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Reading Trauma in Toni Morrison's Beloved 1987

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Dedication

To the memory of my mother

To my father

To my brothers, my sisters and all my friends who encouraged me.

Acknowledgments

Firstly, I thank God for giving me the power and patience to finish my studies.

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Abstract

Differences among individuals have always created trouble to those regarded as “the other.” African Americans are no exception, they were and still are racially discriminated. from the time of slavery and even long after its abolition, they were always regarded with inferiority and hatred and rarely enjoyed the status of American citizen . As a consequence, they faced a history full of traumatic experiences that had different physical and psychological impacts on many generations. This work investigates trauma and its impacts African Americans by referring to Toni Morrison’s master piece *Beloved*. How does Morrison’s protagonist exemplify the traumatic experience lived by many African American women is at the heart of this research. From the traumatic impacts of slavery and the physical abuse to the dehumanization by the white supremacists, which are hidden facts that were barely present in the books of history, the author endeavors to rewrite the past in order to highlight its darkest side. *Beloved* works to mirror the consequences of those experiences on those traumatized selves by tackling the darkest element of the protagonist’s life. In doing so, Morrison gives voice to the pain and wounds of those African Americans who were never heard.

Key Words: **African American identity, women, slavery, trauma, struggle, past, collective memory.**

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General Introduction

The fictional world is an imaginary world which does not exist but is inspired by reality and facts. It always bears a hidden message, a moral about life, about something that happened or may happen. Therefore, literature may be defined as an image that portrays the past under the cover of imagination and memory.

The twentieth century witnessed different literary works which reflected many human painful past experiences through the characters' traumatic lives and its impact on their mental health statuses. Therefore, trauma became the center of the novelists' works and it was regarded from the lens of literature and it portrayed historical events through flashbacks, memories, and remembrances full of pain and sufferings.

The relationship between history, literature and trauma became a center of interest for many scholars such as Cathy Carruth and Judith Herman and as an intersection it gained a worldwide attention.

African Americans have witnessed a history full of traumatic experiences such as slavery, physical violence and rape, which impacted their lives and made them mentally unstable. The Black trauma and its impacts attracted many American writers, especially those who had already experienced some traumatic events such as Toni Morrison, and as a consequence trauma became the center of their works and through their novels they fought against different traumatic events and climbed up the steps of truth in order to come out from the marginalized past.

Beloved is one of Toni Morrison's master pieces that portrays the pain and trauma that the African Americans had to face. Even though trauma, as a consequence of the terrifying past, is the center of *beloved*, its impacts affected the characters' mental status in various ways. Thanks to her imagination, Morrison reconstructed the traumatizing past of the African Americans by setting her frame and choosing the right colors which portrayed a complete image about the horrific past.

The aim of this research is focused on both trauma and its impacts and how it was portrayed through *Beloved*'s males and females characters. This work, then, aims at answering the following questions: What is the impact of trauma on *Beloved*'s characters and how they healed from it? Does the traumatic literature novel come out with a truth that was never spoken? To answer these questions an overview about trauma theory is presented followed

by an analysis of the book and the traumatic experiences of the characters by referring to trauma theory.

It is hypothesized that Toni Morrison's *Beloved* shows the destructive effect of the historical social experiences on the characters' lives, especially on Sethe and Paul D who have suffered from slavery and racism. It is also hypothesized that these traumatizing experiences had a huge impact on the characters' mental status. Thus, some of the characters could heal from their traumas and reconcile with their past, while others could not. The last hypothesis is that Beloved shows how physical pain has engendered a psychological and much more intense form of mental torture in those traumatized selves. Giving voice to the voiceless, the story has revealed some details and emotions that history never spoke about.

This research paper is divided into three chapters. The first chapter is entitled Trauma theory, An overview and is devoted to psychological and theoretical review of trauma. The second chapter is entitled Toni Morrison and Beloved and contains a textual study of the novel including plot summary, List of characters and the major themes. The third chapter is entitled The Traumatic Experiences In Beloved explores how the traumatic experiences of the past work to shape the present. Moreover, the traumatic experiences of the characters foreshadow the relationship between literature, history and trauma, "memory in beloved" and "Healing in Beloved" will be debated too.

Chapter one

Trauma Theory, an Overview

I.1 Introduction

The US south has witnessed a history full of traumatic acts, laws, and legitimized behaviors that racially discriminated the black people. African Americans were refused and literally denied by the white society. They were unwelcomed in the American society and they were regarded with inferiority and hatred because they were black. As a consequence, they endured a history of multiple traumatic experiences such as slavery, unpaid labor, repetitive acts of violence, racism, bad living conditions, widespread sexual assault and rape of Black women, which in turn created new issues of identity formation.

In order to unfold the feelings and mental states of the people after experiencing such traumatic events, American writers such as Toni Morrison, started to use their literary works to portray the pain and trauma that the blacks faced. As a consequence, many works emerged and literature became a mirror which reflected the awful history full of pain and sufferings.

This chapter has been divided into five sections. The first section presents an overview of trauma theory. Next, there are four sections devoted to shed light on the psychological view of trauma theory, the study of race within trauma, then gender within trauma and the last one deals with the representation of traumatic history in literature.

I.2 Definition of Trauma Theory

Trauma is the Greek word for “wound” it was used to describe the physical injuries, but at the present time it is used to describe the emotional injuries or shock resulting from traumatic events and their effects on the mental and physical status of the victim. Even though the term ‘Trauma’ has different meanings, it can be defined as “A disordered psychic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury” (*Merriam Webster dictionary*). However, Trauma does not affect everyone in the same way. Some people experience a traumatic event but they suffer no long-term emotional effects, while the same event may have a huge and devastating impact on the person standing right next to them.

The subject of trauma in relation to mental illness emerged in the 19th century by neurologist Jean Martin Charcot, who was a French physician. His main concern was to study Hysteria and he was working with traumatized women who suffered violence, rape and sexual abuse. Charcot found a correlation between hysterical symptoms and dissociative problems and he

theorized that “the causes of hysteria should be traced back to a psychological malfunctioning rather to a physical one.” (Ringel and Brandell, 2012).

Based and inspired by Charcot findings, many works and articles concerning trauma theory emerged. Janet, Freud and Breuer agreed that psychological trauma was the main cause of hysteria and that trauma damages the mental status of the victim as well as the physical parts of his body.

According to contemporary theorists, trauma theory is defined as:

“life experiences that shatter the social and psychological sense of self and precipitate existential crisis, characterized by flashbacks, nightmares and other reexperiences, emotional numbing, depression, guilt, autonomic arousal, explosive violence or a tendency to hypervigilance.”

(The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Women Writers, 160)

Trauma is a "wound" or a physical injury generated by an external agent or an emotional blow that generates persistent damage to the unconscious. Also, the term Trauma is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind. But what seems to be suggested by Freud in *Beyond The Pleasure Principle* (1919), Carruth contends that “the wound of the mind—the breach in the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world—is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that, [...], is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor”

(*Unclaimed experience: trauma, narrative and history* 1996, 4)

In other words, it is a negative and lasting emotion that puts the well-being of the person at risk. What the trauma does is unbalance the subject's mental system and its existence from the point of view of emotions.

In addition to all the aforementioned, we cannot ignore the fact that nowadays the term trauma is very present in the different fields of life. After the pioneering confrontation with the effects of trauma it started to spread and it gained much attention. As a consequence, it was studied within different other fields.

I.3 Trauma, a Psychological Approach

Psychologically speaking, trauma creates the link between the external reality and psychic reality. This was first investigated by the French neurologist Jean Martin Charcot when he worked with traumatized women in the Salpetriere hospital. He discovered that the origin of hysterical symptoms was psychological which was the results of having endured unbearable experiences. Sigmund Freud and Pierre Janet, students of Charcot, had a special interest in their mentor's work and they continued the studies.

Pierre Janet, nephew of the philosopher Paul Janet, was already a full professor of Philosophy at the University, when he began studying Medicine. He did, under the influence of his brother a surgeon named Jules, became able to take part in the investigations carried out by Charcot to unravel the secrets of hysterical manifestations.

Unlike Charcot, Janet delved perhaps for the first time in the history of medicine in idiosyncrasy and symptomatology of each patient, that is, in his inner life and his memories, recording and documenting over the years and years the finest variations of his clinical manifestations. As a consequence of the application of the communication method, he recorded the apparent hierarchical variability of the bodily phenomena of the patients, detecting a symptomatic grouping of which clear regularities and laws were revealed. (Heller,2017)

More specifically: the clinical precepts found by Charcot in 1886 contained a broader and more solid conceptual basis. Many clinical features of hysteria could be better understood in this way, even some could be described and appreciated for the first time.

Freud left Paris and Charcot's Salpétrière in 1886 and returned to Vienna, where he opened a consultancy taking with him an idea and a tool. The idea was that of Pierre Janet: that hysteria was a traumatic disease. The tool was the hypnosis with which Charcot and Janet himself had worked. Treatment would consist of finding out what happened by digging into the patients' repressed memories. (Timpano, 2011)

It was assumed that hypnosis could bring up forgotten memories or unusual experiences that would be at the origin of the traumatic. Under his influence, the patient could recall those

feared scenes that he had buried in his unconscious and that would emerge in the form of psychic symptoms.

Freud suggested that “We must point out that we consider it essential for the explanation of hysterical phenomena to assume the presence of a dissociation, a splitting of the content of consciousness. The regular and essential content of a hysterical attack is the recurrence of a physical state which the patient has experience earlier.” (Van Der Kolk, Weisaeth et al., 1996).

For Freud, psychic traumas generate a blockage of energy that will cause resistance. These prevent the damage from reaching the conscience, but it moves towards the bodily processes and becomes somatic. (Freud 1896).

Janet, however, attributes it to disorders in the distribution of psychic energy. Initially he speaks of a weakness or lack of strength, but later introduces “tension” into his theory, which is related to the use of energy in higher activities. For Janet the memories form “the subconscious fixed ideas” that operate outside of consciousness and They are very difficult to suppress.

He states that this dissociation is due to a congenital weakness of the nervous system, and not to excess energy, as Freud points out. The search for the causes of the symptoms of neurosis takes both beyond consciousness. Janet is the first to propose a theory of the unconscious. It defends the relationship between it and the pathological states, the result of some "fixed ideas" that are formed due to a weakness in the capacity for mental synthesis. However, for Freud the unconscious is a psychic reality present in all individuals, including healthy people, where repressed memories, desires and instincts are found. (American Journal Of Psychotherapy)

In the 1880's Janet, Freud and Breuer agreed that psychological trauma was the main cause of hysteria. They assumed that the instability of mental status was due to the individual's reactions to traumatic shocks. Their discoveries were considered as an important source to investigate trauma within different fields. As a consequence, many articles and books emerged and trauma was seen from different angles.(Ringel, 2010)

I.4 Trauma and Race

Researchers in the field of psychology have examined the psychological effects of racism, to find, among "the effects for the victim", the presence of post-traumatic stress disorder and other stress-related pathologies. However, the impact of racism exceeds the people who are directly exposed to it. Parents, friends, classmates and neighbours are also affected.

Many racial groups, especially African Americans, experience higher rates of post traumatic disorder as compared to white Americans. This is mainly caused by racism which is itself a traumatic experience. For the victim, racism always represents a significant trauma that leaves a feeling of humiliation, exclusion and inferiority.

Racial trauma, or race-based stress, refers to people of color's reactions to the events of danger related to real or perceived experience of racial discrimination. These include threats of harm and injury, humiliating and shaming events, and witnessing harm to other POCI (People of Color and Indigenous individuals) due to real or perceived racism (Carter, 2007).

This term was applied to describe the experience of the African Americans due to the fact that the history of the American South was full of multiple traumatic experiences such as slavery, unpaid labor, repetitive acts of violence , racism, bad living conditions, widespread sexual assault and rape of Black women, which in turn created new issues of identity formation. The resulted harm and pain are always felt in their writings. “As Barbara Ladd (1636) states,

Memory continues to be important in the determination of southernists to interpret or reproduce orality and performance, to attend to what writing erases or elides, and especially to attend to what United States historiography (plain and literary) has obscured in its commitment to cultural naturalism”

(literary theory: an anthology, 640)

I.5 Trauma and Gender

Recent studies in the field of Psychiatry and Social Psychology revealed that traumatic experiences are lived differently by men and women. They found out that women are more susceptible to develop Post Trauma Stress Disorder. Many analytical models on female's

susceptibility to Post Trauma Stress Disorder (PTSD) are based on theories in Psychology.
(Journal of Health and Social Behaviour)

Some researches show that the difference in PTSD is due to the different types of trauma experienced by men and women. However, this hypothesis does not clarify why women are more susceptible to PTSD than men, in a similar traumatic situation. On the other hand, Cortina & Pimlott-Kubiak (2003) refute this thesis of female susceptibility to PTSD, from a study on the psychopathological reactions of men and women in situations of violence (sexual and emotional abuse and physical aggression).

The authors found no significant interactive effects between gender and interpersonal aggressions. Kathleen Brady (2004) underlines the differences between emotional reactions of men and women in the face of traumatic incidents. Women would develop emotional symptoms that would lead to a diagnosis of depression and anxiety, whereas men would react to a traumatic experience with expressions and attitudes of irritability and impulsivity, and would resort more frequently to toxic substances. Other studies, also on gender differences and trauma, emphasize neurobiological, cognitive and psychosocial, preferring individual and interpersonal explanations. For these researchers, in traumatic situations, the “wounds” are more common among women than among men due to the specificity of the “personality of each gender”.

In other words, the perceptions of fear, anxiety, stress and insecurity are built by men and women in a different way, particularly with regard to cognitive perception trauma and women would feel trauma more than men, through cultural mechanisms, social, psychological and biological. However, it is also possible that women would verbalize more intensely their feelings, while men would do so more discreet.

I.6 The Representation of Traumatic History in literature

Trauma is an experience which cannot be available to instant and conscious understanding unlike history which is belatedly and repetitively recorded as put forward by Dominick LaCapra(2001):

Trauma and its causes may indeed be a prominent feature of history, notably modern history, which should not be airbrushed or denied. But simply to conflate history with

trauma is to obscure dimensions of history that may help to avert the incidence of trauma or to mitigate and at least counteract its effects. These dimensions include efforts to diminish or even eliminate the causes of historical traumas often stemming from extreme differences of wealth, status, and power that facilitate oppression, abuse, and scapegoating with respect to class, gender, race, or species. (*writing history writing trauma*, xi)

The notion of trauma has gained some place in history and social sciences interested in historical processes of the past. As Paul Outka (2009) notes in his provocative essay “History, the Posthuman, and the End of Trauma: Propranolol and Beyond”, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can, in an important sense, be thought of as a “pathology of history”.

“as Cathy Caruth (1995) and others have noted, the intrusive, literal memories at the heart of traumatic experience suggest that PTSD is a pathology of history—a past that won’t be past but one that returns repeatedly and with debilitating force”

(Paul Outka)

Lacapra(2001) and Carruth(1996) theorized history through the lens of trauma. Their ideas summarize and illustrate the implicit conceptions of trauma in much of the historical investigations of particular cases. Each one brings together the memory and the time that would be involved in the traumatic processes, and carries on the work of Freud by focusing on the theme of trauma and referring to the memory and the time of the trauma in the story.

Lacapra wanted to create “A mutually informative and challenging exchange between psychoanalysis and historiography as a process of inquiry, especially one that renders history more self-reflexive and self-critical in its approach to problems “

(Lacapra 2004)

In the texts of LaCapra, trauma and its repetition by those who have lived it are associated with each other in such a way that it does not seem possible to conceive of one without the other. He focused on the conscious aspects of remembrance and mourning as venues of critical reflection about the past. He clarified that it would be situations in which the past harasses and possesses the person, who lived a traumatic experience, so that he is trapped in

the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes. Scenes in which the past returns and the future is blocked.

Lacapra believed that writing history is about writing the past and writing trauma is conveying that past's resistance to writing. He suggested that literature has been the privilege domain and a safe place for trauma rehearsal and performative transmission. In some extent, it gave voice to the wounds that seem to defy representation. In his book *Writing History, Writing Trauma*(2001) he claimed:

there is an identity or essential similarity between historiography and fiction, literature, or the aesthetic on structural levels, and their emphasis is on the fictionality of structures in all these areas. At the limit, they present historiography as a closed window so stained by one set of projective factors or another that, at least on a structural level, it reflects back only the historian's own distorted image. (Lacapra,7)

literature is very broad. It takes the influences of other fields in order to signify some aspects of life. Cathy Caruth's book, *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), opened a new discourse on literary and cultural criticism. Carruth sees literature as a form of witness that is ready to speak even when all other forms of knowledge are incapable of capturing a traumatic experience, as she said:

“if Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet”.

(*UnclaimedExperience: Trauma, Narrative and History*,3)

Trauma theory is thus a point in which the issues of literature, rhetoric, understanding, history, textuality, and materiality appear in its broader scope.

Instead of facing the past directly by writing the past, The African Americans and regarding to their traumatic history, they represented their past experiences in other words in form of fiction, poetry, fairy tales to avoid direct confrontation while presenting their testimony and to facilitate the ability to address the emotional truths of the traumatic past without facing it directly. Because as Carruth claimed in her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*:

Trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language.

I.7 Conclusion

This chapter was divided to shed light on the general background of trauma theory. It focuses on how trauma theory had begun and developed and the different studies of trauma from different angles such as psychological one and the study of trauma within race and gender. Also, it presented some theories of famous scholars such as Dominick LaCapra, Charcot and Janet. And since history and literature are concerned, it also investigated trauma and its relation to history and the representation of the two in literature.

Chapter two

Toni Morrison and *Beloved*

II.1 Introduction

During the 20th century, trauma and its impacts became relevant in literature, and as a theme it has attracted the attention of many American writers from different socio-cultural background. As a consequence, many traumatic literary works emerged that portrayed historical events in order to represent the traumatizing past that has haunted many African Americans. Toni Morrison's master piece *Beloved* shows the consequences of slavery on the black people and the great impact of the traumatizing experiences and memories that come back to haunt them.

This chapter's aim is to dig into the biography of Toni Morrison. Moreover, it deals with the plot summary of Beloved and its list of characters. Finally, it discusses the major themes in Beloved.

II.2. Toni Morrison

Toni Morrison, originally named "Chloe Anthony Wofford Morrison" is an American novelist. She was born on February 18, 1931 in Ohio. She was born into a working-class family. As the second oldest of four children, she grew up in an integrated neighborhood, therefore she was never aware of the racial division that black people were facing.

Toni Morrison successfully graduated from high school and she was accepted in one of the most prestigious universities in America. She studied English in Howard university then in Cornell University. Before starting her teaching career at Texas Southern University, she wrote a thesis on the theme of suicide By William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf. She taught at Howard from 1957 to 1964. In 1958, she married Howard Morrison, an architect from Jamaica, with whom she had two sons. In 1965, and after her divorce, she became a fiction editor at Random House. Before becoming a full professor at Princeton University in 1989, she taught writing at the State University of New York at Albany. "The bluest eye", 1970, was her first novel, then she continued writing and she gained the national attention with her novel Beloved (1978). Beloved was her best-known and best-selling novel and it won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction and it is regularly included in the discussion of the best novel written after World War II and in 2006 it was proclaimed by the jury of the literary supplement of the "New York Times" as "best novel of the last 25 years".

In most of her writings, Morrison focused on the African Americans' history and the epic experiences of the black people in the United States. Through her characters she managed to transmit an image about how black people suffered and lost their own identity in a world full

of white supremacy. In 1993, she received the Nobel Prize for Literature for "her novels characterized by a visionary force and a poetic reach, which gives life to an essential aspect of American reality".

II.3. Plot Summary of “Beloved”

Sethe, a former black slave who lives with her daughter Denver in Cincinnati, Ohio. Eighteen years ago, Sethe escaped from Sweet Home plantation, the farm where she was enslaved. Along her escaping way, she faced many bad conditions, from her husband who left her down to the physical injuries and giving birth to her baby in the woods. After overcoming all these obstacles, Sethe and her baby daughter was welcomed at 124 Bluestone Road by Baby Suggs, her mother in law. Sethe then lived there with Denver and her two sons, Howard and Buglar. However, life was never easy, because 124 was haunted by the ghost of a little girl, Sethe's daughter whom she killed twenty years ago. The ghost made their life terrible to the point that Buglar and Howard escaped from the house. After the death of Baby Suggs and the escape of her two sons, Sethe and her daughter Denver lived alone at 124 House, with the spirit of the little girl.

With the arrival of Paul D, a former slave at Sweet Home whom Sethe used to know, brought her memories back, and the story takes the reader from the present to the past.

Paul D Garner who has buried his painful past of slavery, and his horrific experience at a prison for blacks, in the depth of his heart is a hard-working man. While living with Sethe and her daughter succeeded in chasing the ghost away and he tried to offer Sethe and Denver a normal life but since Sethe's past was so dark and full of pain his task was too difficult.

Back to Sweet Home, Sethe was bought by Mr. Garner who, as a slave owner, always refused physical brutality at his plantation. Sethe was the only women slave among six men of Mr. Garner's slaves. Sethe married Halle a brave man who did everything in order to buy back his mother's freedom. That is how baby Suggs became free and she found refuge in Cincinnati. After the death of Mr. Garner, his brother, whom the slaves called the School Teacher, became in charge of the plantation and as a brutal racist man he turned Sweet Home into a living hell. He used all kinds of brutal physical punishments and he used the slaves for his scientific experiments in order to prove that black people are more alike animals.

Sethe was raped by the School Teacher's nephews, who stole her milk from her breast which was intended for her baby. When she informed her slave master about what happened to her, instead of defending her he whipped her making her back look like a chokecherry tree. Life

became unbearable at Sweet Home and it was time for her to escape. In her way to Ohio, and with the help of a kind white woman, Sethe gave birth of her daughter, Denver. Arriving at 124 Bluestone Road, she rejoined her two sons and her one-year old daughter. There, Sethe lived twenty-eight days of freedom and on the twenty-nineth day, and with the arrival of the School Teacher, her nightmare came back to haunt her. Sethe refused to give her children and in order to prevent them from living the horror of slavery and the law of whipping, she took them to a locker and tried to kill them. She cut her little girl's throat, but Denver was saved by a black friend named Paid Acquitted. Her violent act resulted her ostracization by the black society.

Months later, a girl named Beloved showed on the threshold of Sethe's house. At the beginning Sethe, Paul D and Denver welcomed to live among them. Short after, Sethe and Denver recognized her and because of her weird nature and behaviors, they were convinced that it was the reincarnation of the infanticide little girl. Denver saw in her the friend that she never had and Sethe saw the opportunity to make it up for her and redeem her fault. However, Beloved's aim was revenge and to make Sethe's life miserable. She tried to have Sethe for herself as consequence she tried to separate her from Paul D by seducing him.

When Paul D knew the truth about Sethe's ostracization he could not handle it and he decided to leave her.

When the townspeople knew about Sethe's struggle, they gathered at 124 house and prayed to make the ghost disappear. At the meantime, Mr. Bodwine arrived and Sethe attacked him mistaken him for the School Teacher and that is when Beloved disappear.

Sethe suffered because of losing her daughter for the second time. However, Paul D returned and Swores to help her to deal with her pain and heal from her past.

II.4 List of Characters

Sethe

She is the main character in novel. In the past, she had a traumatic experience. She blooms as a slave, deprived from her freedom and detached from her mother. Her mother murdered all her descendant except Sethe. She was named by her mother after her father's birth name, which remained a mystery since her mother was killed before she had the chance to clarify things. As the time passes by, Sethe becomes a mother, but unfortunately, she repeats the same massacre as her mother did by killing her children. She did so , fearing that they will endure the bitterness of slavery as she did . It all starts when she escaped from the house

where she was enslaved, she refuge at her mother in law house with her children. Yet when her master discovered her location, she attempted to execute herself with her children, but she could kill only her eldest daughter. Although it prevented her from reliving the enslaved memories , it was also a reason in the inconsideration of the black community towards her , the departure of her sons , the mortality of grandma Baby Suggs and the haunting of house by the dead spirit of her daughter.

Although her life was very intense , she was very courageous to face it. Ensuing her survival to her rape by the nephew of her former slave master , she evades not with her husband , pregnant with her youngest daughter Denver. In defiance of the fact that she was almost dead, she could get through it with the aid of a charitable white woman who helped her to deliver her baby. The inhabitants of the town viewed her courage as pride, which made them despise her. At her arrest after she attempts to murder her kids, people determined that she was guilty of her actions, despite her motives. Even after what happened, she still didn't require any help, she became more independent then ever but isolated from her entourage. Sethe was able to defeat many obstacles that made her life complicated. Whenever she is confronted with fearful or violent events, she has enough strength to face it. According to Denver, she is “one who never looks away”.

Denver

She is the youngest daughter of Sethe and the only surviving child left. She always felt charged of her mother's violence. She grows up a lonely child isolated as a consequence of her mother's actions, since the society rejected her mother . It gets even worse after the departure of her brother and the death of Grandma Baby Suggs, as the only company she is left with is her mother and the haunting spirit of her dead sister. She finds it difficult to have relationships with people and to open up to strangers such as Paul D whom she considered as a threat to her position in the family. She thought that his existence will make her less important compared to him.

As she matures isolated, she develops an affectional link with Beloved , it was the first time that she cared for someone else other than herself . She seeks to conserve Beloved's identity in order to avoid the repetition of her mother's massacre. Her actions were driven by love and the need to feel important and necessary.

She becomes more compassionate toward her mother's traumatic past and she realizes that Beloved is a fatal supernatural creature that is threatening her mother . Sethe was dismissed of her work because she was completely haunted by Beloved, so Denver takes the responsibility of working to take care of her mother. She ends up raising herself and telling

the townspeople about her mother's concern and asks them for help. Her evolution in the end of the novel is very noticeable.

Paul D

He was one of the enslaved blacks at Sweet Home with Sethe and four men. When their master dies, his nephew , the schoolteacher becomes in charge . As a result, Paul D is sold to another racist and cruel slave owner. Consequently, to his aggression to the new master, he is sent to a prison farm in Georgia, where he was abused by the white guards. He manages to breakout from prison alongside other inmates during a flood. Afterward because of the lack of job opportunities, he becomes a soldier on the Union and Confederate parts of the Civil War.

After the abolition of slavery, he meets Sethe again in Ohio, which reminds him that he envied her because she was a potential coworker at the moment that she appeared in the house. Back then he was a frustrated man because of his sexual desires that he couldn't possibly have, so he used to satisfy his desire on cows. Sethe was given the choice to choose a man among them and she chose Halle. But in the following years, she had a relationship with Paul D. Though, the trauma of Paul D from his enslavement days still purchases him which made him not able to freely express his desires. This made his relationships short lasting. After finding out about Sethe's massacre towards her children, he puts an end to their relation. But once he confronts his past at the end of the novel, he returns back to Sethe and realizes that she was the best thing that happened in his life.

Beloved

It is still the spirit of Sethe's dead daughter, but this time in a physical form, after she was chased by Paul D. She is Charming and obscure wearing fine clothes. Her appearance in the house impacted its inhabitants. Sethe felt a warmth, Paul D was very curious about it, while Denver was nervous about it. After a while she becomes a member of the family and her presence is approved by Sethe and Denver, but inciting interestingness in Paul D.

"Underneath the major question, each harbored another. Paul D wondered at the newness of her shoes. Sethe was deeply touched by her sweet name; the remembrance of glittering headstone made her feel especially kindly toward her. Denver, however, was shaking. She looked at this sleepy beauty and wanted more."

(Chapter 5, Page 63)

Soon after her behavior was very suspicious as it indicates that she is capable of doing harm to her surroundings, especially Sethe.

Her true identity is uncovered when she sings a song that Sethe used to sing for her dead daughter. She was clearly seeking for revanche as she possesses Sethe making her irresponsible over her duties in order to fulfill all her needs. She captured her name from the word that was written on her tombstone. It was the only name given by Sethe to the engraver, because she could not afford the costs of the full name, so she chose the only word that really matters.

“She had not thought to ask him and it bothered her still that it might have been possible—that for twenty minutes, half an hour, say, she could have had the whole thing, every word she heard the preacher say at the funeral (and all there was to say, surely) engraved on her baby’s headstone: Dearly Beloved. But what she got, settled for, was the one word that mattered.”(5)

II.5. Themes in beloved

Memory of Slavery

Martinez argued that *Beloved*:

“Calls the history of slavery back as a ghost Americans have buried in darkness, it suggests, is the limits of the American dream as first articulated in the declaration of Independence: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That articulation fails to include the ideal that human love be extended to all human beings, love in the sense of affirming and assisting in the existence of the other for his or her own sake and for the sake of a just community.”
(Martinez, 2011)

Slavery is regarded as a major theme in Toni Morrison’s Beloved. Morrison succeeded in transmitting the image of slavery from the point of view of the black community, more precisely, slaves. Through the novel, trauma of enslavement always followed Sethe and Paul D since their past and also their present are linked. Their reunion brought back their memories and obliged them to face, once again, their traumatizing experiences and the horrific memories of their past. The enslavement’s trauma is present all along the novel through different hauntings, from the infanticide of her child to the presence of the ghost then Beloved.

When it comes to presenting the slavery of black women, Morrison's portrayed it mostly in the protagonist's narrative, Sethe. The infanticide of her little daughter shows her fear and her pain resulted from slavery. She preferred to kill her own daughter rather than let her live the horrific experiences of slavery. Her violent act shows her pain that have been oppressed since she escaped from Sweet Home and her fear from being enslaved again.

Paul D, suffered a lot as a slave under the charge of the School Teacher then when he was sold to another racist slave owner. Next to his servitude, he had to handle physical violence when he was a prisoner on a chain gang in Georgia. Because of his traumatic enslavement he could not feel at home anywhere until he arrives at 124 House. His relationship with Sethe helped him to confront his past for the first time but it was never easy because he has always placed his feelings in a "tobacco tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be" (86). Because of his traumatic experiences, Paul D became heartless and affectless in order to avoid the emotional pain. Not to feel was the only way of surviving he has had all these years.

The destruction of black identity

As a legacy of slavery, the white supremacists tried to control the African Americans by destroying their black identity. Through her novel, Morrison portrayed through her characters' narrative how black people were objectified, dehumanized and stripped from their basic rights which make them have a proper life as slaves.

"White people believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle.... red gums ready for their sweet white blood"

In the novel, slaves were treated as if they were animals. They were considered as properties and the slave master was allowed to punish them in anyway, he sees to be appropriate in order to teach them how to behave. The only justification is that his whiteness is superior to their black identity. As a "slave master", the school teacher used his slaves for his scientific experiments in order to prove his point of view and to create his own ideology about the black inferiority.

The acts of the destruction of black identity persisted in the novel among the characters' lives and the cruelty that they have faced. For instance, the protagonist Sethe, after being raped, she was whipped after informing the schoolteacher about what happened. Paul D, was also sexually abused in order to make him feel that he is worthless. Halle, who witnessed his wife

being raped but he could not interfere because he did not have “the power” or “the right” to do so.

The destruction of black identity had a huge psychic and physical impacts on the African Americans. It resulted a serious mental instability and made the black people as if they were empty of a self, especially those who were direct victims of slavery.

Motherhood

The mother-child’s relationship is a sacred one. A relationship that many African Americans did not have the chance to discover, especially for slaves because of labor, rape and the fact that they will be separated as their children will be sold.

Morrison represented these relationships, between a mother and her children and how this relation was affected by many circumstances and traumatic events. First, through Sethe’s mother, as a black woman who was a victim of sexual abuse, killed all of her children but Sethe because she knew who was the father. Second, when Sethe succeeded to overcome all the obstacles that faced her through her escape just to rejoin her two boys and nurse her baby. Finally, Sethe’s violent action through against her own children. She preferred to kill them in order to protect them and save them from living the same pain and traumatic experiences that she has been through.

II.6. Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, it was attempted to make a general analysis of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. It contained a short biography about the author and a summary of the story and its major characters followed by the major themes that are tackled in the novel, next to that it explains how trauma of enslavement and the destruction of black identity affected certain characters.

Chapter Three

The Traumatic Experiences in *Beloved*

III.1. Introduction

In addition to analyzing the traumatic experiences of *Beloved*'s males and females' characters and its impacts, this chapter has sought to shed light on how literature represents the wounds of African Americans by telling the story of a hidden past and how healing from their traumas was represented in the novel.

III.2. Trauma's Impact on Beloved's Characters

Morrison's master piece *Beloved* goes beyond the image of the past, it represents the hidden truth and the traumatic experiences that the African Americans had to endure after the American Civil War (1861-1865). Through the novel trauma persists and signs the blockage and interrupts the good progress of time, diverted from the past, common and painful torments haunt the characters through repeated returns which are unreadable but claims to be revealed.

Through *Beloved*, Morrison brought the black trauma to light. Somehow, she revealed the unspoken and she wrote about the painful past that many people knew but never dared to talk about. Her novel bears the dark memories that the black people have suffered from. It consists of the characters' flashbacks that reveal the details of a tragic past full of traumatic experiences such as slavery, acts of violence, sexual assault and rape.

Throughout the novel, the characters have witnessed many traumatic experiences which, in return affected their mental health status.

Sethe, the main character in the novel, has endured a traumatic past. Being separated from a mother who she barely can remember and growing up as a slave was only the beginning of her nightmare. Sethe was raped at the hands of her master's nephew and she was physically violated by the School Teacher which made her back look like a chokecherry tree.

“the schoolteacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree”

After her escape and after twenty-eight days of freedom, Sethe's traumatizing past comes back to haunt her at 124 House. With the appearance of the slaves' catchers, her traumatic memories were brought back which led her to commit such violent act toward her own children. For her it was the only way to protect them from the pain and the horrific experiences that she has been through. Through committing such crime, Sethe shows that what she has endured as a slave at Sweet Home had a huge impact on her and it caused not only physical wounds but spiritual and emotional ones that came to haunt her again.

Halle

After seeing the schoolteacher's nephews holding down his wife and taking her milk, Sethe's husband, Halle went mad.

"traumatized by the rape of Sethe and the maternal violation that it also represents, Halle literally loses his mind his self-hood shatters"

For Halle witnessing the rape and abuse that Sethe endured broke his spirit and the humanity he had as a slave. He realized what slavery really meant, it was not just a lack of freedom but a stripping of everything that makes him a human being.

"there is also my husband squatting by the churn smearing butter as well as its clabber all over his face because the milk they took is on his mind" (83)

The fact that he was found, after the incident, by Paul D at a butter churn smearing butter all over his face shows that hiding the mammary rape of his wife and the feeling of being just a powerless slave drove him to madness and he suffered from psychic and internal trauma.

Denver

Even though Denver never experienced slavery, she was traumatized through her mother's past. Her mother's infanticide caused her isolation and she became emotionally overwhelmed. She lived with the fear of being killed by her mother as her sister:

" I love my mother but I know she killed one of her own daughters, and tender as she is with me, I'm scared of her because of it" and "I'm afraid the thing that happened that made it all right for my mother to kill my sister could happen again" (242).

The fact of living with a mother capable of killing her children if needed traumatized Denver and her life became full of terror. She suffered from nightmares and hallucinations, imagining that her mother tried to kill her, "she cut my head off every night" (243).

Paul D

Paul D's enslavement trauma purchased him all along his journey. He had faced much cruelty in his life and what he has suffered as a slave was the worst. Starting from Sweet Home and with the arrival of the School Teacher, Paul D faced several physical violations then he was sold to another racist slaves' master. As a consequence of his aggression to the new master he was sent to a prison farm where he was raped by the white guards.

Because of his traumatizing past that kept haunting him, Paul D never felt at home anywhere ever again and he lost his true self by becoming heartless and emotionless because it was the only way to survive.

“I'd ever be Paul D again, living or dead. Schoolteacher changed me. I was something else and that something was less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub” (86).

III.3. History, Literature and Trauma

African Americans, especially those living in the south, have witnessed several traumatic events. Their historical experiences attracted writers and that led to the creation of an art, a new form of literature which represent their wounds and emotions. As a consequence, lot of amazing novels emerged. Novels that bear in their pages some hidden messages and hints about the truth and some details that were not mentioned in history. As in Morrison's *Beloved*, where the mental states of the African Americans are portrayed through its characters after facing such pain and traumatizing past and the horrific details about enslavement, rape and violence that they have endured.

Morrison' Beloved, and the fact that it was inspired from the life of the former slave Margaret Garner, presented a part of the history of African Americans under the cover of imagination. Through the characters' narratives, Toni Morrison presented the past from the lens of black people. Details that only few authors dared to reveal. Her master piece beloved presented to the readers a full image of the sufferings that Blacks had to endure during enslavement, and the traumatizing past that they have been through and how it affected their mental states. Details, wounds, pain and traumatic experiences that were barely present in the pages of history.

Sethe, the protagonist who was raped and whipped with a rawhide because of “informing about the rape”, the infanticide of her little daughter in order to protect her and her children from living the pain, from being brought back to the plantation and to prevent them from the trauma of enslavement that she already had and the fact that she was haunted by her past from the ghost at 124 House to the arrival of Paul D and then Beloved. Even though these events are fictional but the context and the truth behind is real. It represents a story that existed and was lived by many African Americans. Morrison sought the right words and the appropriate way to make the African American world visible and to transmit their feelings and emotions that they were never asked about. She succeeded in picturing the reality

through her novel Beloved and presented what was unspeakable through her fictional characters.

Morrison's Beloved sheds light mostly on what slaves have been through. First, and as a physical violence, most of the characters were physically abused. The protagonist Sethe was whipped until her back looked like a chokecherry tree which became as a reminder of her painful memories. Paul D who was raped and once punished with an iron bit on his tongue so that he can not talk or express what he feels or needs. Sethe's mother, whom she barely remembers, was branded by hot iron. All these violent acts and these scars, each one tells its own story and it is a permanent testimony about the traumatic past.

Through her characters, Morrison gave the opportunity to the story of black people to come to light. They do not have to keep their emotions locked inside their chests. Their oppressed pain and the trauma of the past that haunted them forever was finally released and their voiceless sufferings finally became worldwide heard.

In addition to the physical harm, Beloved presented the consequences of such traumatic experiences on the psychic of the African Americans. Through the narratives of the characters, and by remembering their past through different events, they had to confront their trauma which affected their mental instability. And it is most noticeable when Sethe attacked Mr. Bodwine, mistaking him for the schoolteacher. It shows that her traumatic enslavement had a huge impact on her and the fear of going through that horrific experience made her mentally unstable.

Through her fiction, Toni Morrison portrayed an image colored by pain and sufferings of the past of African Americans. She described what the historical words, articles and books could not describe. And through literature, finally the sound of black trauma, that many African Americans had to face alone, came out to the world.

III.4. Memory in Beloved

Memories were the main reason that brought trauma back to haunt the African American lives. In Beloved the characters' narratives were full of memories. Memories about their dark past that obliged them to live the same horror again and again. These flashbacks affected not only the person's life but also the people around him.

Sethe, the protagonist of the novel, suffered from her memories of enslavement which lead her to commit the violent act toward her children. The infanticide of her little girl, in turn,

became another bad memory that comes back to haunt her in a form of a ghost. The angry ghost somehow represented Sethe's repressed pain and guilt and it portrays the memories of slavery that haunted the African Americans for too many years.

The arrival of Paul D also brought Sethe's memories about Sweet Home and reminded her of her rape and how her milk was stolen, which was the most precious thing to her. And at the same time, it remembered her of how her husband let her down when she escaped from Sweet Home. These dark memories prevented Sethe from living a normal life and it coasted her little girl, her two sons and her "real" freedom.

Moreover, the appearance of Beloved, the embodiment of her dead daughter who should belong to the past and live only in memories, came back in order to remind her of her unhealed trauma and her guilt.

Lacapra claimed in his book *writing history writing trauma* (2001) that:

"One's bond with the dead, especially with dead intimates, may invest trauma with value and make its reliving a painful but necessary commemoration or memorial to which one remains dedicated or at least bound. This situation may create a more or less unconscious desire to remain within trauma." (Lacapra)

The arrival of Beloved restored all the dark memories once again, and through telling her about her past, Sethe faced her traumatizing past at Sweet Home. But also opened the wound of the infanticide of her little girl however she tried to make it up for her and to reconcile with her past full of pain and guilt but the memories of the past were just a reminder of her trauma.

The way Morrison represented memories in her master piece Beloved portrayed African Americans' memories , even long after the abolishment of slavery. These repressed memories that come back at any chance made them live a traumatic life which in turn affected the progress of their time, life in general, and obliged them to live in a whirlpool of pain and caused them a psychic instability.

III.5. Healing in Beloved

Even though the center of Morrison's work is Trauma, at the end of the novel and after confrontations and reconciliations with the past healing from the traumatic past was possible for some characters. The healing in Beloved can be noticed as process that contains different

steps. Steps that the characters had to go through in order to find peace at the end of their journey.

The arrival of Paul D revived Sethe's buried memories and through the narration of her traumatic experiences it was possible for her to heal from her traumatizing past.

"Maybe this one time she could... feel the hurt her back ought to. Trust things and remember things because the last of Sweet Home men was there to catch her if she sank? her brain was not interested in the future. Loaded with the past and hungry for more, it left her no room to imagine, let alone plan for, the next day."(70)

Indeed, this confrontation with her past helped her to get back to normal live. She even attended the carnival with the company of Paul D and Denver. However, this did not lasted for a long time and with the presence of Beloved Sethe had to face another dark part of her life that she buried for eighteen years. Thus, after her long journey full of painful memories, she could finally face her repressed traumas and reconcile with her past and the disappearance of Beloved proves that the old dark memories of the past are gone forever.

Baby Suggs, and through the gatherings with the townspeople, she helped them in expressing their repressed emotions and pain and thanks to her wisdom she taught them the right way to confront their past so they could reconcile with their inner traumatized self.

When it comes to Denver's trauma, it was related to her mother's memories and past actions. She was oppressed by knowing that her mother infanticide one of her children and this fact resulted in Denver's isolation and she became emotionally overwhelmed. After her mother's struggle with the baby ghost, Denver became more mature and she healed from her trauma through facing her fear and leaving the 124 House for the first time by herself to seek an employment. Her act was driven by love, and because of the need of her mother and with the help of the community she became emotionally strong, independent and freed from the memories. finally she could made it through and overcame her trauma.

Morrison portrayed that the confrontation of the hidden emotions and memories through narration of the past is painful but at the same time is necessary for the healing from the traumatizing past.

III.6. Conclusion

Morrison's *Beloved* is more than just a novel. It is a novel that bears the voice of black trauma by representing the life of African Americans full of difficulties because of their

traumatic pasts that comes back to haunt them. Moreover, it gave some horrific details that everyone knew but no one ever dared to bring to light.

General conclusion

Because of the white supremacists, black people endured a past full of traumatic experiences such as slavery, physical violence, dehumanization and rape. As a consequence of their traumatic past full of pain and wounds, African Americans became victims of trauma and next to their physical injuries they suffered from mental instability.

Inspired by the traumatic black history, trauma became a major theme in many literary works and many novelists tried to represent the past through fiction. Therefore, literature became a mirror that reflects past facts under the cover of fiction.

Through the analysis of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, it is noticed that the characters narratives represented the traumatic experiences of the African Americans which caused them different forms of pain. The characters suffered mostly from psychological impacts which were mainly instability of mental status, Halle for example who lost his mind after seeing his wife being raped, and isolation like Sethe's daughter, Denver. Also, loss of true self and emotions as in the case of Paul D.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* succeeded in depicting the cruelty and pain that African Americans had to endure from the era of slavery to the twentieth century. It showed the white supremacy and its oppression on the black people. Moreover, it offered an analysis of the impacts of slavery African Americans and through its characters narratives, it presented a revision of the hidden truth and sufferings as witnessed by generations Black men and women.

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