Research Article

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Re(Claiming) Body and Mind: Maternal Discourses and Black Female Sexuality in Gayle Jones's *Corregidora*

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abstract

The corporeal, psychological, and sexual experiences of Black women constitute a critical site of intersectional analysis, where heteronormative, class-based, racial, and gendered systems of oppression converge. The reclamation of bodily autonomy and cognitive agency, alongside the reconstruction of sexual identity, necessitates Black women's strategic negotiation of what Patricia Hill Collins terms the "matrix of domination." Consequently, sexuality emerges as both a contested terrain and a locus of resistance, offering pathways toward individual and collective empowerment. Black women writers have consistently interrogated the complex negotiations inherent in simultaneously embodying the identities of "woman," "Black," and "American" across distinct historical epochs.

This study, grounded in African American feminist theoretical frameworks, examines the pivotal role of historical narratives and maternal discourse in the construction of Black female sexual identity as depicted in Gayl Jones' seminal novel *Corregidora* (1975). Through close textual analysis, this paper contends that protagonist Ursa Corregidora engages in a deliberate process of deconstructing the inherited maternal and historical narratives that have circumscribed Black women's sexual agency. The analysis demonstrates how Ursa subsequently reconstructs her sexual identity through a dynamic interplay between three symbolic domains: the maternal body (womb), collective historical trauma, and the transformative power of Blues music as cultural expression. This triadic framework reveals the complex mechanisms through which Black women negotiate inherited trauma while asserting sexual autonomy and cultural identity.

Keywords: empowerment, sexuality, identity formation, the blues, black feminism

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Liberated woman. I know what I am, and I know what I want.
Beverly Marsden

1. INTRODUCTION

The reconstruction of sexuality and the assertion of bodily autonomy constitute foundational preoccupations within African American women's literary tradition, representing both thematic consistency and theoretical intervention across temporal and generic boundaries. Contemporary Black feminist scholars and creative writers have undertaken systematic efforts to destabilize hegemonic historical narratives that privilege and perpetuate representations of the sexually violated Black female body as inherently vulnerable and available for exploitation. The institution of slavery functioned as a totalizing system that produced racialized and gendered subjects positioned as inherently subservient, systematically degraded, and economically commodified through both productive and reproductive labor.

Harriet Jacobs's seminal narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) exemplifies the slave woman's testimonial genre, providing critical documentation of the mechanisms through which enslaved women were reduced to economic units valued primarily for their reproductive and sexual commodification. However, the transmission of survival strategies across generations paradoxically resulted in the perpetuation of plantation ideology within post-emancipation maternal discourse. This intergenerational transmission limited Black women's subjectivity to reproductive function, positioning them as "breeders" rather than recognizing their full maternal agency and personhood. Zora Neale Hurston's canonical novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) also illustrates this phenomenon through the character of Nanny, whose advocacy for marriage as economic security reflects the internalization of patriarchal protection myths despite her own experiences of sexual violence under slavery. Nanny's famous assertion that "de nigger woman is de mule uh de world" (1937, 14) simultaneously acknowledges Black women's systematic exploitation while reproducing the very ideologies that construct them as beasts of burden. Similarly, Great Gram in Jones's *Corregidora* embodies the perpetuation of reproductive instrumentality, demonstrating how trauma responses can inadvertently reinscribe the logic of the plantation economy.

Resistance to this ideological legacy necessitated multifaceted interventions across philosophical, political, social, and literary domains. Black feminist activists and literary critics initiated comprehensive cultural movements designed to facilitate community consciousness-raising while simultaneously addressing intergenerational trauma through the excavation of suppressed family histories and the restoration of severed maternal genealogies.

The intersecting systems of slavery and white supremacist ideology functioned to construct racialized female sexuality through the deployment of controlling images that justified ongoing exploitation. Patricia Hill Collins identifies three primary stereotypes—Mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebel—that operate as ideological mechanisms for rationalizing the sexual objectification of Black women while obscuring the structural violence that produces their subordination. These archetypal representations have demonstrated remarkable persistence, continuing to circumscribe contemporary African American women's romantic and social relationships through the reproduction of hypersexualized expectations and dehumanizing assumptions.

Bell Hooks' comparative analysis of racial and sexual exploitation reveals the particular brutality of sexual violence within the broader context of racialized oppression: "racist exploitation of black women as workers either in the fields or domestic household was not as de-humanizing and demoralizing as the sexual exploitation" (1982, 24). This observation underscores the ways in which sexual violence functions not merely as individual trauma but as a systematic technology of racial subjugation designed to fragment Black women's psychological integrity and communal bonds. The internalization of white supremacist definitions of Black female sexuality represents what Antonio Gramsci would term as hegemonic domination—the process through which oppressed groups come to accept and reproduce the very ideologies that justify their subordination. Enslaved and post-emancipation Black communities were subjected to comprehensive psychological conditioning designed to naturalize these hierarchical arrangements and suppress alternative frameworks for understanding Black female subjectivity.

Annecka Marshall's analysis illuminates the contemporary ramifications of this historical process: "objectification of black women as creatures of sex … influences [their] identity and relationship" (1996, 5). This observation points toward the need for what Collins terms "self-definition"—the creation of oppositional knowledge systems that center Black women's own understanding of their bodies, sexuality, and subjectivity as a form of epistemic resistance to dominant cultural narratives. The literary and theoretical work of Black feminist writers thus represents more than aesthetic intervention; it constitutes what Audre Lorde identifies as the transformation of silence into language and action, creating new discursive possibilities for articulating Black female agency beyond the constraints of historical objectification and contemporary stereotyping.

2. ANALYSIS of *CORREGIDORA*

African American feminist critics and writers aimed to dismantle the constructed body politic that subjugated and limited female body reproduction. They created an intellectual and theoretical map that resisted the patriarchal control of sexuality, fertility, and pleasure. They aimed to challenge the idea that biology is a woman's destiny. According to Meena G. Sabala "women's bodies are primarily social constructs that define their experiences femininity in intersubjective relationships with others" (2010, 44). To problematize the construction of female body, mentally and physically, for procreation and male, African American women writers such as Gayl Jones, Toni Morrison, Toni Cade Bambara, Alice Walker, and Ntozake Shange complicated traumatic history, the impact of maternal discourses, motherhood, and the relationships between black men and women. Their arguments and endeavors initiated black feminist, and womanist approaches to empower black women and problematize their physical and sexual subjugation and exploitation. Within this context, Gayl Jones, in her 1975 novel *Corregidora,* challenges and complicates the "intimate violence and historical legacy of violation" (Davies 2005, 25). Jones's approach aims to liberate women from ancestral discourses, rape, and abuse within and across the races. She also seeks to challenge the perpetuation of the legacy of exploitation that cannot be understood without relating it to the Afro-American feminist movement.

It is acknowledged that black feminist thought dates back to Sojourner Truth and Anna Julia Cooper. Sojourner Truth, a former black slave and an abolitionist, addressed the audience at Ohio Women's Rights Convention with her historically famous speech "And Ain't I a Woman?" Later, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper established the NACWC (National Association of Colored Women's Clubs= and published her anti-slavery poem "Eliza Harris." Starting with Toni Morrison and her

first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, African American women authors, using slave narratives as literary foremother texts, problematized the black women's condition and the impact of white ideology. This encouraged black scholars and thinkers to seek for and introduce the principles of black literary criticism and black feminist theory to address their unique problems and concerns. Toni Cade Bambara edited the first anthology: *The Black Woman: An Anthology* (1970). Another significant manifesto that contributed to the development of the African American feminist movement and literary tradition was the Combahee River Collection.[1]

In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2000), Patricia Hill Collins states that "African American women's oppression has encompassed three interdependent dimensions, "the economic, political and ideological" (2000, 4-5). The economic dimension involves labor and capitalist exploitation of black women labor. The political dimension excluded African American women from voting and working at public offices. The ideological dimension refers to cultural, racist, sexist, discriminatory ideologies that permeate social structure, which is regarded as usual unless complicated. In *Corregidora*, Jones depicts the impact of inherited sexual trauma among the descendants of exploited slave women within the matrix of domination, to borrow from Collins, intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Within these intersecting forces, rape and commodification of the black body became one of the central arguments that violated black women's wholeness.

Assuming discourses create that subject and body in a system in which they are embedded, we can see how power operates within this system to develop different discourses. For Michel Foucault, discourse can be "both an instrument of power and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy" (Foucault 1990, 101). Thus, power represents a "complex strategic situation in a particular society" (93). In other words, power is the structure of force relations within a society tied to discourse–cultural modes of understanding. As a corollary of power, resistance develops. In this sense, power is productive as it enables the suppressed to renegotiate the existing discourses and establish alternative discourses to reconstruct the new identity while deconstructing the old one. In this vein, African American literary critics, bell hooks, Barbara Christian, Patricia H. Collins, Adriane Rich, and Audre Lorde, to name a few, implemented mechanisms necessary to generate discourses on sexuality and sexual identity in order to resist the suppressive power and craft and liberate bodies. Ursa embodies the African American feminist movement's politics and enacts its principles by fighting against the power that asks her to give birth to new commodities. Thus, as we will discuss below, she finds ways of dealing with the oppression to liberate her body and mind.

Black women's sexuality reveals the convergence of heterosexism, class, race, and gender. In order to reconstruct their sexual identity, black females have to overcome multiple oppressions. For that reason, their sexuality becomes a site of resistance, which constitutes a path to empowerment

[1]They declared their purpose as follows: "We are a collective of Black feminists who have been meeting together since 1974. During that time, we have been involved in the process of defining and clarifying our politics while at the same time doing political work within our own group and in coalition with other progressive organizations and movements. The most general statement of our politics at present would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As Black women, we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face."

In "Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," Audre Lorde, one of the pioneers of the Black Feminist Criticism, notes:

> What are the words you do not yet have? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you sicken and die of them, still in silence? …. I am the face of one of your fears. Because I am a woman, because I am black, because I am a lesbian, because I am myself. (1978, 42)

Lorde encourages self-achievement and self-realization through negotiating and deterritorializing the sovereignty of heteronormativity by reterritorializing the power/discourse dichotomy through which sexuality is uttered. Lorde articulates the need for resisting dominant values and urges women to act and voice their perspectives. Resistance would end the fears that the black female has been experienced historically. In this sense, Gayl Jones wrote perceptively about the precise inflections of racial and gender difference to black women's experience of being both black and female have attained unprecedented levels of political and academic recognition by the turn of the twenty-first century. Like other black women writers, Jones challenged and problematized the representations of the differences that emphasized gender and race within power and resistance discourse. In so doing, she attempted to explore the meaning of being a "woman," "black," and "American" at different historical moments. Jones explains the relationship between black men and women. The rhythm and the repetitions in blues indicate that the simultaneity of various actions reminds the complicated men-women relationship and black female sexuality.

On sexuality, Foucault notes that "sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct" (1990, 105). Sexuality is our construction, and it is not only discovering our secret and suppressed desires. Cultural-based variations play a significant role representing diverse sexual relationships, heteronormative and homosexual, and psychic shifts. Culture and community construct the sexual identity according to the world view they occupy. Therefore, cultural and communal discourses become a vehicle of introduction into the narratives of gender, sexuality, race, class, and agency. Ifeona Fulani aptly notes that "there are ways in which the history of enslavement and colonization, sexual exploitation, abuse and commodification of black female bodies created an extreme burden on the sexual identity of some black women" (Fulani 2011, 1). Similarly, in "The Occult of True Black Womanhood," Ann duCille points out that "in the twenties, the fascination with the black female body, in particular, and the primitive sexual anatomy and appetite attributed to the African women increased the degree to which black female functioned as an erotic icon in the racial and sexual ideology of Western civilization" (1994, 592). Sexuality is rooted in the body's materiality, yet it is culturally, socially, and historically defined, constructed, and articulated. Since the constructed sexuality is a discursive site, power and resistance fluctuate to renegotiate the sexuality. Within this context, Jones's text opens up a series of crucial moments to contemporary African American feminist criticism that challenges historically generated race, gender, and identity problems. In *Corregidora,* Jones exemplifies reconstructing or recreating oneself in moments of resistance when one is challenged by race, gender, sexuality, family relations, and history's traumatic impact.

2.1. Maternalism and Sexuality

The reconstruction of Black female sexual identity constitutes a central theoretical concern for this analysis, as it challenges essentialist conceptualizations of Black female sexuality as a fixed

identity category. Instead, this study positions sexuality as a dynamic site of negotiation, resistance, and reimagining. Frantz Fanon's psychoanalytic framework provides crucial insight here:

"if one wants to understand the racial situation psychoanalytically…as it is experienced by individual consciousness, considerable importance must be given to sexual phenomena" (1970, 160). This psychoanalytic lens reveals how racial trauma becomes inscribed upon and experienced through sexual subjectivity, necessitating an examination that moves beyond surface-level identity markers toward deeper psychological structures.

The theoretical intervention of this study lies in its challenge to maternal discourses that have historically demarcate Black female agency. Rather than accepting these discourses as deterministic, this analysis positions them as contested discursive and rhetorical terrains where identity emerges as "a site of active agency, desire, and performance." Ashraf Rushdy's observation that "Corregidora is able to define the limits that a slave past can and should have on her, learning both the value and the dangers of remembering generation" (2000, 274) illuminates the complex negotiation between historical inheritance and individual agency. Ursa's paradigmatic resistance operates across multiple dimensions: she disrupts the politics of silence that have traditionally governed Black female experience, challenges the commodification of Black female bodies, and resists both vertical (intergenerational) and horizontal (contemporaneous) forms of oppression. Through this multifaceted resistance, she transforms Black sexuality and identity into new representational forms, articulated most powerfully through the blues tradition.

In *Corregidora*, maternal discourses function as what Marianne Hirsch calls complex ideological formations "based on maternal experience and capable of combining power and powerlessness, authority and invisibility, strength and vulnerability, anger and love, [that] construct sexuality to perform a historical task" (1989, 167). This theoretical framework reveals how sexuality becomes instrumentalized within intergenerational trauma transmission, serving historical rather than individual purposes. The process of renegotiating and reconstructing sexual identity within this context presents considerable theoretical and practical challenges, as it requires simultaneous engagement with and resistance to inherited traumatic narratives. Jerry W. Ward Jr.'s analysis positions Ursa as "imbued with this primitive belief in the duty of a black woman, connected as it is to a circumscribed vision of woman's possible development" (1982, 100), highlighting how patriarchal ideologies become internalized through generational transmission. This internalization exemplifies what bell hooks theorizes as the ongoing "devaluation of black womanhood [that] occurred as a result of the sexual exploitation of black women during slavery" (2015, 54). Ursa's characterization embodies hooks' theoretical framework while simultaneously problematizing the naturalization of these inherited constraints through maternal discourse.

Employing Michel Foucault's theoretical framework of power and resistance, Barbara Bush's analysis identifies "women's control over their bodies" as constituting "power relations at a most basic level," noting that "Power over women was exercised through control over their sexuality, a form of oppression rarely experienced to the same degree by slave men" (1996, 204). This gendered analysis of power relations reveals how sexual control functions as a primary mechanism of domination. Ursa's resistance operates on dual levels: it disrupts the intergenerational transmission of exploitative power structures embedded within ancestral narratives while simultaneously engaging in what Rushdy identifies as healing work, "motivated by the need both to bear witness and to heal the mind" (2002, 277). Through this dual process, Ursa recuperates her subjective agency and liberates Black female sexuality from the commodifying constraints of both Black and white patriarchal gazes, ultimately reconstructing sexual identity as a site of empowerment rather than exploitation.

Toni Cade Bambara observes that "one of the most characteristic features of [the Black] community" is the pervasive "antagonism between [Black] men and women" that reproduces white supremacist power structures within intimate relationships (1970, 106). *Corregidora* inaugurates its narrative with a visceral demonstration of masculinist violence that results in the protagonist's forced hysterectomy, establishing the Black female body as a contested site of interracial power dynamics. The novel's opening sequence dramatizes this foundational trauma: Mutt's jealousy-driven assault propels Ursa down a flight of stairs following her nightly blues performance, precipitating a miscarriage and subsequent hysterectomy that renders her permanently sterile at twenty-five. This act of intimate partner violence positions Mutt as both epistemic and corporeal threat, embodying what bell hooks identifies as the internalization of patriarchal dominance within Black masculinity.

Barbara Bush's incisive analysis reveals that "where sexuality and reproduction were concerned, slave women were quadruply burdened by both black-and-white patriarchies and by both gender and racial oppression" (1996, 210), a framework that resonates powerfully with Deborah King's theoretical concept of "multiple jeopardy." This intersection of oppressions exemplifies the systematic commodification of the Black female body across political, economic, and sexual domains. For Ursa, the womb and reproductive capacity constitute the primary markers of sexual identity imposed through historical indoctrination—a psychological inheritance that perpetuates what Freed identifies as the way "slavery remains alive in the present" (2011, 409). The profound disconnect between physical intimacy and emotional experience becomes evident in Ursa's sexual relationship with Tadpole McCormick following her hysterectomy. Despite engaging in physical intimacy, Ursa's psychological response—or lack thereof—reveals the depth of her trauma. Her acknowledgment that "she feels nothing when Tadpole is inside her" demonstrates how the surgical removal of her reproductive organs has severed not merely her biological capacity for motherhood, but her fundamental connection to sexual embodiment itself. This detachment illustrates the lasting psychological violence of reproductive coercion, where the Black woman's sense of self remains inextricably linked to her commodified reproductive function even after its physical elimination.

Tadpole's response to Ursa's reproductive trauma reveals the extent to which Black male sexuality has been similarly colonized by reductive ideologies that fragment intimacy into functional components. His crude assertion—"I want to help you… Damn you still got hole, ain't you? As long as a woman has a hole, she can fuck" (1975, 82)—epitomizes what bell hooks identifies as the internalization of white supremacist sexual paradigms within Black intimate relationships. This reduction of female sexuality to anatomical availability demonstrates how the commodification legacy of slavery continues to foreclose possibilities for authentic erotic connection between Black men and women, transforming sexual intimacy into a mechanistic transaction rather than a site of mutual vulnerability and pleasure.

Tadpole's formulation exemplifies what Lisa Hinrichsen terms the historical sedimentation of violence, the ways in which "distinctive acts of violence are located in and entangled with historically and socially sedimented modes of denial, disavowal, and misrecognition" (2015, 4). His inability to recognize Ursa's psychological devastation, coupled with his reductive focus on anatomical function, reveals how plantation-era objectification continues to shape contemporary Black sexual relations through what might be termed "inherited emotional illiteracy," the incapacity to recognize or respond to trauma beyond its material manifestations. Ursa's internalized response—her anxious questioning of "what good [she is] for a man" (Jones 1975, 25)—depicts the profound extent of her psychological colonization by patriarchal valuation systems. This rhetorical formulation is

analytically significant for several reasons: it reveals her inability to conceptualize female worth beyond male utility; it demonstrates the absence of autonomous desire or reproductive longing in her self-reflection; and it exposes the foreclosure of interiority that prevents readers from accessing her deeper psychological processes. This narrative strategy functions as what Toni Morrison calls "unspeakable things unspoken"—the traumatic silences that structure Black women's subjectivity within patriarchal discourse.

The text's refusal to grant access to Ursa's inner emotional landscape regarding potential motherhood represents a deliberate aesthetic choice that mirrors the historical silencing of Black women's reproductive desires and maternal ambitions. This absence functions as presence—the very inability to articulate maternal longing becomes a symptom of the ways in which slavery's reproductive instrumentalization continues to colonize Black women's imagination of their own possibilities. Her self-denial and diminished self-worth operate as manifestations of what Patricia Williams terms "spirit murder," the psychological violence that accompanies material oppression. Through Ursa's fragmented subjectivity, Jones interrogates the mechanisms through which patriarchal norms reproduce within Black women's self-conception, demonstrating how oppression is internalized. The protagonist's inability to imagine worth beyond male validation reveals how thoroughly plantation logic has penetrated contemporary Black gender relations, transforming women into perpetual supplicants seeking validation for their diminished existence.

This analysis aligns with Patricia Hill Collins' theoretical framework positioning sexuality as both autonomous oppressive system and constitutive element of intersecting dominations: "sexuality can be conceptualized as a freestanding system of oppression similar to oppressions of race, class, nation, and gender, as well as part of each of these distinctive systems of oppression" (2000, 134). Her sterility becomes the precondition for reconstructing alternative forms of sexual subjectivity within what Houston Baker terms the "blues matrix, "a cultural framework that privileges improvisation, survival, and transformation over biological reproduction and patriarchal validation. The hysterectomy thus operates as both violent rupture and enabling condition, severing Ursa from reproductive duty while creating discursive space for articulating desire beyond maternal function. This liberation enables her eventual navigation toward blues-inflected sexual agency that privileges personal pleasure and creative expression over genealogical obligation and male approval.

Domestic violence functions like a conduit through which Ursa renegotiates her sexuality, deeply influenced by familial history. In other words, Ursa's act of subversion, as Butler puts out, is a "product of the terms of violence," which opens a possibility to oppose the existing power and discourse and creates her own space (Butler 1990, 122). Ursa can subvert hegemonic discourses and signify black female sexuality through this space and operations of power. As Sirene Harb acknowledges, "in her quest for self-refashioning, Ursa revisits, and works through, the controversial implications of the trans-generational tales that dominated her childhood, in order to determine the limitations that she should impose upon the invasive slave past and its haunting details" (Harb 2008, 118). Rejecting discursive oppression and the stories that Great Gram told her, she breaks the yoke of the past and the limitations the past imposed upon her. Through Ursa and giving her the discourse rather than language to tell of her sexual identity, Jones contributes to growing discussions of black womanhood's sexual politics and uses the Blues as a literary device to empower black women.

To create a distinct and unique form of resistance, Black feminist critics, according to McDowell, "ought to move from this Black women writer employ literary devices in a distinct way, and to compare the way Black women writers create their own mythic structures" (1980, 158). In *The Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins asserts that "Black women's sexuality is either ignored or included primarily concerning African American men's issues" (2000, 124). Ursa has nightmares about her ancestral past after the hysterectomy and says: "I dreamed with my eyes open. All the Corregidora women with narrow waists and high cheekbones and wide hips. All the Corregidora women dancing. And he wanted me. He grabbed my waist" (Jones 1975, 61). Simon Corregidora, a Portuguese Brazilian plantation owner, repeatedly raped three generations of Corregidora women—Ursa's great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother— and prostituted the women to white men. bell hooks argues that "the political aim of this categorical rape of black women by white males was to obtain absolute allegiance and obedience to the white imperialistic order" (1982, 27). The slave women's body is consumed for male pleasure and capitalist investment. The body is commodified both as a sexual object and as a breeder. As Marshall succinctly explains, "under enslavement the endeavors of slave-owners to increase the fertility of Black women in order to maximize profits entailed the systematic control of the sexuality of female slaves" (Marshall, 1996, 8). This practice, as Ursa problematized saying, "he made them make love to anyone, so they couldn't love anyone" (Jones 1975, 104), prevented the Corregidora women from taking pleasure and desiring sex.

In *Reconstructing Womanhood*, Hazel Carby notes that "the exploitation of black sexuality led to the repression of passion and the repression or denial of female sexuality and desire" (1987, 174). For that reason, Ursa's quest to reclaim her sexuality, desire, and subjectivity opens up possibilities to leave the traumatic impact of the past behind and encourages her to desire and hate for her own sake and pleasure. To reclaim their bodies, minds, and desires, black women resisted victimization through their sexuality and created a paradigm shift to emphasize their commitment to productivity that would distort gazes on the sexuality. The historical discourses that supported negative stereotypes influenced the way black men and community perceive black women. Since Simon Corregidora commodified Ursa's matrilineal descent during slavery in Brazil, the idea of making new generations and rape haunts Ursa in her nightmares. Corregidora wants to dance with her. Ursa is afraid that Corregidora would commit incest with her as he did with her grandmother and mother and use her as a concubine to give birth to new commodities since every child born from slave women became a "golden" commodity for the master. Jones, through Ursa, problematizes the "procreation [as it is] a slave-breeder's way of thinking" (1975, 22). Corregidora's utterances such as "Ain't even took my name. You Corregidora's, ain't you? Ain't even took my name. You ain't my women" exemplify the traumatic effects of past stories (1975, 61, emphasis in original). The dreams and flashbacks throughout the novel are inextricably entangled with conflicting and overlapping historical formations.

Historically formative discourses and moral practices played a significant role in constructing and limiting the space of identity and the subject- what Foucault calls "modes of subjectivation" (1990, 32). To resist and challenge the historical formations, Jones highlights the fact that Ursa's challenge to traditional manifestations of sexuality is "detachment toward oneself and the Constitution of relation with oneself tending towards the destruction of the form" of the constructed self (1990, 69). Ursa shows that subjectivation entails freedom, aesthetics practices, technologies of the self, and modes of self-fashioning. Madhu Dubey agrees with Jones's assertion that by memorizing and narrating their history, the Corregidora women aim to free themselves from historical traumas and "claim the power of their wombs" to assert the power of maternity denied by "Corregidora's incestuous violence as an oppositional strategy" (qtd. In Fulani 2011, 11).

Therefore, Ursa must find a way to separate her from traumatic and undesirable epistemic and corporeal violence of the past in order to self-fashion herself.

In this sense, losing the womb becomes a discursive practice and acts as a resistance to the historical narratives and maternal discourses. The act breaks the ties with coercive subordinate domination that slavery imposed on the black body. The subordination, which is mostly inescapable, is fixed by birth and race. Ursa's resistance alters these formations as her empowerment "requires transforming unjust social institutions that African Americans encountered from one generation to the next" (Collins 2000, 273). In this sense, losing the womb, I would argue, initiates the process of empowerment, which provides analytical inquiry of choice and fascination that would liberate her from constructed black female roles and sexuality. In other words, this act would enable her to control her own desires, pleasures, and choices. Thus, by ignoring or rejecting the constructed identity, Ursa dismantles the exploitative logic that equates sexuality to productivity. In addition to that, she politically and historically refuses misrecognition or non-recognition and authentically becomes "a whole human being" (Douglass 2004, 26).

2.2. The Blues as Recuperative Force

The theoretical significance of alternative expressive modalities becomes paramount in understanding Ursa's resistance to hegemonic structures that seek to constrain Black female subjectivity. The blues emerges as a critical counter-hegemonic space what might be theorized as a site of aesthetic subjectivation that enables the transformation of traumatic experience into empowered articulation. This process operates beyond mere emotional catharsis; it constitutes a fundamental reconfiguration of power relations through cultural production. Houston A. Baker Jr.'s seminal theoretical contribution in *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature* (1984) provides the conceptual framework for understanding this substitutive dynamic. Baker's definition of the blues matrix as "a womb, a network, a fossil-bearing rock, a rocky trace of a gemstone's removal, a principal metal in an alloy, a mat or plate for reproducing print or phonograph records" (1984, 3) offers multiple metaphorical registers for comprehending the blues' generative capacity. The explicit invocation of "womb" establishes the theoretical foundation for understanding how aesthetic practice can function as reproductive substitute—not merely compensating for biological loss but providing an alternative mode of creation that exceeds the limitations of biological reproduction.

This matrix functions as what might be theorized as a cultural womb—a generative space that produces agency, recognition, and subjectivity for Ursa. Her psychological journey, occurring "within her psychological boundaries" (Nunes 2010, 69), represents more than individual healing; it constitutes a fundamental reconfiguration of her relationship to historical trauma, collective memory, and prescribed social roles. Through this reconstructive process, Ursa moves beyond the constraints of her ancestral inheritance to claim what might be understood as presentist agency—the capacity to determine her own relational and sexual terms. The novel's conclusion, which positions Ursa in a relationship of potential equality with Mutt, suggests the successful completion of this reconstructive project. Her achievement of relational equality emerges not through the recovery of biological function but through the cultivation of alternative forms of power and agency mediated by blues aesthetics. This transformation demonstrates how cultural production can function as a site of decolonizing work, enabling the reconstruction of Black female subjectivity beyond the constraints of historical trauma and biological determinism.

Steven C. Tracy's theoretical framework positions the blues as "an assertion of autonomy and a consolidation of power within the context of a world that wishes to diminish or eliminate that power" (2004, 123). This formulation reveals how aesthetic practices function as more than artistic expression; they become mechanisms of political resistance that operate through cultural rather than directly confrontational means. As a blues singer, Ursa`s blues performance transcends individual artistic practice to become a vehicle for transmitting collective memory while simultaneously asserting individual agency. Through this dual function, she navigates the complex terrain between historical obligation and personal liberation. Similarly, Ann duCille's critical observation that the blues "are the metaphor around which Jones works the magic of her text, the medium she uses to enable Ursa to tell her story" (1994, 567) shows the metafictional dimensions of this aesthetic strategy. The blues functions not merely as thematic content but as structural methodology or a narrative technology that enables the articulation of experiences that resist conventional representational modes. This aesthetic framework becomes particularly significant when considered alongside Ursa's physical trauma and reproductive loss.

The theoretical implications of Ursa's transition to performing at Happy's extend beyond career pragmatism to encompass what might be understood as reproductive substitution through cultural production. The blues becomes an alternative generative capacity: a means of producing cultural rather than biological offspring. This substitution operates through what Tracy characterizes as the "creative celebration of [...] overcoming of hardship" (2004, 123), transforming sites of trauma into sources of empowerment. Through blues performance, Ursa reconstructs her relationship to productivity, creativity, and legacy, establishing aesthetic creation as a form of resistance to the biological determinism that has historically constrained Black female agency.

This process of aesthetic subjectivation enables Ursa to reclaim what might be termed as her sexual sovereignty—not merely the right to sexual pleasure, but the broader capacity to determine the terms of her own embodied experience. The blues provides a discursive space where traumatic memory can be transformed into empowered narrative, where historical burden becomes cultural resource, and where individual healing contributes to collective resistance. In this formulation, aesthetic practice emerges as a crucial site of decolonizing work, enabling the reconstruction of subjectivity beyond the constraints of historical trauma.

> What do you remember?
> I could feel your thing. I could smell you in my nostrils.
> What do blues do for you?
> It helps me explain what I can't explain. (1975, 56, emphasis in original)

The ontological permanence of the blues in Ursa's experience and her assertion that blues "is something you can't lose" (Jones 1975, 97) establishes a crucial dialectical relationship between loss and retention, absence and presence. This formulation gains theoretical significance when positioned against the traumatic loss of her reproductive capacity: while the physical womb has been surgically removed, the blues emerges as an inalienable cultural inheritance that cannot be severed from her embodied experience. This permanence functions as both consolation and compensation, offering a form of generative capacity that transcends biological determinism.

Grace McEntee's theoretical intervention positions the blues as fundamentally resistant to categorical containment, noting that "the blues defies the definition of categorization" (2006, 94).

This definitional elusiveness becomes theoretically productive when considered alongside McEntee's broader claim that the blues, "whether a musical form, broader aesthetic framework, stylistic element or underlying mood that inspires them, ranks as one of the formative artistic forms in African American expressive culture" (2006, 94). The blues' categorical fluidity mirrors its functional versatility in Ursa's reconstructive project: it operates simultaneously as artistic practice, therapeutic process, and political strategy. Through this multivalent engagement, Ursa deploys blues aesthetics to articulate what might be understood as a revolutionary sexual politics—one that challenges both the commodification of Black female sexuality and the reduction of women to reproductive function.

The blues in Corregidora emerges as a form of working-through that operates beyond traditional therapeutic models, engaging cultural memory and collective experience as resources for individual healing. Caroline Brown's analysis illuminates the complex temporal dynamics inherent in blues-mediated healing: "What begins with closure becomes increasingly multifaceted as Ursa … submerges herself within her reflections and the blues process itself, which is not only her singing but the struggle to understand and work through her feelings of rage, resentment, bitterness, and conflicted desire" (2004, 121). This formulation reveals the blues as more than performative outlet—it constitutes a psychological methodology that enables the transformation of traumatic affect into empowered subjectivity.

With the blues, Ursa resists the social, political, and psychological dimensions of misrecognition and domination. In other words, her resistance is the embodiment of affectionate relations between personality, sexuality, political experiences, and language within the scope of the struggle for her sexual identity and representation of the black female body. In that subjectivity, Ursa can define her sexual identity by resisting and removing "rocky traces of a gemstone," which is the legacy of slavery, and the roles assigned to the black female body, and she unearths her consciousness and identity, which were hidden by ancestral discourses" (Baker 1984, 3). With her memories, Ursa resembles "a fossil-bearing rock," which carries essential evidence from the past that conveys messages to future generations. The matrix to transfer the evidence and told and the untold story of the past is the blues. Baker explains:

> The blues are a synthesis. Combining work songs, group seculars, field hollers, sacred harmonies, proverbial wisdom, folk philosophy, political commentary, ribald humor, elegiac lament, and much more, they constitute an amalgam that seems constantly to have been in motion in America – invariably becoming, shaping, transforming, and displacing the peculiar experiences of Africans in the New World. (1984, 5)

Thus, Jones affirms the blues' role as recuperative, shaping, and transforming discourse of power, which "witnesses to painful misfortune or sexual conditions" (McEntee 2006, 94). It shapes Ursa's new identity and transfers her from a commodified black body to a liberated, empowered, and autonomous black body that resists exploitation of both black and white males. Baker also notes that "the blues comprise a meditational site where familiar antimonies are resolved in the office of adequate cultural understanding" (1984, 6). Therefore, Ursa has to create her own song. 'A song,' she says, that would touch [her], touch [her] life *and* theirs' (1975, 59, emphasis in original). Her song aims to express "troubles and desires of [Ursa as a] performer or her sympathetic audience" (McEntee 2006, 94). Similar to the devastating conditions that inspired the blues in its historical course, the painful situations and memories inspire Ursa to sing a song that would mark her identity achievement.

The maternal and historical discourses divided the body and the mind. When Ursa loses her womb, her body and mind are separated and cannot reunify due to the painful memories of her past. Ursa realizes that giving birth to new generations "has different kinds of meanings: that while it is a literal call to make babies, it is also a call to pass on important history about slavery to others, which she can do with or without a womb" (Allen 2002, 268). As mentioned above, black women created a paradigm shift to avoid negative stereotypes about her sexuality and found motherhood as a protective shelter. Losing her womb takes away her sanctuary: motherhood. This is significant because to reclaim her body and mind, Ursa does not need the protective space of motherhood and her sexuality, which denied her subjectivity. For that reason, blues as a productive force and culturally enriching performance, challenges constructed discourses on sexuality and shifts Ursa's victimization to her triumph. By "shaping, transforming, and displacing the peculiar experiences" and recuperating maternal discourses' traumatic effect, the Blues help Ursa construct a sexually autonomous and sensuous identity (Baker 1984, 5). With the recuperative force of the blues, she discovers that she can desire sex and have pleasure because the blues "help her to explain what [she] can't explain" (Jones 1975, 56). As Angela Y. Davis argues, "the historical context within which the blues developed a tradition of openly addressing both female and male sexuality reveals an ideological framework that was specifically African American" (1998, 4). The blues reveals the possibility of a productive narrative to transmit cultural and historical memory to future generations. The blues also helps her to introduce survival strategies for those who used to suppress their hysteria. Ursa wanted a "song that would touch" her life "*and* theirs" (Jones 1975, 59). Ursa becomes a symbol, and through the blues, she creates her defense mechanism against the exploitative system of slavery that abused black women. The blues acts as a conduit to usher their silence and passivism into an eloquent and active struggle against the black body's commodification.

The blues act as a consciousness-raising force that would strengthen the black female body. Despite its recuperative function, the blues is described as worldly music and is associated with the devil. Songs that do not glorify God are considered devilish and are not sung in churches because of various themes such as sexuality, infidelity, loss of a lover, and injustice. For that reason, blues songs may be destroyed in terms of religious understanding as the lyrics are not conducive for church congregations. In this sense, the blues are used as a force against historical and social rhetoric and against religious rhetoric that may subjugate free thinking. There are moments in which the text exemplifies the notion that the blues is regarded as devilish. This fact is articulated through Ursa's mother in the following manner:

> -Songs are devils. It is your own destruction you're singing. The voice is a devil.'
> -' Naw, Mama. You don't understand. Where did you get that?' 'Unless your voice is raised up to the glory of God. (1975: 53)

The blues, challenging already established discourses of dominancy, becomes the political language of the oppressed. In other words, it creates a space for resistance to false, distorted, and reduced conceptions of black female identity and sexuality. When Ursa talks to her mother, she aims to manifest her creative agency and deny a formative conflicting aspect of the mother-daughter relationship to explain the role of the blues in reconstructing her sexual identity when she says, "Yes, if you understood me, Mama, you'd see I was trying to explain it, in blues, without the words, the explanation somewhere behind the words" (1975, 66). Through her discourse, she rejects the matrix of oppression, which impedes Ursa's ability to use proper reasoning. As Ana Nunes states, "the Corregidora women's historical text is uttered to object to and replace a master's narrative that tried to

erase them from the memories of humankind" (2011, 79). The blues replaces the master's narrative and gives Ursa a voice to reconstruct black female sexuality and define her own philosophy of existence.

For Ursa, the blues as a performance represents profound crucial adjustability and elated life force. The rhythm and cadence in blues convey a much deeper meaning to the listeners than the words, which dominates the novel's final scene. For the significance of the blues songs, Davis notes, "The blues songs […] offer us a privileged glimpse of the prevailing perceptions of love and sexuality in post-slavery black communities in the United States" (1998: 41). From this perspective, Ursa sees herself "desperate [and] eventually abandons her damaged self-definition to sing" and empowers herself (Gottfried 1994, 568). It is striking that Ursa vehemently wants to sing after the hysterectomy. Ursa remembers a dialogue with Mutt, which is significant in terms of the role of the blues, reminding us of the "call and response" technique that creates a considerable coherence that unites the body and the mind through the rhythms:

> "What bothers you?"
> "It bothers me because I can't make generations."
> "What bothers you?"
> "It bothers me because I can't."
> "What bothers you, Ursa?"
> "It bothers me because I can't fuck."
> "What bothers you, Ursa?"
> "It bothers me because I can't feel anything" (Jones 1975, 90)

Rejecting silence and Eurocentric discursive systems with her dialogue, Ursa emphasizes that internalizing the blues is the best way to overcome her trauma. For her, the blues creates a social and political space free of anxieties, worries, and sadness. Thus, instead of maternal and historical narratives that always reminded her of the fact that for many slave women experienced: "her father, the master. Her daughter's father" (Jones 1975, 59), Ursa creates a culture-based narrative form to free herself from the psychological bound of the past and reclaim her own story and mind.

The blues' recuperative function works well with Ursa in her journey to self-actualization and reconstructing her sexuality. Dubey argues that "toward an expression of black feminine sexuality and identity, the blues also passionately engages with the masculine, interrupting the feminine continuum affirmed in matrilineal theory" (Dubey 1995, 263). In the final scene during the act of fellatio, which may be read "as psycho-political position-taking in a neo-slavery situation," Ursa reclaims her own desire and achieves sexual control over her partner (Gysin 2004, 147). The blues helps Ursa "to explain what [she] can't explain" (Jones 1975, 56). Now, she is conscious of the power she had; her self-empowerment reminds us of what Beverly Marsden succinctly puts in the epigraph I used, 'I see myself as an achiever. I see myself as an independent liberated woman. I know what I am, and I know what I want' (qtd. in Marshall, 1996, 32). Ursa as an achiever, embracing the power of control, knows what she wants. The blues provides a discursive public space that complicates and destroys sexual oppression and denial of maternal discourses on productivity.

Although it seems that the fellatio scene is servicing of the male, subordinated to male pleasure, in which Ursa is on her knees and hold Mutt's ankles while she is performing fellatio, it actually empowers her as she has the power to control the whole process. There are two different criticisms of this final scene. While some critics such as Bruce Simon reads the scene as a "literal return to the history of slavery" (Simon 1997, 102), and Elizabeth Goldberg, who argues that Ursa's

performance can be read as a denial of her desire and pleasure, I challenge their interpretations and argue that the act empowers her and reminds Mutt her potential power activeness and destruction. Ursa "discovers a potentially destructive feminine power situated at the very edges of heterosexuality" (Dubey 1995, 258), and she knows that she has a choice to emasculate Mutt, who is aware of this power and acknowledges Ursa's power When Ursa tells Mutt that she could kill him. I read this scene as reversing the control of power, and both partners take pleasure from their sexual relationship while both reject the legacy of slavery which inflicted both male and female. Joanne L. Freed's reading of the scene supports my argument stating that "Mutt and Ursa assert the possibility of their own intimacy and pleasure, revising together the forms of sexuality produced by slavery in which they are both implicated" (Freed 2011, 417). Ursa, not literally but metaphorically, emasculates Mutt destroying his masculine privilege and uses sexuality as a weapon of rebellion.

Ashraf Rushdy states that she is "aware of the dangers of wielding that power" as well (Rushdy 2000, 282). Ursa also complicates and destroys the legacy of slavery, which is enacted in an earlier scene depicting objectifying logic ownership as Mutt maintained that logic through his utterance, "your pussy is a little gold piece, ain't it, Urs. My little gold piece!" Jones 1975, 60). This ownership is acknowledged through maternal discourses and repeated several times throughout the text: "It's my ass, ain't it? When I screwed you last night and asked you whose ass it was, you said it was mine" (Jones 1975, 164). However, in the final scene, she unshackles the historical master-slave dialectic and shows that she is not under the control of maternal discourses or black male sexual and political oppression, but desires and pleasure. It is possible to read this moment as reclaim her sexuality, physicality, and spirituality and rejecting "matrix of domination" and "interpersonal domain of power," to borrow from Collins, which maintained sexual exploitation through maternal and historical discourses.

Ursa problematizes the disappearance of pleasure and desire by taking control of her body and mind in the final scene. Ursa formulates the constitutive aspects of freedom within power relations. In this scene, she conjures up scenes from her past, which symbolize "hate and love" in her mind and takes control of her own sexuality (Jones 1975, 184). In the first section of the novel, she was a passive love maker whom her partner dominated and had no control over the process, yet at the very end, she is an active agent and controls the whole process. Mutt is passive while Ursa is active; she knows who she is and what she wants. The repetitions, "a moment of pleasure and excruciating pain at the same time, a moment broken skin but sexlessness, a moment just before sexlessness, a moment that stops before it breaks the skin: I could kill you," signify important characteristics of the blues (1975, 184). During the final scene of the novel, the repetitions insinuate that the blues and sexual identity intertwined in Ursa's sexuality, which creates an assemblage. In this scene, blues reflects love and pain, and the agency is tied to sex. It is also an articulation of cultural, sexual, and aesthetic resistance to exploitation. The consciousness that her songs taught enabled her to accept the lack of fertility and define herself as a sexual body. She is capable of taking control of her life and fulfil her desires taking control in her hands. In doing so, she also challenges the master-slave relationship by directing our attention to the ambiguity and destructive aspect of the maternal narratives suggesting alternative discourses and epistemologies. In other words, Ursa invites the reader to investigate and re-establish the relation between maternal discourses, memory, and history to transform and liberate individuals of historical burdens.

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3. CONCLUSION

This analysis has demonstrated that Black female sexuality and fertility function as contested sites where structures of domination and resistance intersect, ultimately serving as crucial mechanisms for the reconstruction of sexual identity and agency. By employing Black feminist theoretical frameworks in conjunction with blues cultural analysis, this study has illuminated the complex negotiations through which Black women navigate what Michel Foucault identifies as the paradoxical relationship between power and resistance within subjugated populations. The findings reveal that even within systems of oppression, marginalized subjects retain the capacity for transformative agency.

Gayl Jones' *Corregidora* emerges as a paradigmatic text that interrogates the intricate connections between blues music and identity formation, thereby exposing the multifaceted discourses surrounding gender, sexuality, slavery, and neocolonial power structures that continue to shape contemporary Black women's experiences. The novel's significance extends beyond its historical context to offer critical insights into twenty-first-century debates about female authorship, cultural authenticity, and resistance narratives.

The blues emerges as both aesthetic form and epistemological framework through which Ursa—and by extension, Black women more broadly—can articulate experiences of trauma while asserting cultural agency. This musical tradition provides not merely a medium of expression but a theoretical apparatus for understanding how marginalized communities transform pain into power, silence into voice, and victimization into survival. Ursa's narrative trajectory from psychological fragmentation to integrated selfhood exemplifies what Audre Lorde terms the transformation of silence into language and action. Furthermore, this study contributes to broader scholarly conversations about intersectionality, demonstrating how race, gender, class, and sexuality operate as mutually constitutive rather than additive categories of identity. The analysis reveals that Black women's liberation requires not only the dismantling of external oppressive structures but also the internal psychological work of reconstructing selfhood from inherited trauma. Ursa's achievement of self-reliance and independence represents more than individual empowerment; it models a broader blueprint for collective resistance and transformation.

The implications of this research extend beyond literary analysis to inform contemporary discussions about sexual agency, reproductive justice, and cultural preservation within African American communities. By centering Black women's voices and experiences, this study challenges dominant narratives that position Black women as perpetual victims rather than active agents of change. The text ultimately argues that true liberation—the reclamation of body, mind, and sexual autonomy—requires both individual psychological transformation and collective cultural resistance, processes that Jones masterfully renders through Ursa's blues-inflected journey toward wholeness. This investigation opens avenues for future research examining how other contemporary Black women writers employ cultural forms—music, oral tradition, visual arts—as vehicles for reimagining Black female subjectivity in the twenty-first century. Additionally, comparative analyses exploring similar themes across transnational Black women's literatures could further illuminate the global dimensions of these resistance strategies.

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