particular history or priorities are rightly repudiated. The ontologically grounded essentialism is replaced by a libertarian, strategic alternative: the cultural saturnalia which attends the end of innocent notions of the essential black subject. (32)

Here Gilroy leaves blackness open to interpretation: an “open signifier,” or a sign without a referent. Gilroy’s black Atlantic centers the memory of transatlantic slavery and he uses of the ship as a “central organizing symbol,” because ships “immediately focus attention on the middle passage” (Gilroy 4). Reference to the middle passage in Gilroy’s black Atlantic, positions blackness as both ancestrally and experientially grounded. However, while ancestry is a key part of the legal and social process of assigning blackness, a black positionality (necessary for double consciousness) can only be arrived at through a lived experience, as well as an identification with the community for a shared consciousness. Black consciousness as a knowledge position must be dependent on an experience – an experience of a “veiled world” or a perspective that is somewhat inaccessible to whiteness (Gilroy 127).

Furthermore, how do we celebrate the complex representations of black particularity if blackness in a non-specific signifier? The Long Song reveals the legal maneuvers that are invested in defining whiteness, as well as the social deployment of whiteness as a property right, emphasized by the Goodwin’s theft of July’s child, and how this whiteness is always positioned in relation to the distance from blackness.
Considering its roots in legal systems, blackness as an open signifier still operates as an oppositional force to whiteness. The benefit of this oppositional force is that blackness can be deployed against the discourse of whiteness in totality, even considering the diversity in the embodied experience. The Black Atlantic, must actively position itself as an oppositional and intervening force to whiteness, for any analysis of its internal divisions, since these divisions are ultimately linked to discourses associated with white supremacy. Blackness within the Black Atlantic, must become a political orientation that is linked to a racially marked body.

**Commodification**

Besides its dependence on a black positionality, double consciousness as a transnational phenomenon has always been linked to capital. Gilroy rightly states that, “where lived crisis and systemic crisis come together, Marxism allocates priority to the latter while the memory of slavery insists on the priority of the former” (Gilroy 40). In spite of Gilroy’s reluctance to acknowledge the significance of embodied aspects of blackness, this particular line of reasoning seems to imply the prioritization blackness as a lived experience, even in relation to Marxist analysis, which prioritizes class considerations. The Black Atlantic can contribute important racial perspective to Marxist analysis.

In *The Long Song*, July’s nemesis, Miss Clara, a fellow mulatto woman, while still enslaved by the owners of the nearby Unity Plantation, derides July about her dress while visiting with her masters for the Christmas dinner. Although July was “wearing her best…within the shade of Clara’s distinction, she felt as ragged as a half-plucked turkey” (Levy 81). July wears “her missus’ discards; a worn-out cotton dress drained away from
bottle-green to an exhausted grey,” which “because it had once wrapped all of her missus, unpicked and pulled out, the ugly fabric stretched for yards” (81). July staunchly defends her owners against Clara’s accusations that “your massa have no money for white muslin for you” (81). Both Clara and July are deeply invested in defending their owners’ wealth since, as enslaved persons their esteems are wound up in the same system of profit extraction that enslaves them.

The interaction between physical designations of blackness (phenotype) and accumulation of wealth complicate hierarchies within the Black Atlantic, especially where colorism is a factor. July’s interaction with free blacks, during slavery is a particularly interesting and historically accurate feature of The Long Song. During slavery, Nimrod, July’s son’s father berates Godfrey, the headman, “a light-skinned man with opportunity as abundant as pods on a tamarind tree,” for not having bought his freedom yet (Levy 99). Godfrey, who describes Nimrod as “black as sin, ugly, sly, rough, rude and no taller than a girl,” resents Nimrod’s status as a freeman, since in every other way, he would be judged as beneath Godfrey (100). Nimrod and Godfrey recognize that Godfrey’s complexion is a form of capital.

However, Nimrod is able to buy his freedom through cunning; he “poached from the massa –behind his back and before his eyes –to raise that precious cash” (Levy 100). Nimrod, feeling no remorse for his theft, wisely explains to Godfrey that an enslaved person cannot in fact be a thief because “when you take property from your massa for your own use, him loses nothing…for you be his property too…all is just transferring” (Levy 99). Nimrod exploits the system, which objectifies him, by taking possession of himself. Nimrod has no remorse for his theft and cunning, because he recognizes the
fundamental inequalities and contradictions within the system. Despite this, Nimrod is eventually blamed for Caroline Mortimer’s brother’s suicide and is murdered so she can comfortable inherit her brother’s estate. Whiteness, within a system of commodities, still trumps blackness, even if that blackness has access to capital. So while, Gilroy’s black Atlantic is attentive to internal divisions and contentions, it is not attentive enough to the operation of whiteness as social capital operating within his black Atlantic.

As previously discussed, enslaved persons in the 19th century are at the mercy of the sovereignty of their owners, but they are also subject to the transition from sovereign power to bureaucratic administration—a transition that facilitates the spread of global capitalism. As such, Nimrod, as an objectified and commodified person, is able to participate in market capitalism, and eventually buy his own freedom and legally recognized subjecthood. But this legal subjecthood, still does not equate to whiteness. Again, the liberatory narrative shows the way in which law and markets function in simultaneously making and unmaking subjects, particularly in the transition from concentrated sovereign power to the spread of a decentralized, administrative bureaucracy that supports capitalism. While this is of course, a global phenomenon, within a system of colonialism, the demarcation between the beneficiaries and the dispossessed are not just distinctions of class, but also distinctions of territory (and eventually country). Taken together, July’s loss of her children, the reparations to former slave owners, as well as the repatriation of the estate owners to England, emphasize the territorial significance of a global phenomenon. Commodities are extracted from one territory and given to another. Britain has plundered and dispossessed the territory of Jamaica. This does not necessarily mean that all Britons have been beneficiaries and all
‘Jamaicans’ (both historically territorial residents and national citizens) have been deprived (considering the fact that whites born in Jamaica were acknowledged as British subjects); but, even as globalization complicates interactions, these legacies of extraction and enrichment persist, since the world continues to be organized around nation states, with one set of citizens requiring visas for entry, and the other set having unrestricted access and mobility.

These revelations undermine the core of Gilroy’s black Atlantic claims, since art forms expressing a localized experience, are inextricable from national contexts. While Gilroy privileges music as the artistic form of the black Atlantic, in his attentiveness to hip-hop, he fails to recognize that the global force of hip-hop is not separate from the imperial power of the United States. Even as a truly hybrid art form, with roots in Jamaican dancehall culture, hip-hop is inseparable from the particular technologies and capitalist backing that allow for its proliferation, recognition and impact. The genre also originated as an outlet for the specific experiences of blacks in America’s urban centers. It is both general and highly specific.

**Narrative Plurality**

Levy’s *The Long Song* writes against Britain’s national narrative, which erases its culpability in transatlantic slavery, in favor of its role in abolition. Robert Goodwin’s participation in the plantation economy, despite his abolitionist roots, reveals his culpability in slavery and colonialism. The novel’s treatment of abolitionists demonstrates slavery as a generally corrupting (and corrupted) system because it prevents slaveholders from living up to the “metropolitan norm of masculine restraint” (Altink 272). After the “apprentices,” who Robert Goodwin comes to Jamaica to save, refuse to
work under his directive, he has a mental breakdown. The missionary abolitionist is especially implicated and represented as an unstable schizophrenic. Goodwin’s mental breakdown is emblematic of the contradiction of his white savior complex and his “troubling attraction he felt for the negro house servant,” which he dare not admit to his abolitionist father (Levy 236). Though Robert Goodwin’s father wrote of ending “the injustice of that abominable state of slavery,” he is still implicated within the dominant narrative of British racism, which mutates and hides behind the veneer of benevolence after the end of slavery (237). Although July’s relationship with the new overseer Robert Goodwin briefly elevates her social status, Goodwin’s allegiance to whiteness destroys their relationship despite his abolitionist stance. Both Robert Goodwin and his father are emblematic of the centrality of ‘enlightened,’ liberal racism in British nationalist narratives. Colonization is also a traumatic event for the colonizer who is unable to withstand any reality that differs from his expectations.

July performs double consciousness as she sidelines this master narrative in her account of her life, and very clear in identifies the master narrative as the white, British perspective. She banishes any reader who is interested in “the puff and twaddle of some white lady’s mind,” to look towards the cannon of books which live on “any shelf…wrapped in leather and stamped in gold” (Levy 10). July positions her perspective in opposition to that the dominant narrative about the Caribbean, written primarily by visiting white ladies from England. She is aware of the white, British perspective and exploits it when necessary (playing to their prejudices as acts of resistance during her enslavement); however, she is not simply content to pander to this perspective in telling her story. Her narrative intends to make and intervention.
From the beginning, July dismisses all potential readers who expect “waxing upon the nature of trees when all know they are green and lush upon this island,” and warns that the “white missus will have you acquainted with all the many tribulations of her life upon a Jamaican sugar plantation” (Levy 9, 10). She references the popular portrayals of life in the West Indies again when a pregnant July joins her lover Mr. Goodwin, in a painting of himself and his wife, Caroline Mortimer. This painting by “a Mr. Francis Bear,” who “produced, in his evidently short life, many portraits of Jamaican planters and their families,” is implicated in the bias and silences in the master narrative (233). When an “old-distiller-man” named Dublin Hilton happens upon the set up for the painting, he enquires about why Mr. Bear erases the “higgledy-piggledy of the negro village,” and replaces any sign of black life with “another bush” (252). *The Long Song* intentionally intervenes in the British literary and artistic cannon to expose its erasure of slavery, colonialism and black life from the dominant national narrative.

With both of July’s children being raised in Britain, Levy’s text asserts that the slave past is entwined in British heritage. Ethnocentric narratives of conquest require the silencing of opposing testimonies for their validation. British, ethnocentric nationalism crumbles with the entry of new information and perspectives about the diasporas that empire creates. Within the same empire, July’s son is a free black subject, while she remains enslaved. The fragmentation of the British Empire means that there is a distinction between those persons living within colonized territories and those (still) colonized bodies living within imperial metropolis: Thomas Kinsman is a free subject, even while July is still technically enslaved.
These territorial differences produce legacies that are consequential to July and Thomas’ familial bond and interactions when they eventually reunite. July spars with her editor son whose British education and upbringing position his sensibilities within the master narrative, despite being called “black Tom” and ostracized by racism in England. Thomas Kinsman is well educated by a Baptist couple, and becomes a skilled printer in England when they take him there. More importantly, his residence in Britain as a freeman reinforces the British Empire’s failure to contain the contamination of colonialism.

Although July’s son is a collaborator and facilitator in the writing of her story, *The Long Song* emphasizes the importance of amplifying alternative narratives that aren’t positioned within the imperial metropoles (which includes America’s major cities). The legacy of legal fragmentation of the British Empire means that living within a British metropolis grants Kinsman the access and mobility denied to those in the colonized outposts. The twenty-first century reader of Levy’s liberatory narrative might recognize tourism as one of the tangible ways in which legacies of mobility and privilege persist. Thomas Kinsman’s double consciousness is distinct from July’s. July, as a former slave, has internalized white racism, viewing whiteness as a form of capital and social mobility. Despite Thomas Kinsman rejection of white racism, his gratitude for his education and life as a freeman, in Britain undermine his ability to resist the dominant perspective, since he first needs to make space for the possibility of alternative narratives.

Of course, birthplace is not a predictive component of a person’s politics or privilege. However, birthplace can be predictive of access to technology as well as mobility. Kinsman is able to repatriate to Jamaica with the technology and skills
necessary to open a printing house. The power play between July and her son, at the extradietic level of the novel, foreground divisions within Gilroy’s black Atlantic that demand attention to territorial distinction (which becomes nation-state based nationalism), even if nationalism is inadequate as the only framework for analysis. Levy’s twenty-first century liberatory narrative demands that her reader examine the persistent international structures that require that Jamaicans get visas to visit Britain (the former colonizer), while British citizens travel freely to most of the former colonies.

Furthermore, while dismissing the white writer’s obsession with the natural environment and the white woman’s narcissistic interest in her own discomfort adjusting to life in the colony, July craftily reminds her reader that the white writer’s “particular distress [is] so there might be sugar to sweeten the tea blacken the teeth of the people of England” (Levy 10). She continues to let her reader know that as she writes she has “a cup of sweetened tea…but sweetness comes at a dear price here upon this sugar island” (10). Although July writes an intimate and personal tale, her life story is embedded within a larger narrative of colonialism, globalization and economic disparity. The inhabitants of the sugar producing island, can barely afford the commodity that they were enslaved to produce. These territorial disparities persist.

The pinnacle of July’s narrative occurs in conjunction with the Baptist War of 1831-1832. Despite her son’s urging that she account for the events of the Baptist War (also known as the Sam Sharpe rebellion), July silences him and reminds her reader that “news did not travel as it does today,” so most on Amity Plantation, would not have immediately known of the war across the island, the naming of which (Baptist War) she calls “an invention” (Levy 90). She sidelines facts and figures in her story in favor of the
liberatory act of creating a free subjecthood through narrative. For those who desire a historical account, July warns her reader against reading a pamphlet written by the planted John Hoskin, since it is full of inaccuracies, but recommends the pamphlet with the title *Facts and documents connected with the Great Slave Rebellion of Jamaica (1832)* written by a Baptist minister named George Dovaston (90).

When July directs those in her audience who might be interested in the facts of the Baptist War towards an account by a Baptist Minister (most likely an abolitionist) and away from a report written by a planter, she reveals the fact that even ‘historical’ accounts are contestable. Even the master narrative is comprised of contesting accounts, with the British planters occupying one side of the debate, while religious abolitionists (a group with even more internal fragmentation) occupying the other. Any stable British nationalist narrative, whether it incorporates or silences colonialism, is a construction.

Also, July dismisses a key symbol of Jamaican Black Nationalism within her narrative. Sam Sharpe, the central figure of the Baptist War is one of Jamaica’s seven national heroes. Jamaica has six national heroes and one heroine (Nanny of the Maroons). July’s ambivalence towards the pivotal Baptist war is symbolic of her ambivalence towards what will become a major symbol of Black Nationalism within Jamaican nationalism. If Fanon’s theory about the necessity of violence for decolonization holds true, *The Long Song’s* July, as a non-violent bystander, symbolizes the persistence of colonial structures and ideology (Fanon 1-62).

Levy’s *The Long Song* is not unique in its portrayal of a mulatto character’s ambivalence to both British and Jamaican national symbols. In Marlon James’ 2009 neo-slave narrative *The Book of Night Women*, his protagonist, a mulatto woman Lilith,
refuses to participate in a rebellion that is organized and led by her mulatto half-sisters. Her allegiance to black resistance is complicated by her housekeeper relationship with the white overseer Robert Quinn. Lilith lives a tumultuous life, punctuated by a series of attacks to which she responds with ever increasing violence. But when it is time for the rebellion she decries violence and even saves her father Jack Wilkins, who is responsible for raping her mother and many other enslaved women at Monpellier Estate. James neo-slave narrative, despite having some liberatory aspects, is more invested in exposing the violence of slavery, rather than the preservation of the dignity of the enslaved woman. Furthermore, while July is in control of her narrative, Lilith does not tell her own story. So *The Book of Night Women* will not be treated as a liberatory narrative here. However, similar to *The Long Song*, James’ female mulatto protagonist outlives many of the persons within her community and her story lives on. Most importantly, both these Jamaican neo-slave narratives feature ambivalent mulatto protagonists, validating Levy’s portrayal of her July. James’ *The Book of Night Women*, also characterizes the maroons, in their (historically accurate) role, as collaborators with the British. Maroons in Jamaica, to maintain their freedom, returned runaway slaves to their owners. Nevertheless, Nanny of the Maroons, remains the only national heroine, alongside Sam Sharpe, the leader of the Baptist War/Christmas rebellion. James’ neo-slave narrative and Levy’s liberatory narrative highlight the contesting narratives that comprise Jamaican nationalism.

Rather than rooted in Africanist cultural elements, these texts (*The Long Song* and James’ *The Book of Night Women*) position creolisation as predicated upon an acceptance of (if not an aspiration towards) whiteness. Both these novels center on the mulatto characters that outlive their peers, are privileged with literacy, and the ability to tell their
stories. Creolisation in the Caribbean begins at the site of the planation, where “settler practices of belonging” are constructed (Jackson 4). In this way, creolisation is a process that is always rooted in and oriented towards whiteness, if we understand capital to be one of the main features of whiteness. This is a significant reminder that while double consciousness emerges in America and Britain, in the context of majority white populations, double consciousness emerges in many Caribbean countries in the context of white colonization, but the absence of significant white populations (in most cases). Power shifts to the ‘brown’ or creole class symbolized by July and Lilith, characters whose ambivalence highlights their awareness of the narrative plurality embedded in all nationalisms. So, double consciousness in the Caribbean, is not a relationship to the nation-state, many of which have Black Nationalist narratives interwoven in their nationalism, but a relationship to white supremacy which is a global, capitalist orientation. Thus, the black positionality created by Caribbean processes of creolisation, in the context of creole nationalism, is not a double consciousness created by a relationship to nationality, but rather a double consciousness created by a relationship to transnational white supremacy, predicated upon a relationship to capital.

Conclusion

In his affinity for creolisation, Gilroy underestimates the power dynamics involved in cultural and ideological mixing, which Andrea Levy’s July clearly displays. *The Long Song* portends the evolution of creole nationalism in Jamaica, and challenges Gilroy’s conceptualization of nationalism in highlighting that nationalism is not territorially bound, or necessarily in conflict with a black positionality. The irony of Gilroy’s theory about the African diaspora is that it fails to account for key characteristics
of diasporas. Although Jamaica is still a part of the British Empire at the time of his repatriation to his birth land, July’s son is very much a part of Jamaican history. Even the classification of the novel, *The Long Song*, is a contested issue: is it British or, is it Jamaica, or is it both and is this classification dependent on the author’s nationality or the novel’s subject matter? Of course *The Long Song*, is both a British and a Jamaican novel, highlighting the fact that the project of empire leaves indelible marks on both nations (Britain and Jamaica) and their multiple narratives are permanently intertwined.
CONCLUSION

Redefining the Black Atlantic

Gilroy’s black Atlantic provides the theoretical tools for us to begin to understand the significance of the transatlantic slave trade in creating a black diaspora. However, so many of Gilroy’s claims have gone uncontested, without rigorous parsing. Although they haven’t all been covered in this thesis, *The Long Song*, as a liberatory narrative, exposes Gilroy’s failure to redefine modernity as a retreat from the political work his theory aims to do. Furthermore, his application of Du Boisian double consciousness depends on a reductionist definition of nationalism and does not consider the possibility of emergent creole nationalism from the Caribbean.

In redefining the Black Atlantic, Gilroy’s move towards transnationalism in his black Atlantic will be retained, while also maintaining nationalism as a valuable, but not entirely adequate mode for understanding identity, cultural formation and social relations. This consideration is not an assertion or reaffirmation of the already disproved links between culture and physical location/territory. On the contrary, it adheres to the concept of nations as already transnational “imagined communities,” a concept developed by Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* and built on by thinkers like Stuart Hall and Arjun Appadurai. There must be an accounting for the specific systems at work in the production of identities and their localized mutations. Nationalism still matters as long as access to capital and mobility determine who gets to travel, relocate, and own cultural production (physical and intellectual property) within the Black Atlantic.
However, one of the most valuable aspects of examining the limits of Gilroy’s black Atlantic is a reconsideration of his sidelining of Black Nationalism and Afrocentricity. Gilroy opines that:

With a few notable exceptions, critical accounts of the dynamics of black subordination and resistance have been doggedly monocultural, national, and ethnocentric. This impoverishes modern black cultural history because the transnational structures which brought the black Atlantic world into being have themselves developed and now articulate its myriad forms into a system of global communications constituted by flows. This fundamental dislocation of black culture is especially important in the recent history of black music which, produced out of racial slavery which made modern western civilization possible, now dominate its popular cultures. (Gilroy 80)

Gilroy rightly criticizes that many pan-African and Afrocentric movements are not attentive enough to the history of slavery, and regard their African heritage as “momentarily interrupted by slavery and colonialism” (190). Gilroy astutely highlights that this allegiance to a linear narrative, and imagined greatness (which in many cases focuses only on the civilizations of Egypt and Ethiopia) stagnates Africa in the minds of the diaspora and misses the significance of transatlantic slavery in altering world history. However, Gilroy is disingenuous in characterizing all Afrocentric movements as always ignoring “the transnational structures which brought the black Atlantic world into being.”

12 Afrocentricity is a school of thought developed and explained by Kete Molefi Asante in his most popular publications, *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change* (1980), *The Afrocentric Idea* (1987). Afrocentrism or afrocentricity was developed as a cultural ideology that centers the contributions of African peoples to human advancement, since many of these contributions and achievements were downplayed or erased to justify colonization and slavery.
since finding the international connections between Africanist forms of expressions and tracing these back to their sources is central to many of these projects, which cannot and do not avoid transatlantic slavery. Even Rastafarianism, which is often criticized for its myopic focus on Ethiopia, at the expense of the diaspora’s West African roots, is grounded in the experience of slavery, as its musical expressions often evoke. While this is a gesture which reifies “tradition,” and in which “Africa is retained as one special measure of authenticity,” it is nonetheless a transnational project, which uses Africa (albeit a self-serving invention of Africa) as a source of connection (191).

Yet, Gilroy obscures the possibility that a gesture towards Afrocentrism is not always a gesture towards the mummified past or the traditional, but rather a tracing of heritage and community. Merely recognizing the Africanist cultural forms that resist suppression and survive in diverse and generative ways, can be labeled “Afrocentric,” because of the contrast with Anglophilia. These Africanist cultural formations, that emerge as artistic expression and language, serve an identifying and unifying function within the Black Atlantic: that is, how the Black Atlantic recognizes itself. Gilroy’s black Atlantic, grounded in the experience of slavery, without any gesture to towards the origin of the diaspora, or Afrocentrism, can easily become a black Atlantic grounded in aspirations towards whiteness, particularly if lamentation and death become the central unifying forces as Gilroy’s exposition expresses. Ultimately the political function of the Black Atlantic should be to use its knowledge position, which is dependent on the inside/outside experience of racially marked bodies, to intervene in the dominant discourse, and nullify that discourse’s ability to (re)create race and other hierarchies of power.
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