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Ecological Inscription and Material Memory: Ecofeminist Philosophy and the Afterlife of Slavery in Morrison and Butler

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ABSTRACT: Drawing on ecofeminist philosophy, Black feminist ecologies, and posthuman critiques of instrumental reason, this article argues that Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred* (1979) and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) develop an environmental ethics of memory: they figure landscape, water, and the more-than-human world as archives that document slavery's ongoing material and affective residues. Rather than treating "nature" as a neutral framework, the novels present ecological spaces as controversial venues where racial capitalism and patriarchal authority organize extraction, bodily vulnerability, and the policing of kinship. I show how both texts convert ecological imagery into a philosophical critique of domination: (1) they expose how colonial regimes render Black bodies and nonhuman life fungible; (2) they model "rememory" and temporal rupture as forms of testimony that resist epistemic erasure; and (3) they reframe care, survival, and motherhood as ecological relations shaped by coercion yet capable of counter-knowledge. Methodologically, the essay combines concept-building with close reading, using ecofeminist and critical race structures to track how material environments mediate trauma, agency, and ethical responsibility. By linking narrative form to environmental thought, the article contributes to contemporary debates in feminist environmental ethics on justice, memory, and the afterlives of colonial violence, casting testimony as ecological counter-knowledge.

Keywords: ecofeminism, feminist environmental ethics, Black feminist ecologies, material memory, afterlife of slavery, environmental humanities

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1. Introduction

Ecofeminist philosophy examines how patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist logics co-produce the domination of women, racialized peoples, and the more-than-human world. Contemporary ecofeminist work is wary of essentialist claims that women are "naturally" closer to nature; instead, it foregrounds how gendered and racialized divisions of labor, property, and vulnerability are historically made and politically maintained. In this sense, ecofeminism is less a single doctrine than a critical orientation: it links environmental harm to structures of power, and it asks how ethical responsibility, care, and justice are negotiated under conditions of extraction and inequality. Recent scholarship has intensified this orientation by centering questions of colonial afterlives, racial capitalism, and ecological method. Work in Black ecological thought stresses that environments are not only "background" but also relations and archives through which racial violence is organized and remembered (Bruno 271). In parallel, feminist policy and ethics debates have underscored how gendered exposure to ecological crisis is structured by the gendered division of labor, displacement, and unequal access to decision-making, resources, and services rather than by biology or a fixed identity. Reviewing posthuman and new-materialist critiques of the

human/nature binary, these interventions supply a contemporary philosophical frame for re-reading neo-slave narratives as sites of environmental thought rather than as "merely" historical representation. Considering posthuman and new-materialist critiques of the human/nature binary, these interventions supply a contemporary philosophical frame for re-reading neo-slave narratives as sites of environmental thought rather than as "merely" historical representation.

Butler and Morrison's emergence as major writers in the 1970s -a transformative era shaped by the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement (1954–1968) and its challenge to Jim Crow segregation -highlights how *Kindred* and *Beloved* intervene in contemporaneous debates about race, gender, identity, and history. Even though the Thirteenth Amendment, ratified on December 6, 1865, formally abolished slavery, systemic racism persisted across legal, social, political, and economic structures, prompting numerous forms of resistance, including literary ones. The racial and gender identities of Butler and Morrison as Black women orient both their literary visions and their critical distance from dominant feminist and posthumanist theories, which frequently universalize experience and overlook the specificities of racialized and gendered life. Such misreadings and modes of conceptual flattening that erase racial and gendered specificity appear in the work of white theorists such as Judith Butler, Joan Scott, and John Champagne (Martínez 26). These critical blind spots stem, in part, from a failure to recognize how both authors engage language not as a neutral tool but as a dynamic and unstable force that can itself enact violence. This is evident in the linguistic strategies used in both novels, which align with Black feminist and ecofeminist rhetorics, resisting dominant modes of meaning-making and asserting alternative epistemologies grounded in nature and memory. Along these lines, the texts under scrutiny employ counter-discursive strategies that resist dominant white discourse and destabilize colonial conceptions of history as linear and closed, instead imagining history as open to intervention and reassessment. They further function as postmodern neo-slave narratives that look back on slavery from a contemporary perspective, using speculative strategies to interrogate how that past is remembered and lived in the present, particularly in Black women's bodies and in the environments they inhabit.

In *Beloved*, the primary setting is 1873 Cincinnati, with extensive nonlinear flashbacks to the antebellum "Sweet Home" plantation in Kentucky. In *Kindred*, by contrast, Butler employs time travel to create a transhistorical narrative structure: Dana, a Black woman living in 1976 California, is repeatedly and involuntarily transported to early-nineteenth-century Maryland whenever her white ancestor Rufus is in danger, in order to ensure his survival and thereby preserve her own existence. For the study of speculative fiction—a literary mode of philosophical speculation rather than a mere genre label—these formal choices matter in two closely related ways. First, they show that the speculative devices do more than stage psychological trauma: they formally encode the entanglement of history, embodiment, and environment that ecofeminism theorizes. In *Beloved*, the ghost and the logic of "rememory" push beyond realist narration to show that slavery's violence remains materially present in bodies and landscapes; in *Kindred*, time travel forces a contemporary Black woman to inhabit the past with her own body, undoing historical distance and making the plantation's ecology of labor, reproduction, and land use immediate. Second, building on SF-studies work on embodiment and genre in neo-slave narratives (Bast 151; Robertson 362; Vint 241), an ecofeminist interpretation clarifies how Black women's bodies and nonhuman nature are simultaneously exploited and reimagined. Taking up Sherryl Vint's claim that only the fantastic can capture slavery's ongoing disturbance of American culture, this article argues that speculative devices are crucial for imagining forms of resistance that exceed the representational limits of realist historical fiction.

Throughout this article, I use the term "colonial" -drawing on concepts of internal colonialism and the colonial matrix of power- in a strictly historical sense to mark the origins of these regimes in British colonial America, especially in the legal framework of colonial Virginia, and to trace how their logics endure, in altered but recognizable ways, into the antebellum and postbellum United States, where Black life continues to be treated as expendable and exploitable. Morrison's neo-slave narrative and Butler's time-travel novel each stage, in different generic registers, Black women's bodies as instruments through which

racial capitalism extracts value from reproductive labor and from the earth itself. At the same time, scholarship on racial capitalism demonstrates that modern capitalism is, from its inception, dependent on plantation slavery, empire, racial hierarchy, and the gendered exploitation of reproductive and care labor rather than merely compatible with them (Follett et al. 154). From this vantage point, chattel slavery in the Americas is not an institution separate from colonial modernity but one of its primary engines. Connecting postcolonial critiques of continuing imperial power to what Saidiya Hartman calls the "afterlife of slavery" places *Beloved* and *Kindred* within a broader analysis that links racial violence, capitalist accumulation, and imperial formations instead of treating U.S. slavery as an isolated, purely national aberration. To explore how these narratives reconsider Black women's resilience within violent colonial ecologies, this study traces three intersecting concerns: first, the emotional and cultural gravitas of ancestral memory and the reshaping of time through speculative forms that disrupt linear history; second, the maternal body as both a site of care and an object of commodification; and third, nature as both a space of healing and of terror.

2. Theoretical Overview of the Main Concepts

This article situates its reading of *Beloved* and *Kindred* within this anti-essentialist, intersectional ecofeminist tradition. Focusing on these two novels as primary case studies is therefore not simply a return to over-studied 'classics' at the expense of more recent Black women's speculative fiction, nor are their fantastic elements mere embellishments on a historical plot. Rather, the speculative strategies they deploy are core genre resources for representing how racial violence, patriarchy, embodiment, and environment are mutually constitutive. Bringing the co-exploitation of Black women's bodies and nonhuman nature to the fore, these novels demonstrate that ecological justice is already at stake in Black speculative engagements with slavery and its legacies, linking the violence of slavery and its afterlives to questions of nature, language, and haunting.

Ecofeminism affirms the link between environmental degradation and the systemic oppression and marginalization of women. While the term was coined by Françoise d'Eaubonne in her 1974 work *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (*Feminism or Death*), its basic principles are far older. Long before ecofeminism developed into a formal theory, many Indigenous worldviews articulated similar values. For example, the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) upheld matrilineal governance and environmental reciprocity (Scupin 202); the Andean principle of *ayni* sustain mutuality and balance (Afshar 77–78); and numerous Native American traditions understand the Earth as a living, relational being (Sturgeon 119). These cosmologies advocated governance and respect for all life, recognizing the relationship between ecological well-being and social justice. Although not labeled ecofeminist, they were critical precursors to the movement. Moreover, the central concerns of ecofeminism, the co-domination of women and nature, can be traced to earlier philosophical and anti-colonial critiques. In *Supplement to Bougainville's Voyage* (1772), Denis Diderot, through the fictional voice of Orou, condemned European colonialism for corrupting the natural harmony of Indigenous societies. Similarly, Baruch (Benedict) Spinoza's *Ethics* (1677) laid intellectual groundwork for ecofeminist thought by rejecting natural hierarchies and asserting the continuity between humans and the rest of nature: "The human mind is a part of nature, subject to the same universal laws which govern the rest of nature" (XV).

During the twentieth century, a wave of feminist and decolonial resistance expanded upon these earlier critiques. In *Le Deuxième Sexe* (*The Second Sex*, 1949), Simone de Beauvoir examined the historical objectification of women, a theme later extended by ecofeminists to include the objectification of nature. Women, like nature, were historically cast as passive and positioned as the "Other" to be dominated and defined by men (15, 95). Echoing this logic, Aimé Césaire in *Discours sur le colonialisme* (*Discourse on Colonialism*, 1955) argued that colonialism degrades colonizer, corrupting his morality by awakening instincts driven by greed, violence, racial hatred, and ethical decay (12). Césaire claimed that colonialism's moral and material devastations parallel the exploitation of both land and marginalized populations. Building on this approach, Frantz Fanon's *Les Damnés de la Terre* (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961)

analyzed the psycho-physical violence inflicted on colonized bodies, linking the commodification of people to that of land (23). Fanon emphasized the parallel between environmental degradation and human oppression, resonating with ecofeminist critiques of hierarchical systems (xx). He challenged Western humanism's imperial legacy, arguing that the concept of "Man" is not synonymous with the human but rather a colonial construct used to assert universal authority through racialized and gendered power (xxxvi, 86).

Nonetheless, Françoise d'Eaubonne's articulation of ecofeminism was more radical than her predecessors'. She insisted that ecological destruction must be addressed in tandem with gender inequality, setting the stage for a political movement linking environmental and social justice. Her vision called for the dismantling of rigid gender roles in favor of a cooperative humanism that lives in harmony with nature (xxxv, 208, 1974). Above all else, d'Eaubonne rejected any romanticized or essentialist notion of women as inherently closer to nature. She criticized feminist and ecological discourses that "glorify 'the Woman' as naturally more connected to the earth," warning that "this timidity has long robbed the movement of all political or theoretical legitimacy" (39, 251). For d'Eaubonne, such essentialism weakened ecofeminism by diverting attention from the established forces that exploit both women and the environment. Many decades later, ecofeminism evolved into an umbrella term encompassing a broad array of perspectives. Karen J. Warren, a leading voice in the field, identifies two central connections within ecofeminist thought: first, the association between women and nature (3); and second, the more expansive linkage among women, nature, and what she terms "Others" (338–39). Warren intentionally capitalizes *Others* to distinguish the term from its general usage, using it to refer to groups systematically marginalized within dominant social structures such as children, people of color, Indigenous peoples, the poor, the elderly, the ill, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people with disabilities. She further defines *nature* as inclusive of everything that is neither human nor human-made, including nonhuman animals, plants, ecosystems, water, air, soil, and geological formations like mountains.

3. Methodology

This article uses a comparative interpretive method that treats the works under discussion as theorizing an environmental ethics of memory. It integrates ecofeminist philosophy, Black feminist ecologies, and critical posthuman critique to examine how each novel produces counter-narratives to the historical and ideological foundations of colonial modernity—specifically the entangled logics of patriarchal domination, racial capitalism, and extractivism.

The first pillar of this approach draws from ecofeminist theory, which links ecological destruction to patriarchal power and argues that the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature emerge from related structures of mastery (d'Eaubonne, xxiv). Within this framework, ecofeminism clarifies how both novels depict "nature" as neither neutral backdrop nor pure refuge: plantation landscapes, woods, rivers, and domestic spaces appear as loci of violence, while vegetal and climatic relations also become mediums of survival, shelter, and return. Reading with ecofeminism, the analysis tracks how the novels critique extractivism and the privatization of life while also imagining relational alternatives—reciprocity, mutual vulnerability, and care—against patriarchal and colonial logics.

The second pillar is Black feminist ecologies, which revises classical ecofeminism by centering slavery's afterlives and the plantation as an ecological regime. Tiffany Lethabo King (2019). offers a method for reading at the shifting interface of Black and Indigenous histories, where conquest, chattel slavery, and critiques of the Human meet without being collapsed into a single narrative. These lenses treat the plantation landscape as infrastructure—soil, food, housing, reproduction, and punishment—through which gender and environment are co-produced, clarifying why the novels' ecological imagery is inseparable from inheritance and the material afterlife of slavery.

The third pillar is critical posthuman critique, which interrogates colonial modernity's construction of "the human" as mastery, property, and autonomy. Ruffin's account of African American ecoliterary traditions

complements this critique by foregrounding how racialized vulnerability reorganizes human–environment relations: Black writing figures land, weather, and nonhuman life as both injury and resource, thereby unsettling liberal assumptions of autonomous human agency (2010).

Considering Black studies critiques of the Human, this framework helps describe how both novels distribute agency across more-than-human actors (animals, plants, weather, objects, and "hauntings") without dissolving historical responsibility. Posthumanism thus functions as a diagnostic tool for tracing how survival and harm move through multispecies and material relations while keeping gendered racial violence at the analytic center.

Operationally, the study proceeds through close reading and discourse analysis of scenes in which ecological motifs (trees, water, soil, animals, weather) coincide with gendered coercion or practices of care; it also tracks the novels' counter-language— "looted language" and rememory—as techniques for resisting epistemic erasure. This critical posthuman orientation draws on Wynter's critique of "Man" as an overrepresented genre of the human, clarifying how colonial modernity organizes epistemic authority and the conditions of intelligibility (2003).

Because the approach is theory-driven, it remains alert to the risks of anachronism and overextension; the limitations section below specifies scope conditions and where claims remain provisional.

4. Discussion

The alternative Black feminist and ecofeminist rhetorics at work in *Beloved* and *Kindred* are inseparable from the histories of racial terror the novels recount. The long list of atrocities, including lynchings, arson, rape, theft, and beatings reveals how racial violence remained normalized and deeply embedded in American institutions long after formal emancipation, while efforts at institutional redress were frequently compromised by indifference and structural racism.

Looted Language and Counter-Language

In her 1993 Nobel Lecture, Morrison underscores this point and names it a "systematic looting of language." She argues that certain ways of speaking -whether in state bureaucracy, media, academia, science, law, or everyday prejudice- do not merely describe reality but actively participate in shaping and sanctioning such violence, limiting what can be known and imagined. Such policing of language presents itself as respectable or objective but in fact feeds on vulnerability and blocks new knowledge and genuine dialogue, which is why it must be exposed and rejected. One example from *Beloved* appears in the catalogue-like inner monologue focalized through Stamp Paid, a former slave who reflects on the continued racial terror experienced by Black Americans during Reconstruction. He has just found a red ribbon with a lock of hair and a piece of scalp, possibly belonging to a child, which signals the lingering brutality of white supremacy. Confronted by this grisly artifact, Stamp is unable to comprehend the unrelenting cruelty and spirals into a grief-filled inner monologue:

> Eighteen seventy-four and whitefolks were still on the loose. Whole towns wiped clean of Negroes; eighty-seven lynchings in one year alone in Kentucky; four colored schools burned to the ground; grown men whipped like children; children whipped like adults; black women raped by the crew; property taken, necks broken. He smelled skin, skin and hot blood. The skin was one thing, but human blood cooked in a lynch fire was a whole other thing. The stench stank. Stank up off the pages of the North Star, out of the mouths of witnesses, etched in crooked handwriting in letters delivered by hand. Detailed in documents and petitions full of whereas and presented to any legal body who'd read it, it stank (340-1).

This litany of carnage underscores how freedom after the Civil War was largely illusory, as white racial violence remained rampant. Stamp's reflection also emphasizes that the state's failure to protect Black lives creates a form of structural and social abandonment. The passage disrupts the distance between documentary record and sensory memory (particularly the evocation of smell) to resist abstraction: the violence depicted is not only personal but historical and collective. At the same time, the piling, rhythmic list, along with the repeated "stank," refuses the sanitizing, bureaucratic language of newspapers and legal

petitions. Morrison crafts a counter-language that names violence in sensory and bodily terms rather than in the neutral idiom of official discourse, enacting precisely the exposure and rejection of oppressive language she calls for. Butler adopts a similar stance in *Kindred*. In an interview with *The Indypendent*, she explains: "I was trying to make real the emotional reality of slavery. I was trying to make people feel more about the data they had learned. I wanted to make the past real and [show] how it scars the present." Collapsing historical and contemporary timelines through time travel, Butler's writing, like Morrison's, rejects the distancing, ostensibly objective language in historical data and policy, thereby compelling readers to conceive of slavery as an embodied, unfinished reality rather than a safely concluded chapter of the past. This emphasis on the present-tense force of slavery's afterlife underwrites Dana's fraught complicity. Her recurrent returns to antebellum Maryland confront her with a legal and economic order that rendered her ancestors fungible property, yet Butler pointedly links that order to Dana's ostensibly post-civil-rights present (270). Dana's ethical agony does not arise simply from "slavery" in the abstract but from an enduring colonial matrix of power in which her reproductive potential and genealogical ties are mobilized to secure the continuation of a white lineage and plantation economy.

Afterlives of Slavery

Like Saidiya Hartman's account of the "afterlife of slavery," postcolonial theory interrogates the lasting impacts of colonialism, attending not only to political domination but also to its literary and psychological legacies. Scholars such as Edward Said (26), Gayatri Spivak (278), and Homi K. Bhabha (14, 48) have shown how imperial power continues to structure identity, language, and representation in ostensibly postcolonial contexts through concepts such as hybridity, mimicry, and the ongoing force of colonial discourse. These contexts often center on how formerly colonized peoples resist and rewrite colonial narratives through cultural production and criticism. Where postcolonial theory tends to frame empire as a completed historical formation that continues to live on in culture and discourse, Hartman's "afterlife of slavery" underlines the ongoing material and bodily consequences of Atlantic slavery (criminalization, economic deprivation, and premature death) that mark Black life in the present.

In the African American context, Hartman argues that slavery persists as a structuring force not because of "an antiquarian obsession with bygone days" but because Black lives remain "imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago." She names this continuity "the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment," and concludes, "I, too, am the afterlife of slavery" (*Lose Your Mother* 6). Hartman's perspective intersects with traditions of internal colonialism and racial capitalism. Black studies work on internal colonialism and racial capitalism conceptualizes U.S. racial slavery and its afterlives as part of a colonial matrix of power that remains even after formal independence. Robert Blauner explicitly argues that white-Black relations in the United States can be understood as relations of "colonizer" and "colonized." (393). Interestingly, Black and Chicanx thinkers since the 1960s have theorized African Americans as an internally colonized population whose labor, mobility, bodies, and reproductive capacities are controlled through forms of segregation, policing, and economic extraction structurally analogous to imperial domination but located within the borders of the metropole (Gutiérrez 281).

The 1662 law passed by the Virginia colonial assembly, which declares that children born to an English man and an enslaved or otherwise unfree Black woman will inherit the mother's status, is emblematic of this history. Cheryl Harris argues that such statutes reversed English common law in order to tether Black women's reproductive capacity to the expansion of white wealth: the womb became a legal mechanism of accumulation, binding personhood to enslaved property (1719–21). Though enacted in a British colony, this legal logic did not vanish with the Declaration of Independence; it was carried forward, reworked, and reinscribed in the antebellum United States as a racial regime. Reading Sethe's infanticide as an act of maternal love under the afterlife of slavery and Dana's return to the plantation as an encounter with a racial order that continues to govern her twentieth-century life traces a line from this colonial legal apparatus to its long post-emancipation afterlives in regimes of property and racialized motherhood in nineteenth-

century Kentucky, Maryland, and Ohio. Remarkably, Morrison and Butler translate these structures into speculative narrative forms utilizing magical realism. Both authors challenge the belief that "time heals all wounds." Rather than allowing historical trauma to recede, their writing undoes temporal distance, making the legacy of slavery emotionally and experientially immediate. In *Beloved*, the fragmented narrative structure mimics Sethe's fractured psyche and echoes the broader temporal disorientation generated by slavery's intergenerational trauma. Morrison transforms "traumatic memory into narrative memory" through her use of magical realism (Di Iorio and Pérez 24). The novel is an embodied haunting, a revenant who appears in human form as the return of Sethe's murdered baby and of slavery's unresolved past. As a ghostly figure, she symbolizes the physical and emotional scars of slavery, blurring the boundaries between the supernatural and the real and literalizing memory as a disruptive force that interrupts the flow of everyday life and demands confrontation. Her spectral presence transforms 124 Bluestone Road into a haunted house and a psychological prison: a material and symbolic space in which the past rejects confinement and demands reckoning. The home turns into a place of historical violence and psychic entrapment, underlining the difficulty of healing from collective trauma. This conflict between the need for refuge and the ongoing terror at 124 resonates with Morrison's own reflections on memory and slavery. In an interview with Marsha Darling, Morrison maintains that African Americans may have rushed away from slavery "because it was painful to dwell there," but she insists on "a necessity for remembering the horror [...] in a manner in which the memory is not destructive" (1994).

Similarly, *Kindred* undertakes a parallel undertaking through the body of a contemporary Black woman constantly pulled back into the antebellum South. Critics have read *Kindred* as a sustained theorization of embodiment, biology, and historical responsibility (Bast 151–52; Jesser 37–39; Robertson 362–64; Vint 241–43). Butler's reworking of neo-slave narrative conventions through speculative means foregrounds the ecological and reproductive dimensions of embodiment. Her time-travel device not only dramatizes the inescapability of ancestral history but also exposes the plantation economy's dependence on Black women's reproductive labor and on the extraction of value from land and nonhuman nature. These dynamics become particularly clear in the formal role that time travel plays in Dana's story. Yet, unlike much conventional speculative or science fiction, Butler offers no scientific or technological explanation for Dana's time trave; instead, she uses it to perform the inescapable pull of ancestral memory. Dana's experience is narrated with stark realism, but the speculative mechanism shows how history lives on in the body and mind. The Maryland plantation grows into a recurring site of psychological and physical captivity, echoing *Beloved*'s haunted house, while Dana's helplessness and loss of control imply the dehumanization that characterized slavery. Butler's dual timeline folds past and present, underlining slavery's lingering legacy even more than a century after its abolition. Dana's returns to the past embody a form of "retrocausality," where the future determines the past (Jiang 30). Within this retrocausal dynamic, nature assumes a dominant role, intervening to pull her back at moments of danger and operating simultaneously as protector and historical archive.

Nature as Sanctuary and Place of Terror

Undoubtedly, both novels can be read as counter-discourses to dominant historical narratives that resist the historical obliteration of Black identity and challenge the epistemic violence embedded in colonial language practices. The frequency of specific terms in both novels illustrates the convergence of ecofeminist concerns, illustrating how nature and gender are deeply engrained in the characters' struggles against intersecting systems of oppression. Recurrent, explicitly gendered forms of address such as "woman" (167 times in *Beloved*, 114 in *Kindred*) and "girl" (169 times in *Beloved*, 58 in *Kindred*) highlight both the vulnerability and the resilience of female characters under systems of domination, resonating with ecofeminist concerns by theorists such as Vandana Shiva, who argues that the domination of women and nature arises from the same capitalist and colonial patterns of exploitation (13-14). More broadly, ecofeminists contend that the subjugation of women and the exploitation of nature are structurally interconnected, both rooted in patriarchal systems reinforced by capitalist ideologies. In legal theory, Arvidsson and Jones show how dominant international legal orders remain entangled with anthropocentric

and extractivist logics that marginalize ecological well-being (2010–12). Within such a system, capitalism's prioritization of profit and monetary value over human and ecological well-being perpetuates the intertwined domination of women and nature. Land and female bodies are outlined as inferior, expendable resources, instrumentalized to serve the interests of capital. As a result, environmental degradation parallels the exploitation of women's reproductive labor, which is appropriated to subsidize capitalist productivity.

Carolyn Merchant claims that Enlightenment science framed both women and the earth as passive and controllable, naturalizing their treatment as resources to be managed and dominated (xvi). This alignment of gendered and ecological domination is demonstrated at the level of language in the novels themselves. The disparity in allusions to "slave/ry" (34 times in *Beloved*, 166 in *Kindred*) and "freedom" (7 times in *Beloved*, 106 in *Kindred*) reflects *Kindred*'s more explicit engagement with systemic regimes of enslavement, further harmonizing with ecofeminist arguments that link the exploitation of women to the domination of nature under patriarchal systems of power and seek to expose and resist the colonial mechanisms that uphold such control. These concerns are further substantiated by the novels' recurrent references to natural elements such as "fields," "woods," and "trees," which reinforce nature's dual role as both a space of subjugation and refuge. In *Beloved*, "fields" (37 mentions) and "trees" (89 mentions) conjure physical and emotional trauma, while also offering moments of spiritual renewal particularly in Sethe's relationship to the Clearing. In *Kindred*, "fields" (69 mentions) and "woods" (54 mentions) articulate Dana's reliance on the natural world for survival and escape.

Along these lines, rivers and waterways are vividly portrayed as central symbols of resistance and freedom. They function as witnesses to trauma and as tools for survival, replicating the protagonists' resilience and struggle against persecution while reinforcing the deep interconnection between natural and human histories. In *Beloved*, the Ohio River marks the boundary between slavery and freedom, evoking the immense physical and emotional courage required to escape enslavement and recalling how rivers such as the Mississippi, Arkansas, and Ohio served as boundaries of oppression and as pathways to liberation, each carrying distinct symbolic and historical meanings. Historically, the Mississippi River was the economic backbone of the slaveholding South, acting as a vital artery for transporting enslaved people and cotton. Walter Johnson notes that it was integral to the expansion of a slave-based capitalist system that underpinned the Cotton Kingdom's imperial ambitions (31-32).

In contrast, the Arkansas River (situated between slaveholding states, disputed territories, and routes of flight along the Underground Railroad) marked shifting territorial and legal boundaries in U.S. westward expansion, flowing through contested regions including Arkansas, Indian Territory (now Oklahoma), and Kansas. As new territories were opened to white settlement, questions about whether slavery would be permitted became essential to U.S. politics, especially under the Missouri Compromise (1820), the Compromise of 1850, and the Kansas–Nebraska Act (1854) (Carnes 151). Moreover, the Arkansas River demarcated Indian Territory, where slavery was practiced by several Native nations, including the Cherokee, Creek, and Choctaw, though often in forms that differed from U.S. chattel slavery, further complicating its legal and moral status (Riegel and Long 257). Several Native nations did participate in systems of captivity and, in the nineteenth century, adopted aspects of U.S. chattel slavery; yet it is crucial to distinguish these practices from the rigid, race-based, hereditary system that structured the U.S. plantation South. Whereas U.S. chattel slavery systematically objectified African-descended people as permanently dehumanized property, Indigenous systems of captivity often involved the incorporation of war captives into kinship networks and could encompass Indigenous, Black, and white people. Acknowledging both the overlaps and the differences underscores that *Kindred* places Dana in a contact zone where multiple regimes of unfreedom intersect, without collapsing Indigenous histories of captivity into the specific racialized commodification of Black life under U.S. law. In this context, the Arkansas River can be seen as a symbol of a legal flux and the perilous passage toward freedom.

For enslaved people, the Ohio River represented the hope of liberation, forming a natural border between

the free North and the enslaved South. The Ohio River Valley played a vital role in the Underground Railroad, with cities such as Cincinnati becoming hubs of abolitionist resistance and critical nodes in the network of safe houses that facilitated escape to freedom (Griffler xi). Just as this river functioned as a crucial threshold between slavery and freedom, the routes used by enslaved individuals in Maryland likewise established the importance of geographical boundaries and support networks in the struggle for liberation. In this context, the Mason-Dixon Line, separating Maryland from free states such as Pennsylvania, operated as a symbolic and physical boundary between enslavement and freedom. Fugitives relied on well-organized systems of aid, including abolitionist communities and figures such as Harriet Tubman, an American abolitionist and suffragist, who used her intimate knowledge of the natural environment and celestial navigation to guide many enslaved people across forests and waterways toward freedom (Foner 7). In addition, Maryland's proximity to Northern free states and its access to the Chesapeake Bay provided diverse escape routes, by both land and sea. In *Beloved*, Sethe's crossing of the river signifies a symbolic rebirth into freedom, while water imagery throughout the novel evokes themes of revitalization and the lingering scars of slavery. Similarly, in *Kindred*, rivers like the Patuxent and waterways including the Chesapeake Bay are linked to escape routes, epitomizing impediments to freedom and potential paths to liberation. These natural features mirror the struggles of Dana and the enslaved individuals she encounters, reinforcing water as a literal and metaphorical medium of transition.

These landscapes become sanctuaries for spiritual reawakening and renewed embodied connection to the more-than-human world, aligning with ecofeminist critiques of the intertwined exploitation of women and the environment. Dana's time-traveling ordeal communicates the ecological scope of her struggle: her survival in the antebellum South depends on her ability to navigate and adapt to natural and domestic spaces: plantation fields, kitchens, and surrounding woods. Through this forced return to the past, she directly contacts ancestral memory and a landscape that simultaneously sustains and punishes. Moreover, her proximity to nature echoes the historical relationship many marginalized groups have had with the environment, one marked by both meaningful resistance and resilience. Similarly, in *Beloved*, the land is not a passive background but a living documentation of racialized and gendered history. Even amidst her association with trauma, Sethe finds moments of solace in the woods and in the "Clearing," where Baby Suggs holds communal gatherings to celebrate and heal the Black community. Indeed, nature in these narratives is far from impartial; it is etched with memory, carrying the imprint of historical violence and personal trauma experienced by both protagonists. It is a metaphor for the brutal legacy of slavery, functioning as a physical and ontological displacement for Black identity, both in its present and its past forms. The natural world does not merely witness history; it prompts it, calling forth the unsettling effect of subjugation along with the ensuing ethnic, racial, doxastic, and cultural struggles that emerged with the onset of slavery. In this instance, nature operates as an active participant in molding Black American identity, particularly for the female subjects who must relocate and redefine themselves. It also offers safe harbor and resistance, providing concealment and a physical obstacle to pursuit, vis-à-vis the society that offers exposure and harm.

The deep, almost instinctual quality of Dana's connection to the natural world as a place of safety stands in a stark counterpoint to the oppressive, human-made structures of slavery that seek to control her. She flees into the trees to hide from whites to evade detection, even amid terror: "Terror gave me speed and agility I never knew I had. [...] Now I longed for darker denser woods that I could lose myself in" (42). The desire to vanish into the landscape reflects a deep yearning for safety beyond the reach of enslavers. Later, she underscores this connection when she recalls this moment by lying "sprawled on the ground under a tree..." (58). Here, she becomes part of the earth itself, blending into the environment, using it as a shield against those who would harm her. While Dana's accumulating injuries from her time travel can be viewed as corporeal inscriptions of historical trauma, Sethe's scars, described as a tree growing on her back, exemplify the enduring pain and dehumanization of slavery. These wounds are not portrayed in clinical terms but reframed through natural imagery. When Amy Denver first sees them, she offers a disturbingly aestheticized reinterpretation: "A chokecherry tree. Trunk, branches, and even leaves" (31).

On the one hand, this graphic metaphor transfigures the brutality inflicted upon Sethe into something organic and strangely beautiful, suggesting that her suffering has taken root in her body much like the way memory clings to the land. On the other hand, it entails a glimpse of compassion, an attempt to make sense of violence through the familiar language of nature. In contrast, Paul D's reaction destabilizes this poetic reframing. He perceives the scars as a "wrought-iron maze" (40) and refutes the tree metaphor: "Not a tree, as she said. Maybe shaped like one, but nothing like any tree he knew because trees were inviting [...] things you could trust and be near." For him, the scars prompt not nature's healing but its betrayal, depicting them as metallic and imprisoning, emphasizing the inhumanity of the violence done to Sethe.

Still, nature's precarious protection is not without danger. Such a place of terror, where the beauty and serenity of trees are made complicit in the enactment and concealment of racial violence, appears in both novels. The distortion of nature into an instrument of aggression reveals how both women and the land are subjected to domination under intersecting systems of white supremacy and extractive logic. Violence is personalized through Sethe's anguish at remembering the trees more vividly than the murdered children: the plantation's "beautiful trees" (77) obscure the brutality committed beneath them, symbolizing how natural beauty can veil systemic horror. Her contemplation "The sycamores beat out the children every time and she could not forgive her memory for that" (9) exposes the fraught ethics of survival and remembrance. The sycamores, with their delicate foliage and "lacy" sound, are transformed into grotesque monuments: natural forms corrupted by historical atrocity. Nowhere is this paradox more devastating than in her recollection of lynched boys hanging from those trees, a scene she describes as "shameless beauty… Boys hanging from sycamores" (8). This haunting contradiction, where beauty masks terror, denote the psychological dissonance of trauma, as memory clings to aesthetic detail to shield itself from unbearable truths.

Similarly, in *Kindred*, nature becomes a literal stage for racialized punishment. Trees, often emblems of peace, are transformed into tools of immobilization and torture. In one particularly brutal scene, a Black man is forced to "hug the tree," his hands tied behind him to prevent escape, his naked body exposed to the elements and to the white men preparing to whip him (35). The verb "hug," typically associated with comfort or affection, is used here with chilling irony, emphasizing the grotesque reversal of the natural world's symbolic meaning. This scene graphically illustrates how landscapes associated with home and survival are instead enmeshed with histories of terror and domination. In these instances, Morrison and Butler defy the pastoral ideal by portraying nature as entangled with - and often instrumental to - racial violence, particularly against Black women.

Ecofeminist Nuances and Memory

However agonizing, memory becomes integral to the healing process. The convergence of memory and temporal disjunction triggers an overwhelming sense of displacement: one that unsettles spatial, temporal, psychological, and ontological spheres. Both Dana and Sethe undergo this fragmentation through trauma and survival, where the past refuses containment and existential stability is continually renegotiated. The journeys they undertake are part of a process of recuperation that unfolds through history, becoming a collective rather than merely personal experience. This experience modifies Dana's understanding of history and personhood. Her seemingly brief absences from 1976 result in prolonged and violent immersion in the nineteenth century. Yet through this process, she develops a thoughtful awareness of enslaved individuals as fully human, not as abstract figures confined to sociological or literary representations. Alena Cicholewski contends that the "Akan concept of Sankofa," invoked in *Kindred*, articulates a restorative temporal praxis in which returning to the past is in fact a means of reclaiming what has been lost or suppressed (4). This movement toward ancestral memory acts as a form of counter-historical compensation, enabling both individuals and communities to confront intergenerational trauma and process historical violence. Similarly, the ghost of Beloved can be interpreted as a emblematic trace of racial trauma embedded in slavery and its afterlives, a spectral manifestation of slavery's unresolved

psychological and historical violence. Baby Suggs's sermons in the Clearing and Sethe's intimate connection to the trees of "Sweet Home" induce an alternative reasoning, one substantiated in memory and emotional truth. When Schoolteacher tells Sethe, "You got two feet, not four," she envisions that "a forest sprang up between them; trackless and quiet" (193), signifying a rupture between the oppressor's dehumanizing logic and Sethe's developing interior resistance. Such haunting presence, whether literal or metaphorical, speaks to a legacy of dehumanization that refuses to fade: "It was not a story to pass on" (522-523).

This thrice-repeated line near the end of *Beloved* features a haunting refrain that encapsulates the tension between remembering and forgetting painful history. Reiterating it, Morrison interrogates and affirms the necessity of memory, resisting cultural and political pressures to suppress historical violence and to substitute it with historical distortion. The refrain distills the paradox of collective memory: while the atrocities of slavery may seem too painful to preserve, forgetting them risks obliterating the lived experiences of the oppressed. Its repetition further foregrounds this paradox, suggesting that the past, however unbearable, demands recognition. In this way, it reflects trauma's recursive nature: its unwillingness to submit to linear time and its tenacious resurfacing across generations. The line also gestures toward the systematic silencing of marginalized histories, particularly those of Black women whose voices are often excluded from dominant narratives. This invocation of memory becomes a radically resistant act of defiance. In this regard, Sethe's observation, "Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay [...] Some things you forget. Other things you never do" (70) suggests that memory is not passive recollection but an active reclamation of subjectivity, as freedom from slavery remains incomplete without the recovery of self and voice.. Without doubt, such memory is associated with the natural world, and this association deepens during a domestic moment: "Sethe squatted in the pole beans. Her shoulders were distorted by the greased flannel under her dress to encourage the healing of her back" (246). As she works the garden, her wounded body and the cultivated land coexist, both marked by past violence, both tended with care. Amy Denver's presence nearby reinforces this intergenerational closeness to the land, where recovery is not separate from labor but bound to it. In these moments, nature turns into a space where the physical and emotional weight of slavery is not erased but evinced and slowly mended through continued acts of survival. This entanglement of memory, place, embodied experience, and historical identity is precisely what Morrison calls "rememory."

Toni Morrison coins the neologism "rememory," a term she uses nine times throughout *Beloved*, to convey how memory exists not only in the mind but also as a lingering, external presence in the world. Not found in standard English usage, rememory is a deliberate linguistic innovation that articulates the persistence of trauma and the way memory resists containment within individual consciousness. Morrison's concept expands both psychological and narratological contexts. David Middleton explains that psychologically, rememory aligns with the idea of anamnesis, the rediscovery or reliving of past experience, substantiating how the past remains immanent in the present. Narratologically, it positions storytelling not merely as mimesis (imitation) but as remimesis, a recursive act of re-creation that reflects the layered, cyclical temporality of human suffering and survival (138). To add, *Beloved*'s fractured narrative structure provides a mechanism through which characters reconstruct identity, as rememory preserves and molds both personal and collective histories. Beyond its psychological and literary effect, rememory also operates as a radically resistant practice of memory. Sethe confronts her haunted past and resists historical erasure by reclaiming narrative intervention, merging personal memory with collective trauma as a form of resistance to dehumanization: "If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place--the picture of it--stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world." (70). In this moment, Sethe asserts that rememory transcends the individual; it becomes spatial and communal, refusing to be extinguished. Rememory also offers an unwavering criticism of slavery's commodification of Black bodies and its violent severing of kinship structures. Through rememory, Sethe reclaims her narrative and transforms grief into resistance, preserving not just the memory of her daughter but the profound meaning and consequence of that loss. Painful though it is, this act of remembering operates as a form of rehumanization and an active reclamation of identity, autonomy, and even motherhood, systematically denied under slavery.

Motherhood

Slavery-bounded motherhood is never private or protected; it is invaded, violated, and commodified by anyone who regards the enslaved woman not as a mother, but as property. In *Beloved*, Sethe's relationship with her children is established by the brutal conditions of slavery, which force her into unimaginable moral and emotional dilemmas. Her act of infanticide, intended to protect her daughter from the horrors of bondage, stands as a haunting testament to the psychic costs of maternal love under racial-capitalist violence. That is, her decision, though harrowing, is in fact a radical refusal to allow her children to be treated as commodities; her choice represents an assertion of maternal agency within a system that denies her even the right to claim kinship. Harris maintains that colonial slave law, exemplified by the 1662 Virginia statute, codified the brutal intersection of property and personhood by systematically dehumanizing nonwhite bodies as legally sanctioned property (1721). The statute already discussed made clear, Black women's reproduction was legally harnessed to produce enslaved property: children inherited the status of the enslaved mother, turning childbirth into generational bondage and a mechanism of capitalist expansion. *Kindred* similarly interrogates how blood and genes are invoked to naturalize this arrangement, as Dana's body becomes the only way through which a genealogical line must be preserved, even as the novel exposes that line as the product of colonial law and racial capitalism rather than "natural" biology (Jesser 36).

The milking scene is another disturbing example of how slavery desecrated Black motherhood. Sethe recounts the event with searing clarity. In the following lines, breastfeeding transcends its biological role: it becomes a political act of reclaiming bodily sovereignty and resisting a system built on dispossession:

> Nobody will ever get my milk no more except my own children. I never had to give it to nobody else—and the one time I did it was took from me—they held me down and took it. Milk that belonged to my baby (384).

Sethe objects not simply to being assaulted, but to the theft and redirection of her maternal labor: what rightfully belongs to her child is seized for someone else's benefit. She later reflects, "There was no nursing milk to call my own [...] after they handled me like I was the cow, no, the goat, back behind the stable" (384). Here, Sethe's body is transformed into an ecological metaphor and treated as fertile ground for economic exploitation. Her breast milk, representing maternal nourishment and care, is violently expropriated, reducing her to a resource to be extracted rather than a mother to be honored. From an ecofeminist perspective, this violation mimics colonial extractivism, in which women and the earth are similarly plundered, objectified, and stripped of autonomy.

The animalistic comparison is no accident; it demonstrates how system-wide dehumanization casts Black women's bodies as equivalent to livestock, valued only for their labor and reproductive capacities. Yet, despite the violence she suffers, Sethe's determination that she "had milk for [Beloved]" (31) becomes a radical assertion of authority and maternal defiance. Whereas Sethe fights to keep her maternal labor for her own children, Dana, although not a biological mother, is forced to ensure the birth of her ancestor Hagar, entangling her in the reproductive violence of slavery: "I should have been used to white men preying on black women. I had Weylin as my example, after all. But somehow, I had hoped for better from Rufus. I wondered whether the girl was pregnant with Hagar already" (129). She also witnesses Alice's rape and coerced motherhood under Rufus, a condition imposed without consent and sustained by force. Alice remarks that she "'ll push him whenever [she] can [and that she] should have took Joe and tried to run before [she] got pregnant again" (232).

Owing to this enduring colonial matrix of power, born in colonial law yet persisting as racial capitalism within the United States, Dana's complicity becomes fraught with ethical pain. Benjamin Robertson suggests that Dana embodies history's violence rather than history per se: her survival depends on

maintaining the very plantation order that has turned her kin biological property. Although she is a well-meaning actor, she is forced into morally compromised roles that preserve the very lineage and plantation order that have made her ancestors exploitable in the first place. In addition, Dana's final "No" is not primarily a linguistic gesture but a bodily one: it is registered through the act of stabbing Rufus, an intervention that makes agency inseparable from pain and mortality rather than from abstract choice. In that moment, Butler condenses the novel's long meditation on constrained agency into a single, violent performance of a Black woman whose body has been recurrently claimed for work and sex. Florian Bast (2012) asserts that this embodied "No" is an ecofeminist rebuttal of Dana's relegation to reproductive and agricultural labor on the plantation: by attacking Rufus, she refuses the role of compliant medium through which the Weylin line and its property relations will be secured, and she simultaneously rejects the expectation that her body will continue to cultivate the land that supports that regime. The agency expressed in the stabbing is thus double: it is a desperate assertion of bodily integrity in the face of sexual and racial domination, and it is a rejection of the colonial-capitalist ecology that has regarded her as a living resource, a renewable source of both field work and future slaves.

Within this context, Sethe's defiant declaration: "She's mine, Beloved. She's mine" (402), is not a reproduction of possessive logic but a radical reassertion of maternal power. Reclaiming the right to love and protect her daughter on her own terms, Sethe challenges the colonial order that denied her personhood and parental authority. These lines align with the arguments of Hortense Spillers and Saidiya Hartman, both of whom incisively expose the brutality and dehumanizing logic of the slavery system. Spillers contends that slavery "ungendered" the enslaved, reducing familial bonds to flesh and stripping them of normative social recognition (452). Such positioning yields the commodification of the enslaved more palatable to the dominant order, transforming human beings into abstract and exchangeable units of labor and reproduction. Hartman likewise depicts how the enslaved were denied interiority and self-ownership, describing slavery as a condition in which individuals were deprived of the legal means and cultural forms to assert humanness. She formulates vividly how the enslaved were stripped of interiority and self-possession, transformed into pliable forms of labor and subjugation:

> The fungibility of the commodity makes the captive body an abstract and empty vessel vulnerable to the projections of others' feelings, ideas, desires, and values; and, as property, the dispossessed body of the enslaved is the surrogate for the master's body since it guarantees his disembodied universality and acts as the sign of his power and dominion (*Scenes of Subjection* 21).

Patriarchy, Commodification, and Dehumanization

Critics of colonial modernity such as Sylvia Wynter, Walter Mignolo, and Val Plumwood similarly confirm that modern Western epistemologies have produced a narrow and exclusionary definition of the human, one that legitimizes the commodification of racialized others. Wynter's distinction between Man1 (the Renaissance figure of the rational, secular individual) and Man2 (the post-Enlightenment liberal subject defined by norms of biological and cultural superiority) highlights how these categories isolate individuals and naturalize racial hierarchies. Warren claims that the interconnected oppressions of women and nature are rooted in hierarchical dualisms such as culture/nature and male/female, which undergird systems of exploitation (4). Likewise, Val Plumwood denounces the logic of domination entrenched in Western dichotomies, demonstrating how roles associated with nature and femininity are systematically devalued and instrumentalized under patriarchal power (1993).

In both *Beloved* and *Kindred*, this logic structures the plantation world in which Black women and their children are treated as property rather than as fully human subjects. White male figures frequently embody patterns of control (whether through slavery or emotional detachment), while female characters cultivate restorative, intuitive relationships with the natural world, drawing upon it as a source of revitalization and spiritual strength. Rufus Weylin, Schoolteacher, and their ilk most starkly embody this order, as their access to legal personhood, property, and violence depends on the simultaneous dehumanization of Black people

and the land. Even Kevin, Dana's white husband, though often sympathetic, remains constrained by his racial and gendered privilege. His remark, "This could be a great time to live in […] go West and watch the building of the country" (97), reveals a romanticized detachment from the brutality Dana experiences firsthand. Yet the relational spaces forged among the enslaved -such as the communal gatherings in Baby Suggs' Clearing or the fragile solidarities Dana builds across time- contest this dehumanizing order. They model forms of personhood grounded in mutual interdependence and communal survival, complicating the dominant equation of "the human" with mastery and autonomy.

Crucially, the novels under discussion also reveal that patriarchy is not simply rule by all men but a racially restricted order that grants full masculine subjecthood only to white enslavers. That is, enslaved men are denied the authority and paternal rights that define normative manhood; although they are gendered male, they are not recognized as men within the plantation hierarchy but are instead treated as fungible labor and reproductive instruments. Nigel, for example, navigates these oppressive systems ambivalently, occasionally replicating their logic as a means of survival. At the same time, Nigel's inability to protect his family or claim secure authority over his own life underscores how enslaved men themselves are barred from the privileges of patriarchal manhood. In this sense, the novels not only challenge who counts as "human" but also expose how the same logic that commodifies Black women's bodies extends to the natural world. The protagonists' deep connection to nature is often fundamentally at odds with the white male characters who exploit both women and the environment, reinforcing the parallel between the subjugation of nature and the subjugation of women within patriarchal systems. Rufus Weylin exemplifies patriarchal authority through his constant exploitation of Black women, especially Alice and Dana. His dominance operates along racial and gendered lines, as seen when Dana recounts, "Suddenly, there was an avalanche of pain, red impossible agony! And I screamed and screamed" (261).

In *Beloved*, the Schoolteacher epitomizes this colonial and patriarchal mindset through his pseudo-scientific dehumanization of the enslaved. Sethe recalls, "Schoolteacher'd wrap that string all over my head, 'cross my nose, around my behind. Number my teeth" (366), casting her as an object of study, or more accurately to a measurable specimen. His treatment of women reflects a logic of domination, contrasting sharply with the exemplified spirituality of Sethe and Baby Suggs. When Sixo's attempt to flee Sweet Home is thwarted, he is labeled mad and executed by fire. His inability to secure recognition for his relationship or to protect his partner and prospective child reveals how the system deprives him the status of husband and father that upholds normative white patriarchy. Paul D, too, unveils traces of internalized patriarchy. Haunted by trauma, he buries his emotions in a "tobacco tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be" (141–42). His initial condemnation of Sethe, telling her, "What [she] did was wrong" (315), reflects patriarchal expectations of rational moralism over empathetic understanding. Yet his gradual emotional opening gestures toward a more reciprocal and restorative model of masculinity, challenging the very structures he once embodied and exposing how enslaved men must renegotiate masculinity from a position of structural dispossession.

This patriarchal system has significantly contributed to the lingering legacy of colonialism, particularly through the commodification and dehumanization of Black bodies under slavery. Yet it is through memory that this legacy is confronted and resisted. One of the most significant symbols of this resistance is "The Clearing," which appears twenty-seven times throughout *Beloved*. In contrast to the plantation, where bodies are reduced to property, it is described as "a wide-open place cut deep in the woods" (168). The Clearing's secluded nature, "a path known only to deer and whoever cleared the land," suggests an intentional disconnection from the outside world, turning it into a refuge where enslaved people, brutalized by slavery, can momentarily reclaim their personhood and connect with themselves and each other free from surveillance or harm: "Baby Suggs, holy, followed by every Black man, woman and child who could make it through, took her great heart to the Clearing." The Clearing converts the forest into spiritual resistance, where community members are able to "laugh, cry, and dance." It functions not simply as a place of emotional release but as a restorative zone where body and land converge in defiance of the

fragmentation imposed by slavery. Baby Suggs's sermons accentuate the sacred unity of self and community, as she "offered up to [the slaves] her great big heart," giving them what they needed to survive and to feel fully human. In this space, enslaved men as well as women briefly inhabit modes of vulnerability and personified joy that the plantation's patriarchal order denies them, unsettling the association of masculinity with domination and control. These practices can be viewed as a resistance to pervasive and violent white supremacy.

5. Synopsis of the Main Research Outcomes

This article argues that Morrison and Butler use ecological form to generate counter-history: landscapes, bodies, and objects operate as archives of colonial violence, and narrative reworks those archives into sites of testimony and ethical relation. The main outcomes are:

I. It reframes plantation space as an ecology of domination, showing how gendered extraction is inseparable from environmental injury.

II. It develops "material memory" and "ecological inscription" to explain how violence persists in place and matter, not only in consciousness.

III. It shows how counter-language (rememory and narrative repair) functions as ecological counter-knowledge.

IV. It advances a critical posthuman reading that traces more-than-human agency while preserving historical accountability.

6. Conclusions

Placing ecofeminism in dialogue with Black feminist ecologies and critical posthumanism, this article offers a framework for reading literary form as philosophical method. *Beloved* and *Kindred* maintain that colonial modernity's violences are simultaneously gendered, racial, and ecological: they are enacted through property logics that reorganize bodies, land, and the category of the Human.

The novels' counter-narratives do not simply represent trauma; they model ways of knowing and living with it. Their ecological consciousness—grounded in interdependence, care, and restorative possibility—reorients feminist environmental ethics toward the afterlife of slavery and the material infrastructures that sustain it.

Rather than offering closure or catharsis, the article opens a space for ongoing critical reflection, challenging Eurocentric historiography and tracing the entanglement of ecological and social systems. It further demands that the scars of slavery on bodies and memory cannot be ignored. They must be remembered and reckoned with in order to imagine more unprejudiced and regenerative futures, indicating that the past is never fully erased but remains imprinted, urging reinterpretation in every new attempt to chart a different future.

7. Limitations, Implications, and Further Directions of Research

Despite the article's valuable philosophical in scope, reading the novels novels as forms of conceptual work that develop an environmental ethics of memory and interrogate colonial-modern "humanism" as mastery and instrumental reason, its claims are limited by a two-text corpus. Future research could expand the framework to a broader archive of Black women's historical fiction and—where methodologically appropriate—to records of environmental governance under slavery and Reconstruction, using cross-regional comparison to assess how plantation ecologies vary across the Atlantic world.

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