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History, Identity, Trauma and Narratives in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* in relation to “Black Lives Matter” (BLM)

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Dedication

To my family.

Acknowledgement

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Table of Contents

<u>Title</u>	<u>Page</u>
Dedication	2
Acknowledgement	3
Table of Contents	4
Abstract	5
Introduction	7
<i>Beloved</i> Scholarship	9
Theoretical Framework	12
The wound of the mind: History, memory and their narrative enactment of African-Americans in <i>Beloved</i>	16
Memory and narratives	26
The wound of the body	32
Conclusion	33
Works Cited	37

Abstract

This is a study of African-American traumas in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* in relation to the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM). It attempts to explore those stances in the two modes of narrative that impede the justice and peace for African-Americans within particular historical and social contexts.

Based on trauma theory by Cathy Caruth, the essay explains the physical and mental wound left by trauma. Instances from the novel have been analyzed to show how bodies are inscribed, literally and metaphorically, by the oppressor to enforce his identity on people of color. Those markers testify to the agonies of the past, contribute to the process of self-discovery and support the idea that the past is alive in the present. It was also significant to show the effect of the wound of the mind on individuals and communities. The mental wound, which comes later as a response to the violent events, is unhealable and unbearable. Therefore, the essay shows that there is no completed panacea for traumatized African-Americans who suffer the mental wound and lose their control over their present life.

It has been one of the basic concerns of this study to underscore the role of trauma narratives in reconstructing (hi)story in order to attain self-discovery and reconstruct new realities, subjectivities and identities. Through Stuart Hall's argument, it was also important to assert that identity is not a static concept or a one dimensional question. It alters as history does and shifts as positions do.

The study shows that although *Beloved* and BLM are two different modes of narrative, they have the same aim of depicting the mental and physical wounds of African-Americans in order to reveal the truth and affect their audience. It was also important to show

that both Morrison and BLM assert the continuity of African-American traumas and systematic racism in the U.S. America. African-Americans remained the object of oppression, violence and racism after the Civil War and the Reconstruction Era and are even so today.

Introduction

Tracing African-American history helps us to discover the past experiences of African-Americans and their traumatic memories. Literature, social media and other modes of narrative are suitable for understanding the way historical occurrences shape and change the lives of African-Americans. The study at hand aims to show the role of trauma narratives in Toni Morrison's Pulitzer-Prize winner *Beloved* (1987) and the contemporary social movement “Black Lives Matter” (BLM). Both the novel and the social movement aim to depict African-American traumas, showing that a true understanding of the self is not dissociated from a good understanding of one’s surroundings.

Beloved is a novel written in nineteen eighty-seven about slavery in the nineteenth century. Toni Morrison wrote this novel after discovering a document narrating the story of a slave woman named Margaret Garner. Like Morrison's character, Sethe, Margaret Garner escapes slavery with her four children and later, when her slaveholder attempts to take them back to slavery, she kills one of the children. She is then sent to jail for “destruction of property” (Mckay 8).

In the course of analyzing the stories in the study, I attempt to show how BLM and Morrison design settings, images and plots that reveal African-American traumas with double wounds, the wound of the body and the wound of the mind, and show how oppressed African-American men, women, and even children are in the various narrative settings throughout the different historical periods. Obviously, African-Americans remained the object of oppression, violence and racism after the Civil War and the Reconstruction Era and are even so today.

Toni Morrison uses several literary techniques that combine modernist and post-modernist innovations (Torres 180). This can be depicted through her use of the stream-of-consciousness technique, not relying on traditional chronological narrative. Shifting points of view are deployed to ensure that the reader sees the stories of the past from several perspectives. African-American traumas that BLM narrates today are part of African-American history and memory that are depicted in *Beloved*. The narrative technique of BLM is a new narrative that has arisen to assert that police brutality and African-American traumas today are not new issues; rather they are a continuous process for a series of historical traumas that African-Americans suffer over time. This essay tries to answer the question: To what extent can trauma narratives of the Black Lives Matter movement and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* affect the audience and contribute to a social change regarding the inherent issues of African-Americans such as trauma, racism, injustice, violence and so forth?

In their narratives, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Black Lives Matter explore stances that can be seen as impeding the quest for justice and peace in the U.S society. Both Morrison and the BLM organization adopt trauma narratives of African-Americans as a technique to reconstruct African-American history in order to reconstruct a new reality that can affect subjectivities and identities of African-Americans today. In the case of African-American lives, we need to understand the relation among identity, history, trauma and narrative. These factors work altogether as components to the changing process that can help African-Americans in their seeking of justice and peace in America today. As Cathy Caruth claims that traumas affect “time, self and the world” (Caruth 4), and Stuart Hall argues that history is needed for identity construction. Still, we need the modes of narrative such as literature and social media to recapture history, depict traumas and show “the reality that is

not otherwise available” (Caruth 4). This truth can help African-Americans in self-discovery and reconstruct new identities able to face the present with a depth perception to the past.

Further, Susan J. Brison asserts that narrating memories may contribute to the healing process or remaking the self of survivors who suffer trauma. She argues that trauma narratives make a voice for voiceless traumatized people who suffer trauma twice, once through the occurrence of the violent events, and again through the mental wound that comes later as a response or repetitive phenomena such as flashback, nightmares and uncontrolled memories. However, both Brison and Caruth agree that it is very difficult to cure the wound of the mind or survivors who suffer post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms. Based on this argument and the ambiguity of the healing process of traumatized Sethe in the novel, I argue that there is no completed panacea for Sethe and other African-Americans who suffer the mental wound and lose their control over their traumatic memories.

***Beloved* Scholarship**

Toni Morrison's Pulitzer-Prize winner *Beloved* is considered an important work that has been and still is of a great interest to scholars, students and readers. Among Toni Morrison's novels, *Beloved* “is the one most often taught and the one most written about across the world” (Mckay 4). Bao Jinping notes that the importance of the novel is that “Morrison presents a black world that has been neglected for a long period of time because of the white” (1) man. *Beloved*'s narratives depict the profound pain that has been left behind in African-American bodies, minds and memories by the whites. Nellie Y. McKay pays attention to the novel's context when she argues that Morrison's “powerful words, on behalf of millions, give voice to a profound lament” (3) of African-Americans. Critics help us realize a deep

understanding of the novel's aspects such as history, memory, racism, motherhood, black identity and so forth. In this section of my essay, I am going to present different critics writing on *Beloved* with regard to the novel's narrative enactment of traumatic history, memory and the body.

Many critics agree that *Beloved* is a work of historical fiction that shows a traumatic side of African-American history. Cathrine Rody notes that *Beloved* is "a historical novel; Morrison rewrites the life of the historical figure Margaret Garner" (93). Mae G. Henderson sees the novel as a historical site that attempts to "fill in the blanks that the slave narratives left" (81). Moreover, Rody suggests an ideological reading of *Beloved* through reading the novel from African-American historical and psychological perspectives. As mentioned, Morrison writes *Beloved* after reading a historical text about a traumatized slave that affects her psychologically and then she attempts to fill in the psychological space between African-Americans today and their ancestors by "reimagining an inherited past" (Rody 95). Furthermore, several critics look at the historical side of the novel as a cure for African-Americans who are unaware of their traumatic history. Mckay sees rewriting the traumatic history of African-Americans as "a conscious act toward healing a painful wound [and] to remind us never to let this atrocity happen again" (3). According to Mckay, one may argue that rewriting the traumatic history in the novel is needed for self-discovery and recovery.

Critics have also highlighted memory, or what Toni Morrison coins "rememory." Rody defines "rememory" as a "heightened imaginative power ... [able to] represent the past" (102). She explains that Toni Morrison uses remembering the past, whether from her or her characters, as a technique to illustrate "collective memory" through narrating and exploring African-American trauma (Rody 101). Mae G. Handerson notes that the novel explores

memories—personal and collective— as a technique “to move from image to text” and as a link to connect between past and present (82-86). Furthermore, some critics take remembering the past as a healing process of the self. For instance, Eliana Cristina Ionoaia argues that “the novel is organized by fragments of memories retold and it deals with a healing of the self” (68). Thus according to these scholars, using memory through narration is a useful way of supporting the idea of self-discovery and recovery. Although many critics focus on the traumatic side of memory in the novel, Mary Paniccia Carden notes that remembering the past enables a romantic relationship between Sethe and Paul D. Thus, critics present different ways of using memory.

Other critics have focused on the body, which represents the inscribed image of slaves and ex-slaves. As Rafael Perez Torres explains, the bodies of slaves are inscribed by the white man. He argues that their bodies “become the text on which their identities are written” (187). Also, Carden highlights another negative effect on the slaves' bodies. She explains that the institution of slavery and the oppression maintained by white men had rendered the body of the slaves, both males and females, genderless through playing the same positions and without thinking of their humanity (8). These painful images of body, history and memory are depicted through “magical narratives” in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*.

Several critics focus on the narrative strategies of the novel and their effect on readers. Torres argues that Morrison uses several literary techniques that combine modernist and post-modernist innovations (180). He explains that Morrison's powerful language manages to present a “voice and identity” of cultural and social absences (180). The narrative technique has been described as magical by Bao Jinping. According to him, shifting between past and present in the novel's narrative has a great effect on the audience and plays a large

role “to reinforce the idea that the past is alive in the present” (Jinping 3).

Today, critics continue to analyze the novel as one of the most important works in African-American literature. However, I attempt to discuss *Beloved* with relation to a contemporary movement, Black Lives Matter (BLM). Through this way, I think, we can understand the link between past with present, and explore why Morrison returned back to speak about the roots of African-Americans through a 'magical narrative' in contemporary life. In *Beloved*, the sense of discovery of slaves' and ex-slaves' traumas has been successfully depicted by narrative technique. But the sense of fuller recovery of the mind's wound for Sethe remains ambiguous. In the novel, writing about traumatic history, memory and body of African-Americans in modern day is a technique Morrison uses to depict the origin of oppression, racism and violence that African-Americans have suffered by white supremacy ever since their uprooting from their motherland. The narratives of the BLM movement, in their turn, assert the continuity of the unhealable wounds that African-Americans still suffer in the U.S today.

Theoretical Framework

In the theoretical framework of my essay, I will use trauma theory in order to understand the complicated wounds of traumatized African-Americans who suffer violent experiences at the hands of the whites. Trauma theory is a useful field to understand the wounds that black people have suffered by whites, especially in American society. In her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and history*, Cathy Caruth explains the term “trauma” as a wound of overwhelming violent experience that people suffer through unexpected and uncontrolled circumstances. Thus, the main reason of trauma is violence. We cannot say all

kinds of violence can cause trauma, but we can say that trauma, which I use here, is as a result of violent acts. Initially, violence inflects upon the body, which in its turn affects the minds, whether survivors' mind or the minds of other people who listen to and read about survivors' stories. Here, trauma narratives play a large role in depicting the wounds of traumatized individuals and unveiling the true reasons that stand behind their traumas.

Originally, trauma was used as a term to explain the effects of a harsh injury to someone's body, but Caruth observes that the later usage of trauma, especially in medical literature, focuses on the wound that "inflects not upon the body but upon the mind" (Caruth 3). In this case, the wound of the mind, in trauma, usually is harsher than the wound of the body. The difference between the body and the mind is that the people never share bodily wounds, but they always share their thoughts, ideas, memories, histories and other activities of their minds. In other words, I cannot feel the wound of the body that someone feels, but I can feel his/her wound in my mind. Caruth claims that the wound of the mind can affect "time, self and the world," so it is a collective, unbearable and unhealed wound, "not like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event" (Caruth 4). Thus, in order to understand the communal issues of the mind, we need to look at, listen to or read the narratives of the violent experiences that affect the bodies and the minds of individuals.

Caruth argues that people who survive trauma have "to live it [the wound] twice" (Caruth 7). First, when the traumatic events occur to survivors. In this case, the effect of trauma will be upon the body of the survivor. Another comes later as "flashbacks, nightmares and other repetitive phenomena" (Caruth 94). In the second situation, traumatized people live with emotional anguish for a long time or maybe forever because it is difficult to cure the wound of the mind. At this point, the wound affects their minds and transforms the issue

from personal to collective because the wound of the mind can be shared, as mentioned above. Here, trauma narratives come after the occurrence of the overwhelming events in order to narrate the unknown pain of individuals as a way of showing the facts when healing the wounds. However, the repetitive wound, which comes later, shows a mortal impact of trauma on the survivor and the unsuccessful process of healing discourse and that which is called Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD is the uncontrolled situation in which survivors cannot escape, resist or give up their repetitive wounds that perhaps succeed to destroy their lives slowly. In order to understand the complicated situation of survivors' identities, we need to look at Stuart Hall's argument about identity.

It is important in the case of trauma to look at identity because identity includes the body and the mind together. In order to understand traumatized identities, Stuart Hall suggests thinking about identity as a never complete production that can change over time. Trauma, that is inflicted upon the body and the mind, is a factor of the constitution of cultural identity. Therefore, we need to look at cultural identities that suffer trauma in their position. Thus, Hall's argument helps us to understand

the ways in which black people, black experiences, were positioned and subject-ed in the dominant regimes of representation were the effects of a critical exercise of cultural power and normalization. (Hall 225)

Those black identities whose overwhelming wounds Morrison and BLM try to show still haunt them like a ghost even in modern day. At this point, it is necessary to realize the history that has a critical role for shaping the present. Hall argues that “'hidden histories' have played a critical role in the emergence of many of the most important social movements⁹” (Hall

224). Hidden histories, here, is a complicated subject because we speak about hidden histories, memories, and other past traumatic experiences of African-Americans. These cultural aspects are significant in forming African-American identities. African-Americans need to discover their hidden past or their ancestors' position in order to position themselves in the present and avoid “the rift of separation” between past and present (Hall 224). Hence, literature, social movements, mediation and other modes of narrative arise as a kind of depicting, dramatizing, showing and unveiling the veil of the past. In this way, we are able to repair “the broken rubric of our past,” and rebuild a strong connection of knowledge between past and present (Hall 225). As mentioned above, the modes of narrative can also contribute psychologically to healing the survivors. However, we still need to know whether the recovery of traumatized individuals can lead to fuller healing?

In “Trauma Narratives and the Remarking of the Self,” Susan J. Brison presents an important argument about the relationship between trauma narratives and recovery of the self. According to her, trauma narrative is a process of narrating traumatic memories as “a speech act that defuses traumatic memory, giving shape and a temporal order to the events recalled, establishing more control over their recalling, and helping the survivor to remake a self” (Brison 40). In PTSD symptoms, survivors need to remake themselves in order to regain their control over their intrusive memories in the present. So, self-narrative is a useful process for recovery through trying to regain their control and restore their normal life. However, Brison notes that there are two obstacles on the way of remaking the self. First, survivors lack of the powerful language of self-narratives, which is important to express their painful reality. Second, there is a lack of listeners who are “able to hear us and to understand our words as we intend them” (Brison 46). The modes of narrative can help to pass through

those barriers through using aesthetic ways of showing the truth, and that in its turn helps to create listeners, readers and audience. However, Brison asserts that this way of healing is not “always therapeutic, nor that it is, by itself, sufficient for recovery from trauma” (Brison 40). By the end of the novel, the ambiguity of the fuller healing of traumatized Sethe shows that perhaps there is no completed panacea for such situations.

The wound of the mind: History, memory and their narrative enactment of African-Americans in *Beloved*

While reading *Beloved*, we witness how the black community in Ohio struggles in an environment which refuses to accept the human reality of blackness. Black people there turn inward in an attempt to decipher their own past and present. Black women in the community, the most oppressed of the most oppressed, try to struggle and resist the pain of their wounds that are inflicted on their bodies and their minds. Those of them who have suffered traumas under slavery are still haunted by memories and brutal history.

In the novel, Schoolteacher at Sweet Home and his students have been using science to study the black race's characteristics. Sethe overhears the schoolteacher telling his nephews after being done examining and measuring her body to write down on a piece of paper her human characteristics on one side and her animal characteristics on the other. Mae G. Henderson proposes that, “the schoolteacher espouses a concept of 'otherness' as a form of subhumanity that serves, through a process of negative self-identification, to confirm his own sense of superiority” (Henderson, 88-89). The schoolteacher is a custodian of the kind of white knowledge that refuses to acknowledge the humanity of the other. Other deeper and more human issues are not worthy of his consideration. His stand is actually representative of

many white men who uncritically adopted branches of theories that are directly and indirectly racist and dogmatic. He believes that he is the sole bearer of the truth. Linda Krumholz notes that, “the social authority of the schoolteacher and the logical clarity of his methods give his words the power of ‘truth’” (Krumholz 113). Sometimes this racist discourse is internalized in the minds of the oppressed. Some black people unconsciously adopt the oppressor's discourse and come to judge members of their race accordingly. One can argue that racism can be an infectious disease that may unconsciously spread among people's subjectivities. For instance, when Paul D hears about the infanticide, he accuses Sethe of acting like an animal, “you got two feet, Sethe, not four” (Morrison 165). It seems that somehow he is drawing on the schoolteacher's language.

In addition to the dehumanization and torture – which made them like animals – that Sethe and other slaves face at Sweet Home, Schoolteacher is still claiming his property which “reproduced itself without cost” (Morrison 23, 228). According to the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850, Schoolteacher, with his nephew and sheriff, reach Sweet Home to return Sethe and her children back into slavery. At that time, Sethe was sure that her presence in a freed state among freed people would not help her from Schoolteacher's attack. After 28 days of freedom, Sethe was able to reconstruct her identity which she lost in slavery and then she felt that she gained control over her body, milk, children, mind and decision. Sethe describes her feeling after freedom: “Look like I loved em more after I got here. Or maybe I couldn't love em proper in Kentucky because they wasn't mine to love. But when I got here, when I jumped down off that wagon--there wasn't nobody in the world I couldn't love if I wanted to”(Morrison 162). For Sethe, that was the first step of healing her traumas that she suffered under slavery. But, when she sees that Schoolteacher comes back to strip her of her rights,

she commits her infanticide by killing her daughter, Beloved, to add a new trauma and brutal memories to her mind. Sethe, whose feelings of motherhood, as described by Paul D, are “too thick,” is convinced that the “best thing she was, was her children” (Morrison 251). By killing her daughter, Sethe believes that she is freeing both her daughter and herself. She acts as a defender of freedom of her and her children and resists racism: “I stopped him . . . I took and put my babies where they’d be safe” (Morrison 164). In other words, after 28 days of freedom, Sethe can see her past from another angle and then discover a new reality for her and her children. The new 'position' contributes to a large change in her subjectivity. She changes her mind and chooses death instead of living under slavery. She does not commit her infanticide under slavery because she hoped to escape with her children to a free place where she supposedly would be safe. But after seeing schoolteacher’s hat in Cincinnati all her hopes are destroyed. Unfortunately, for Sethe, killing her beloved daughter is the solution to racism and oppression that are caused by the white man and the racist law in America.

Obviously, the link between the mother and daughter is shown as too strong in the novel to be defeated or mitigated by even a wild act of murder. This is why when the murdered baby comes back to haunt the mother, Sethe cannot but surrender to her victim. Out of guilt, Sethe tries to compensate Beloved for what she has done to her. Yet, by the end of the story Beloved, the embodiment of the traumatic past, begins to consume Sethe and deprive her of her extraordinary potential. The body of Beloved grows so huge that it cannot be controlled. So the body as a metaphorical device, as a symbol for the past and communal history, is emphasized. The importance of this emphasis is to draw the reader’s attention to the fact that it is impossible to do away with one’s traumatic past. Still, this past should not be allowed to become a source of fatal obsession. To be tied to the past in a negative manner

is as dangerous as a denial of it. Actually, a great deal of the tension in the novel results from this powerful and shrewd relation between the characters' past and present.

The appearance of Beloved is a technique that Morrison uses to assure the relation between the past and the present as well as a metaphor to play many roles in the novel. After her death, Beloved comes back to haunt 124 Bluestone as a hidden ghost trying to reveal her hidden past. But she fails in her mission because she cannot force her mother to narrate her traumatic memories, and because the appearance of Paul D who is strong enough to drive the baby ghost out. Baby Suggs asserts to Sethe the weakness of the baby ghost, and expands the focus from personal to collective: "Not a house in the country ain't packed to its rafters with some dead Negro's grief. We lucky this ghost is a baby. My husband's spirit was to come back in here? Or yours?" (Morrison 5). For Baby Suggs, all African-American houses are haunted by ghosts. The ghost is a symbol of the responses to their traumas that they have suffered during and after slavery.

Beloved comes again as an embodied soul and succeeds to force her mother, Sethe, to remember and narrate her traumatic experiences. Beloved's food is storytelling, so she keeps saying to her mother "tell me ... tell me" (Morrison 58). Beloved insists that Sethe retrieve history and remember the traumatic events because Beloved refuses to be forgotten for her and her dead ancestors whom she has seen during her death. The conversation between Denver and Beloved asserts that Beloved is a symbol of the greater context of African-American history and memory:

You see anybody?

Heaps. A lot of people is down there. Some is dead.

You see Jesus? Baby Suggs?

I don't know. I don't know the names. (Morrison 75)

The quotation shows that the appearance of Beloved after her death is a technique that Morrison uses to give a voice for African-American ancestors who are dead at the hands of the whites without even names, and who are lost and forgotten by their generations. Beloved is also a symbol of the Middle Passage and the novel's epigraph: "Sixty million and more" of African men, women, and children who were forced to leave their homes in Africa and cross the Atlantic Ocean in order to become slaves in the Americas.

Unfortunately, at one stage in the novel, Sethe is defeated by the consuming power of the past. On the other hand, Denver, Sethe's other daughter, seems to be more capable of handling and coming to terms with the past than Sethe. Denver, who has identified herself through Beloved's gaze is now aware of the danger Beloved poses: "The job she started out with, protecting Beloved from Sethe, changed to protecting her mother from Beloved" (Morrison 243). Denver goes out of her isolation and out of the house and asks for the help of the black female community who exorcise the ghost, Beloved, through songs and hymns.

We see that each of the slaves and ex-slaves feels an urge to develop his/her own sense of the slavery experience. They are driven by an ability to interpret and perceive the objects or the events that take place in the external world in relation to their own specific past and personal experiences. As Kathryn Woodward notes, subjectivities are acquired through the interaction with other members of the community (Woodward 39). In other words, each has a desire to construct his/her own subjectivity as opposed to an objectified identity inscribed on him/her by a white-supremacist ideology and an oppressive power.

The concept of subjectivity is conducive to individual differences. This is why,

despite their common history of slavery, black people in *Beloved* emerge as different human beings. The internalization of slavery is subjective in nature. Sethe, even if she continues to feel guilty for taking the life of her baby, can go on justifying her act. For her, it is a mode of resistance to and rejection of the white man. It can be argued that it is an extremist response to slavery, but one should not underestimate the torture, pain and humiliation that Sethe went through at the hand of white men. If the baby is killed once, Sethe has been killed several times. At this moment of invasion by the white man, intimidated by an agonizing past and humiliating experiences, and probably not fully conscious of her actions, she commits her crime. She tries to make those around her understand this, narrating it time after time: once to Paul D, another to Beloved, in addition to us, the readers.

Another scene that shows the relationship between whites and blacks is the one with Amy, the white woman helps Sethe deliver her baby (Denver) while running away towards Ohio. Amy suffers from oppression too. She and Sethe both “know the bonds of slavery and sexual violation [for she has been raped by her stepfather]. Both escape their position as objects of oppressive discursive practices” (Torres 187). When Amy sees Sethe's bleeding back after being whipped by her master, she tells Sethe:

I had some whippings, but I don't remember nothing like this. Mr. Buddy [her stepfather] had a right evil hand too. Whip you for looking at him straight. Sure would. I looked at him one time and he hauled off and threw the poker at me. Guess he knew what I was a-thinking.

(Morrison 79)

Obviously, the bodies of both women have been exposed to abuse by the white man. Amy, as a part of her culture and a product of her own community, helps Sethe during her delivery:

“Lu [the name Sethe gave her afraid that Amy might tell on her] made it through. That's because of me. I am good at sick things” (82). However, Amy also feels a sense of relief that she is not a member of that race. This fact is emphasized by Amy's words, “Glad I ain't you” (79). Hence, the novel makes it clear that there are degrees of oppression, and being black is the worst kind of oppression.

However, it is important to mention that there are different sorts of white men in the novel. While some can be very dehumanizing and abusive, others can adopt a milder position towards the “other,” i.e., the black people. In this respect, Toni Morrison has been very sensitive to avoid indiscriminate stereotypes of even the oppressive white master. She does not restrict them to one identity. This is also true of her depiction of all the black characters in her novel. They have common history of oppression; still, each emerges with a different identity.

The story of *Beloved* shows us two different identities of white masters at Sweet Home. The first represents Schoolteacher and his nephews who come after the death of Mr Garner and treat the slaves harshly through oppression, whipping, torture and dehumanization. Therefore, all slaves think of escaping to search their freedom or at least to get rid of that humiliation. The second kind represents Mr Garner and his wife who seems better in treatment than Schoolteacher, who let Sethe and Halle get married, who give Halle the right to work Sundays and then buy his mother, Baby Suggs, and free her, who make their slaves feel their humanity. After the death of Mr Garner, the slaves at Sweet Home still do their job well and they even do not think of escaping. Here, Schoolteacher does not need to treat them harshly or oppress them.

In this key issue, the difference between two white masters shows that Schoolteacher

is a racist master who holds in his mind racist ideologies. The presence of this racist man is the turning point in the story that causes the traumatic events to the main black characters. Schoolteacher is the main reason of the traumas for all slaves at Sweet Home and their generations. In this regard, trauma does not affect only survivors but also the people around them such as families, friends and communities. For instance, with Schoolteacher, Sethe suffers too many traumatic events that lead her to commit her infanticide, which is the most traumatic event in the novel. Sethe's family is almost destroyed; her husband, Halle, gets mad; her oldest daughter, Beloved, is killed by her; her two boys leave her afraid of the presence of the baby ghost; and her youngest daughter, Denver, eventually suffers loneliness and the ghost of her dead sister. That is why we look at trauma, memory and the history of African-Americans as a collective even we discuss the stories of individuals. For Sethe, “every mention of her past life hurt. Everything in it was painful or lost” (Morrison 58). Her past is the most devastating and agonizing trauma she has.

In trauma theory, Cathy Caruth describes trauma as an “unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena” such as uncontrolled memories (Caruth 91). Caruth explains that trauma is characterized by double wounds: The wound of the body through violent events, and the wound of the mind as “the response to the event” (Caruth 57). The response, which comes later, is a sign of the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Caruth describes PTSD as “the response to the event [that] occurs in the often uncontrolled, repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (Caruth 57-58). Obviously, this description focuses on the responses that come later, and often survivors cannot control them. But the question remains: Why do these

responses come later? In this case, Caruth suggests understanding the relation “between narrative and reality” (Caruth 6). According to Caruth, the role of narrative is to rethink reference and therefore re-situate it in our understanding. As a kind of narrative, the process of recalling and storytelling lets history arise again and replace the past reality with a new one, which is more influential and in which survivors are often forced to lose their control over their traumatic memories, if they cannot find a suitable way of healing.

In the case of the novel, the description of trauma is very relevant to the catastrophic situation of slaves and ex-slaves who suffer the responses of torture, whipping, being raped, and dehumanization to which they have been subjected by white-racist supremacy since their uprooting from their mother land. The most agonizing response which characters face is their traumatic memories. Some traumatized characters have succeed to gain control over the responses of their violent events such as Paul D, who is strong enough to control his memories and listen to Sethe's memories, and Baby Suggs who tries to teach Sethe to keep the past “unspeakable” (Morrison 58). But other characters whose wounds are unbearable, such as Sethe, have failed to control their memories. Sethe admits that remembering the past initially is “an unexpected pleasure” (Morrison 58), but after recovery of her traumatic past under Beloved's influence, she becomes prisoner for her uncontrolled memories. Sethe endures too much pain to free herself from the prison of slavery, but after her freedom she cannot free herself from the prison of memory that makes a large change in herself. For instance, after seeing Schoolteacher in the first time at 124 Bluestone, she kills her daughter, but in the second time, when she sees Mr Bodwin, she thinks he is again Schoolteacher and then she tries to kill him instead of repeating her infanticide. She tries to change or rewrite her past according to her new reality that she discovered after re-perceiving her past through

the appearance of Beloved.

The past manifested in the character of Beloved will still linger. In the last page of the novel, “[Beloved's] footprints come and go, come and go” (275). This is actually true. The past of slavery and the white-supremacist ideology will still be there and will still be witnessed by those who want to move on with their life. As Denver leaves the residence of the white abolitionists, the Bodwins, who offer her a job as a servant, she catches the sight of a small statue of a black boy placed on the shelf.

[The] blackboy's mouth full of money. His head was thrown back farther than a head could go, his hands were shoved in his pockets. Bulging like moons, two eyes were the face he had above the gaping red mouth. His hair was a cluster of raised, widely spaced dots made of nail heads. And he was on his knees. His mouth, wide as a cup, held the coins needed to pay for a delivery or some other small service, but could just as well have held buttons, pins or crab-apple jelly. Painted across the pedestal he knelt on were the words 'At Yo Service'.

(Beloved 255)

Torres clarifies how the history of enslavement will continue to be reflected in images and symbols such as the grotesque statue that is still present in the house of the people who fight the institution of slavery. He states that

with this brief image the text exhibits a comprehensive critique of the commercial, racist, and potential violent nature of the ...social order. The passage also evokes a series of puns: the 'service' of blacks equated with the 'service' of the small cup full of change, the taking of

the money from out the black boy's mouth suggestive of the drawing upon the services performed by blacks, the presence of the grotesque boy 'At Yo Service' evident just as Denver is going to enter the service of the Bodwins. (Torres185)

Racism is being carried out in everyday life. The reader cannot help but wonder how much the sight of this statue and the stereotyping of black figures affect Denver. Would she depend on society for identification? She struggled first, when she was within the limits of the house with memories and ghosts from the past. How much would she succeed now in her struggle with society as a whole?

Memory and Narratives

Toni Morrison uses several literary techniques that combine modernist and post-modernist innovations (Torres 180). This can be depicted through her use of the stream-of-consciousness technique and not relying on traditional chronological narrative. Shifting points of view are deployed to ensure that the reader sees the stories of the past from several perspectives. The characters in the novel rewrite and reinterpret their history and their individual past to construct a new discourse of their own which is divergent from that of the racist one. "The omniscient narration is told by the contemporary speaker" (Torres 197), that is Morrison in 1987, through events that took place between 1855-1873, within the historical context of American slavery and Reconstruction. Morrison sets the entire novel in a historical frame, referencing many actual events. Therefore, there are two narrations, the narration of the events that took place during slavery and the author's present narration where the author's own interpretation of the past history is shaped by the present situation and her current

position.

The process of recalling and confronting the past can sometimes be conducive to positive transformation. The institution of slavery had a tragic impact on African-Americans and left its deep scars on their psyche and their perception of their own lives. However, for healing to take place, the past, according to Freud, should not be repressed for it would turn into obsession (qtd. in Henderson 92). Hall argues that “presence Africaine is the site of the repressed. Apparently silenced beyond memory by the power of the experience of slavery” (Hall 230). Thus, in order to avoid repression, the collective memory of African-Americans should be narratable among people or through the modes of narrative such as literature, media, cinema and so forth.

The recollection of collective memory is needed for characters to confront their present and future. The scene of relieving the pain of repression is clear when Paul D comes to 124 and gives Sethe a chance to tell the past after 18 years from repression; “his arrival changes the climate of repression” (Rody 99). For Sethe's memory, Paul D is needed to “trust things and remember things because the last of the Sweet Home men was there to catch her if she sank?” (Morrison 18). Morrison also uses the character of Beloved to break down the boundaries of repressed memories. “Beloved herself – the ghost of the two-year old killed eighteen years before the actual events of the novel – comes back as the epitome of the return of the repressed”(Ionoaia 77). Self-narrative or narrating the repressed memories is a technique that Morrison uses to enable her characters to grow as individuals able to define themselves, narrate and evaluate their history, rethink and reinterpret their own past, thus having an identity defined by their own specificities and experiences. Their narration would become their own version of the truth. Beloved's appearance in Sethe's life and the events

from the past that Beloved symbolizes provide Sethe with the opportunity “to become... conversant... [and] acquainted [with her past],... to work through it, to overcome it, by continuing, in defiance of it... Thus, the psychoanalytic process becomes the means by which Sethe must free herself from the burden of her past and from the burden of history” (Henderson 92-93).

In this study, it is important to show how narratives shape and are shaped by experiences, both collective and personal. It is also significant to realize the role that the modes of narrative play to show African-American memory through exploring their past in modern day. This is a powerful way to assert the continuous effect that collective memory and history still play in forming African-American identities. Stuart Hall claims that the past, which includes collective memory, has an important role in cultural construction:

Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (Hall 225).

Hall's argument is very important to understand the relation between cultural identities and history. Both identity and history are not fixed; rather, identities are unfinished productions, which are subject to constant transformation in a non-essentialist past. History is a

changeable process depending on the way we narrate the past in our present. The recovery of the past leads us to re-imagine it, reinterpret it and re-situate it in our present understanding.

As Neil Y. McKay argues, experiences and histories play a substantial role in constructing human identities. Both merge and develop to form identities. Morrison's characters are the outcome of complex interaction between different levels of experiences. For McKay, Morrison's themes "revolve around the wish to forget and the necessity to remember, to reject and to reclaim: and to elide the boundaries between past and present. She imagines and fills in what was not written into the slave narratives. Who else writes a ghost story to recreate history and raise a monument?" (McKay 12).

The writer's role is not to document history or be absolutely truthful to the events as they have occurred, since surface reality is not always conducive to the truth. It is through imagination that historical experience is enriched. John Edgar wonders, "what is history except people's imaginary recreation?" Racial memories, he suggests, "exist in the imagination" (qtd. in Rushdy 37). They are in fact a record of "certain collective experiences [that] have been repeated generation after generation" (qtd. in Rushdy 37). Indeed, "the stories provide selfdefinition in the way that legends, anecdotes, and personal experience narratives define their subject" (Harris 141). History and one's own past, no matter how harsh and traumatic they have been, need to be reclaimed and constructively utilized. This is so since the formation of the human identity is related to that human history. Black people, in particular, cannot possibly do away with their history. It shapes their present and is part of their psychological make up and political standing. Yet, history or "recovery of the past," as maintained by Woodward, "is part of the process of constructing identity which is taking place at this moment in time and which, it appears, is characterized by conflict, contestation

and possible crisis” (Woodward 11).

Hall's argument is also relevant to the way that PTSD survivors suffer the responses that come after the recollection of their traumatic past. Thus, after recalling, narrating or rewriting the past, a large change can occur to our past understanding. In this way, the healing process can begin “when these forgotten connections are once more set in place” (Hall 225). In regard to reviewing history, the prominent role depends on the modes of narrative such as literature, media, cinema and so on. Toni Morrison herself seeks to position herself and reclaim African-American history by choosing to narrate the story of her people. She uses literature as a powerful resource to rewrite African-American history. This brings us to the role literature can play in defining history and unraveling issues of trauma.

The recovery of the past works as a useful means for communal consciousness, if we take it as a collective issue. In the story of *Beloved*, narrating the traumas of black characters is a powerful way to plant a sense of communal awareness to deny slavery entirely and to think of the present as a key component to a bright future for all blacks. Rody notes that “[t]his 'history' thus acquires the function of communal 'talking cure': its characters, author, and readers delve into the past, repeating painful stories to work toward the health of fuller awareness” (Rody 99). The modes of narrative have an effective language that succeeds to affect the audience today and helps them to reconsider their inherent past. It is a good way of fighting the inherent issues such as racism, violence and injustice that African-Americans have been and are still subjected to by the hands of white-racist supremacy in the U.S today.

A return of the memory, or what Toni Morrison coins "rememory," is a first step towards self-healing. Eliana Cristina Ionoaia notes that “the novel is organized by fragments of memories retold and it deals with a healing of the self through representations in speech of

traumatic events of the past” (Ionoaia 68). In order to understand the link between narrating memories and the healing process, we need to look at theories about memory and narratives.

In this regard, Susan J. Brison, in *Acts of Memory*, argues that

narrating memories to others (who are strong enough and empathic enough to be able to listen) empowers survivors to gain more control over the traces left by trauma. Narrating memory is not passively endured; rather, it is an act on the part of the narrator, a speech act that defuses traumatic memory, giving shaped and temporal order to the events recalled, establishing more control over their recalling, and helping the survivor to remake a self (Brison 40)

The argument sheds light on the healing process of PTSD survivors who find difficulties controlling the responses that come after the occurrence of their traumatic events. Even if there is a possibility to cure PTSD survivors through self-narrative, narrating memories do not always go smoothly. According to Brison, survivors need a speech act with a powerful language to express their feelings, and they also need listeners who have the ability to listen and empower them to remake their selves. In the novel, Sethe has kept her memories away from Denver for eighteen years, but she starts to narrate them immediately after the arrival of Paul D who is strong enough to listen and help her. However, she initially keeps the infanticide as a secret even from Paul D because first, she lacks a powerful language to justify her crime, and second, she thinks that Paul D is not strong enough to help her in that case. But eventually, the healing process for Sethe has probably failed since she was forced to narrate her infanticide by Beloved. However, by the end of the novel, Paul D puts his story next to Sethe's and tries to live with her in the reality they found themselves living in:

Africans in America. By that ending, the story does not show that traumatized Sethe begins to be healed. Thus, one can argue that there is no completed panacea for her situation.

The wound of the body

The body as central to identity is necessarily associated with traumas. Sethe's punishment at the hand of Schoolteacher, after the theft of her milk, leaves many traces on her body. She is whipped fiercely and the scars on her back are shaped like a tree—a tree that is interpreted differently by many people. Sethe's body becomes a text which, according to Mae G. Henderson, stimulates a gendered reading. Amy, the white woman who helps Sethe deliver her baby, sees it as a chokecherry tree, having roots and branches. In this interpretation, the tree is “transformed into an image of fruition instead of oppression” (Torres 188). Baby Suggs reads it “as a pattern of 'roses of blood,' stenciled onto the bed sheet and blanket” (Henderson 87). Paul D, who arrives after the open wounds have healed, remarks on “the sculpture...[as if it is]... the decorative work of an ironsmith too passionate for display” (Henderson 87).

The bodies of slaves are inscribed by the white man. This is true both at a physical level and a metaphorical one. Slaves do not have significant control over their lives. The inscriptions on their bodies become the sites upon which their history of slavery is narrated. This is applicable to both male and female black slaves. Their bodies “become the text on which their identities are written” (Torres 187). This is helpful to the fact that identities are not shaped or developed in isolation of one's own history, even if this history continues to be a source of agony. Identity is not formed in accordance with one's own choices. Even if slaves do not have absolute control over the formation of their identities, it is important to

emphasize that identity is not a static concept with fixed elements. Like history, a human identity is a dynamic presence that is always shaping (Hall 226).

The traumatic history of the slaves in *Beloved* is bodily inscribed. Sixo's body is burnt and shot, Paul A's is mutilated and Paul D is pierced with an iron bit in his mouth so as not to speak. The bit leaves a scar. All these bodily inscriptions work to tell us that the wound of the body is a great part of African American traumas. Still, it should not be ignored that the body of the black woman was even more abused not only at the work level, but also at the sexual one. Black women were continuously harassed and raped by the white master. The wound of the body shows that the past, traumatic, painful and dehumanizing as it was, is written by the white patriarchy, racial order etc.

The fact that the slaves' bodies are read differently helps in the process of self-growth and self-understanding. For example, Sethe, though "able to read herself through the gaze of the others" does not blindly adopt others' readings of her body. Her challenge is "to learn to read herself—that is —, to configure the history of her body's text" (Henderson 87-95).

Sethe's mother's scar is a text which testifies to the period when slaves were first brought from their motherland and marked the way animals are marked and labeled. The body mark testifies to slaves' new place of belonging, not to a certain place or territory, but to a new master. The mother confesses: "I am the only one got this mark now. The rest dead. If something happens to me and you can't tell me by my face, you can know me by this mark" (Morrison 61). The mother is aware of the fact that slavery has reduced her to a mark. Still she is not willing to deny the existence of this mark, lest she may be denying her own history, which is an important identity marker (Henderson 95).

Conclusion

In conclusion, I am going to connect between the novel with the contemporary movement “Black Lives Matter,” or “BLM,” that fights anti-black racism, especially police in connection with brutality. BLM started as a group with the hashtag “Black Lives Matter” in 2012 after the shooting death of an African-American teenager, Trayvon Martin, in Florida. Today BLM has a network of thirty nine chapters across America, and the phrase “Black Lives Matter” has become a rallying cry. Morrison and BLM have the same aim of narrating African-American traumas, but they use different modes of narrative. Morrison depends on literature as a mode of narrative in order to attract the readers' attention through powerful language and a magical narrative, while BLM depends on social media to reach their audience through storytelling, expressive images and powerful slogans.

Historical factors play an important role in determining the course of action the characters take in their assertion of their own individuality and identity in the novel. Thus, in *Beloved*, self-discovery involves struggling with one's own past and present. This is particularly so given the fact that African-Americans continue to be relatively powerless and less able to define themselves. They are manipulated by the 'other' white society which impedes an autonomous construction of an African-American identity. Identity is not a static concept or a one dimensional question. It alters as history does and shifts as positions do. It also merges with subjectivities and emerges new. Therefore, both Morrison and BLM feel that narrating history, depicting traumas and remembering the past of African-Americans are needed for an identity construction. This process can emerge a source for a true enrichment of identity and empowerment.

In both *Beloved* and BLM, the black bodies were and still are the victims of

systematic racism. Black bodies are inscribed by whipping, torture and violent death, and become an identity marker. Instances from the novel have been analyzed to show how bodies are inscribed, literally and metaphorically, by the oppressor to enforce his identity print on colored people. These inscriptions, as outlined in the study, are internalized by the oppressed and become, sadly enough, an inherent identity constituent. Those markers testify to the agonies of the past and contribute to the process of self-discovery. Their inscribed bodies continue to narrate their traumas in the present and future. Morrison uses the black body as evidence to depict African-American traumas and prove that the past lives in present. Not only Morrison succeeds to use the black body as a mode of trauma narratives; BLM asserts the importance of showing the true image of the black body through social media. Today, protesters of the BLM movement use “die-in” as a tactic of protest and as a mode of narrative in which they pretend to be dead in a public area in order to assert that black bodies are still evidence of African-American traumas. BLM dramatizes the painful image of black bodies of African-Americans who are killed and have died by police brutality (YouTube).

Caruth notes that trauma narratives show “the reality that is not otherwise available” (Caruth 4). The narrations marks their entry into subjectivity and self- discovery. Morrison and BLM work as effective voices for traumatized African-Americans through narrating and showing their traumas. As Brison has mentioned, survivors need listeners who are strong enough to hear them and understand their words. Through social media and literature, BLM and Morrison try to attract the audience's attention to the inherent issues of African-American traumas that impede the quest for justice and peace in the U.S society today. Both Morrison's and BLM's aim is to show the true and painful image of African-American traumas left by racism. Through depicting the past traumatic experiences, both want to affect the audience

and persuade it to work together to defuse racism and claim African-Americans rights.

In both *Beloved* and BLM, trauma narratives work side by side as a kind of medicine to support the survivors psychologically through remaking the self, and to create a sense of consciousness to avoid the continuous occurrences of traumas and other inherent issues like racism, violence etc. However, in trauma theory, the healing process of traumatized people, who suffer the mental wound, is very difficult. By the end of the novel, the story does not show that traumatized Sethe begins to be healed. Thus, one can argue that there is no completed panacea for her situation.

The way that BLM is using social media today to narrate African-American traumas continues the kind of work done by Morrison in nineteen eighty seven through *Beloved*. Morrison's narrative strategies have a great effect on the audience and play a large role “to reinforce the idea that the past is alive in the present” (Jinping 3). African-American traumas that BLM narrates today are part of African-American history and memory that depict in *Beloved*. The narrative technique of BLM is a new narrative arising to prove that police brutality and African-American traumas today are not new issues; rather they are a continuous process for a series of historical traumas that African-Americans suffer over time. By the end of *Beloved*, through using past tense, Morrison shows that *Beloved* “was not a story to pass on” in order to assert that African-American traumas were repeated in the past (Morrison 274, 275), but Morrison repeats the same sentence using present tense in order to assert the continuity of African-American traumas and systematic racism in the present. By the end of my essay, I have argued that African-American traumas cannot be healed and cannot be finished.

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