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Violence, Haunting, and the Uncanny in Toni Morrison's Selected Novels

Przemoc, nawiedzenie i kategoria niesamowitego w wybranych utworach Toni Morrison

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A testament to burdens you did share.
With deepest thanks, a truth I now proclaim:
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SPIS TREŚCI

INTRODUCTION

Toni Morrison, renowned for her in-depth examination of race, identity, and the experience of African Americans, stands as a pivotal figure in American literature of the twentieth and the twenty-first century. Her literary contributions have significantly influenced modern dialogues on culture and history of black Americans in the US, while also broadening the range of African American female narratives. The novelist's literary success cannot be denied as it is evidenced by the numerous prestigious awards Morrison received, including the Pulitzer Prize for her highly acclaimed novel *Beloved* (1987) and the Nobel Prize in Literature (1993). What makes the writer's literary output distinguished is her innovative storytelling techniques, profound symbolism, and emotional depth, all of which contributes to establishing her as an influential figure in the field of literature.

Morrison, as an African American novelist, intricately weaves her narratives around the marginalized experiences of the black community, with a particular emphasis on the representation of African American women and the challenges they have faced throughout history. Her *oeuvre* is influenced by historical contexts, specifically the legacy of slavery in the US and its aftermath. In her narratives, Morrison confronts the distressing aspects of black womanhood, focusing on the themes of black motherhood, racism, and the lingering effects of enslavement. Despite the presence of male characters in her novels, Morrison's primary interest is in the black female protagonists who face daily challenges in the predominantly racist and patriarchal American society.

While Toni Morrison occupies a unique position among African American female authors, there are other distinguished representatives of black literature in the US. Maya Angelou, along with Alice Walker, bell hooks, and Toni Cade Bambara are Morrison's contemporaries who introduced mainstream American literature to a new dimension of women's writing:

> Black women writers have always, out of necessity, had to maneuver outside of the dominant white (including the white woman's) literary system. Their exclusion from the mainstream literary traditions led them to develop and employ alternative means of communicating, drawing upon their own experiences of oppression and resistance to shape their texts and to represent the characters and situations within it. (Beaulieu 2003: n.pag. Web)

Their narratives serve as an essential and transformative force in the US literature, shedding light on the complex nature of the African American female experience and exploring themes of race, gender, and black identity. In this context, their writings delve into previously unexplored and marginalized facets of black womanhood, emphasizing, among other things, the themes of black motherhood during slavery and introducing strong, black female characters to enrich the canon of black literature.

The majority of Morrison's *oeuvre* was crafted in the latter part of the twentieth century; yet, the body of her work still continues to be valued by both scholarly and general audiences. Not only is her literary output confined solely to fiction, but it encompasses a broader range of genres, including a collection of essays, plays, poetry, and books of criticism. Morrison, in partnership with her son, Slade, produced a successful compilation of nine children's books, which demonstrates the novelist's multifaceted literary nature and talent. In addition to her status as a highly regarded novelist, Morrison held various significant literary and critical positions. Throughout her life, she emerged as a prominent public figure frequently featured on popular television programs. One of them was *Book Club* initiated by Oprah Winfrey in 1996. Toni Morrison appeared on the show multiple times, not only highlighting her own fiction, but also engaging herself in discussions on the novels by other authors. John K. Young, in *Black Writers, White Publishers: Marketplace Politics in Twentieth-Century African American Literature* (2006), posits that Morrison's appearance on Oprah's *Book Club* played a pivotal role in reshaping the landscape of American publishing. Young argues that this shift changed the perception of what could be classified as high culture literature, predominantly favoring white male authors, towards a novel framework where serious literary fiction could coexist with commercial success, particularly when bolstered by influential literary figures such as Morrison (2006: 130). In addition to receiving the esteemed Nobel Prize in Literature and the Pulitzer Prize, Morrison was also acknowledged by the former US President, Barack Obama, who in 2012 awarded the novelist Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Toni Morrison's literary output has been the subject of numerous academic publications, books, and reviews. One of the recent pieces of writing on the novelist is Susan Neale Mayberry's *The Critical Life of Toni Morrison* (2021). It must be stated, though, that the predominant research regarding the novelist's fiction and non-fiction was published at the end of the twentieth century, as well as in the first decade of the twenty-first century. For instance, in 1988, Nellie Y. McKay co-edited *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison* and *Toni*

Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present. The study was an influential and extensive collection of essays, reviews, and interviews, which proved to define the early critical reception of Morrison's *oeuvre.* Moreover, another significant study of Morrison's literary output was carried out by Trudier Harris in *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison* (1991). In this thought-provoking examination of Morrison's novels, Trudier Harris integrates fictional and folkloric methodologies to shed light on the richness and intricacy of African American literary heritage in *Beloved*, *Tar Baby*, *Song of Solomon*, *Sula*, and *The Bluest Eye*. Nevertheless, as it has been reported by the Toni Morrison Society, it was the early 2000s which saw a significant proliferation of articles, book chapters, and dissertations concerning the author (n.pag. Web). This rise in critical engagement not only signified Morrison's growing canonical prominence within American and global literature but also reflected the expanding body of scholars who were increasingly dedicated to conducting interdisciplinary examinations of her complex body of work.

As far as academic publications on Toni Morrison, issued in the twenty-first century, are concerned, the majority of them addressed the problem of racism, slavery, its repercussions, as well as the condition of the black female body within the American context. Among such publications are Erik Dussere's "Accounting for Slavery: Economic Narratives in Morrison and Faulkner" (2001), Jacqueline M. Jones's "When Theory and Practice Crumble: Toni Morrison and White Resistance" (2005) or Greta Le Seur's "Moving Beyond the Boundaries of Self, Community, and the Other in Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *Paradise*" (2002). Other academic studies on Toni Morrison's narratives dealt with the themes of black motherhood, the enduring legacy of slavery, and the Gothic elements present in the author's novels. For instance, the abovementioned issues are discussed by Oty G. Agbajoh-Laoye in "Motherline, Intertext and Mothertext: African Diasporic Linkages in *Beloved* and the *Joys of Motherhood*" (2001) or in the articles by Mischelle Booher or Claude Cohen-Safir, the authors of "'It's Not the House': *Beloved* as Gothic Novel" (2001) and "Female Gothic in America: The Uncanny Vision of Gilman, Jackson and Morrison" (2001), respectively.

As mentioned before, Morrison's literary *oeuvre* has been a focal point of study and analysis in several academic dissertations throughout the 2000s. While the motive of black motherhood, for instance, was discussed by Miehyeon Kim in "Finding Mothers: Reconstruction of African American Motherhood, Family, Community, and History in Toni Morrison's Fiction" (2003), the theme of trauma was addressed by Furaha DeMar Norton in

"On Trauma, Self-Knowledge, and Resilience: History and the Ethics of Selfhood in Toni Morrison's *Beloved, Jazz,* and *Paradise*" (2002).

In outlining doctoral dissertations on Morrison's *oeuvre*, it is relevant to highlight Agnieszka Łobodzieć's "Black Theological Intra-racial Conflicts in the Novels of Toni Morrison" (2007) and David Roger Whitehouse's thesis, "Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, Race and Tragedy" (2018). When discussing academic works authored by Polish scholars, Grażyna Branny's contributions are highly relevant, as the researcher has produced numerous publications on Morrison's output. Branny's notable essays include "Playing in the Dark of Race and Racelessness in *Paradise*: Teaching Toni Morrison's Fiction through her Critical Writings" (2005), "Collective Memory and Re-invention of Self: Female Transformation in Toni Morrison's Latest Novel—*Mercy*" (2009) or "A Dissolution of Borderlines in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child* (2017). Ewa Barbara Łuczak is another Polish researcher whose compilation of essays on the novelist's fiction contributes to an in-depth study of Morrion's oeuvre. *Mistrzowie Literatury Amerykańskiej. Toni Morrison* (2013) is a collection of nine essays written by distinguished Polish intellectuals, including Ewa Barbara Łuczak, Justyna Włodarczyk, Patrycja Antoszek, Anna Pochmara-Ryżko, Anna Warso, Anna Krawczyk-Łaskarzewska, Grażyna Branny, and Marek Paryż.

As regards more recent publications on Toni Morrison, one should include Marilyn Sanders Mobley's *Toni Morrison and the Geopoetics of Place, Race, and Be/Longing* (2024) and Lawrie Balfour's *Toni Morrison: Imagining Freedom* (2023). With reference to academic articles, the attention should be paid to "Magic, Mysticism, and Race in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" (2022) by Hannah Williams, Peace Kiguwa's "Phantom Love: Affective Politics of Love in Toni Morrison's *Love*" (2022) or Wajiran Wajiran and Tristani Apriyani's "Race, Gender, and Identity in Toni Morrison's Novels: Relevance to Contemporary Black Women's Struggles in America" (2025). Given the abundance of academic body of work on Morrison's fiction and non-fiction produced in both the early twenty-first century, as well as in the last decades of the previous millennium, it is challenging to reference all of them. Therefore, the most relevant sources on the subject matter have been incorporated into the dissertation's biography.

Toni Morrison, who passed away in 2019, continues to be a prominent figure in the field of African American literature, highlighting the voices of the unheard and marginalized black American communities, women in particular. Since the themes present in her prose and non-fiction have attracted considerable interest from academic circles, resulting in an

impressive number of publications on her works, it may appear unnecessary to produce yet another academic discussion on the novelist's literary output. In spite of the abundance of these publications, this thesis attempts to take the writer's two significant narratives under scrutiny and discuss the motives of violence, haunting, and the uncanny in *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and *Beloved* (1987). This attempt is taken with hope to explore Morrison's body of work through interdisciplinary perspectives and shed light on contemporary social issues which involve violence based on race and injustice faced by African American minorities.

Apart from their literary significance, *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* appear to signal a turning point in Morrison's writing career, as with the publication of the former, the novelist's literary path as a writer began. Prior to commencing her literary career, Morrison worked as a lecturer and an editor. Her professionalism in the publishing industry is underscored by her distinction as the first African American female editor in a prestigious publishing house, Random House. In the 1988-interview given to Charlie Rose, the novelist explained the inspiration to write her first piece of fiction about a black, eleven-year-old girl, so far absent from a mainstream American literary discourse:

> I've given several different answers, one of which is loneliness, one of which is wanting to read something like that. I wanted to read that book that I wrote and I couldn't find it anywhere […] Certainly there was a sense that there was a void […] I wanted to put centrally this little person who never appeared in American literature, except as a joke, which is a little black girl with no redeeming qualities whatsoever except she was lovely. (n.pag. Web)

The other novel which will be examined in this dissertation, *Beloved*, was written by Morrison to portray the inner lives of black individuals who endured the atrocities of slavery. In the 1987-interview the novelist gave to Charlayne Hunter-Gault, Morrison explained that her objective was not to concentrate on the system of slavery itself, but rather on the individuals who endured its traumas. As Morrison argued in the interview, by concentrating on the people instead of on the institution, she put "the authority back into the hands of the slave rather that the slave holder" (Hunter-Gault 1987: n.pag. Web). By giving the slave woman a right to decide about her child's future, the slave–oppressor relation, with the superiority of the latter, is disturbed. Therefore, it can be concluded that the novelist's

innovative perspective on the issue of slavery and its victims may account for *Beloved*'s critical acclaim and literary success.

Although *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* are set in different historical contexts, both narratives unfold during crucial eras for African Americans. As regards Morrison's debut novel, it develops during a time marked by the Great Migration, when numerous African Americans relocated from the rural South to urban centers in the North in order to seek opportunities and liberation from the harsh realities of racism and segregation. *Beloved*, on the other hand, is set in the post-American-Civil-War period, with numerous flashbacks highlighting harsh realities of slavery, as well as the burden of the traumatic past on the present. Despite these differences, though, both narratives deal with the condition of the black womanhood, its challenges, and everyday struggles within a context shaped by the discourse of whiteness and its perceived superiority over people of color. Morrison's female protagonists of the novels under discussion are marginalized and subjected to different forms of violence. While some of them are too vulnerable and fragile to face their oppressors, others resist and show their strength in their pursuit of dignity.

Aims

One of the aims of this dissertation is to thoroughly discuss the issue of violence and its multifaceted nature in Toni Morrison's selected narratives. Violence, both physical and psychological, is intricately embedded throughout Morrison's two novels which this paper takes under analysis. Violence and its many dimensions will be discussed particularly in relation to Morrison's female protagonists, both adults and children.

With regard to *The Bluest Eye*, the narrative presents a profound exploration of the harsh truths surrounding racial self-loathing and the detrimental impact of Eurocentric beauty ideals on young African American women. This is vividly illustrated through the tragic story of an eleven-year-old girl, Pecola Breedlove, whose existence serves as a reminder of the pain associated with invisibility and societal rejection. What is more, the paper will examine the problem of domestic violence, as illustrated in *The Bluest Eye*. In the narrative, the relationship between Pauline Breedlove and her daughter, Pecola, is characterized by verbal and physical violence which the woman directs at the girl. As it will be demonstrated further in the paper, Pauline's attitude to Pecola showcases a damaging impact of white hegemony on

the mother-daughter bond, along with Pauline's blind fixation on the idea of white beauty and its repercussions.

With reference to *The Bluest Eye*, the thesis will also address the sexual abuse perpetrated by Pecola's father, Cholly Breedlove, on the girl. The rape exemplifies the egregious sexual violence inflicted upon the most vulnerable human being, i.e., a child. The research will also examine and discuss another aspect of violence which refers to the white gaze and its impact on black communities, women and girls in particular. In *The Bluest Eye*, the white gaze renders Pecola unseen and marginalized. The critical scrutiny, however, extends beyond the white community of Loraine, Ohio, as Pecola faces rejection and condemnation from other African Americans who have internalized white beauty standards and cultivated racist views within themselves.

The theme of sexual violence is also present in Morrison's second novel the thesis discusses, i.e., *Beloved*. In the narrative, the character of Sethe and Baby Suggs fall victim to sexual assault which underscores the violence perpetrated by the institution of slavery against black female individuals and illustrates the dehumanizing nature of the system. In the novel, violence also serves as a means of resistance against white slave owners who dehumanize and treat black individuals as mere property. In *Beloved*, Morrison confronts the devastating legacy of slavery and its effects, as Sethe's painful decisions exemplify the extremes a mother will reach to shield her children from the brutality that marks their history. In this regard, Sethe's act of infanticide may be perceived as a form of resistance to the institution of slavery. This problem, however, will be discussed further in the dissertation.

Another significant issue the paper addresses concerns the concept of haunting in reference to the traumatic past of African Americans. In *Beloved*, haunting becomes a prominent motif that skillfully interacts with the psychological and emotional terrain of the characters and portrays the severe scars left by the institution of slavery. As it will be examined in the paper, Morrison's use of the concept underlines how the past still shapes the present, making it challenging for the characters to progress. In order to illustrate the haunting character of slavery, the thesis aims to highlight the profound impact of the system by examining transgenerational trauma and its repercussions on both the immediate victims and their descendants. Moreover, the concept which is strictly related to the category of haunting and which the thesis takes under discussion is the uncanny (German *das Unheimlich*). The presence of the uncanny in *Beloved* is multidimensional, as it does not refer only to the deteriorating and eerie environment of 124 Bluestone Road, which acts as a tangible

manifestation of haunting and trauma. The term is mainly used in reference to the spectral figure of Beloved who represents the haunting recollections of her mother's traumatic past, as well as the enduring historical trauma of slavery that cannot be put to oblivion.

Methodology and the Structure of the Dissertation

The methodological aspect of the research is theory-oriented and organized around a series of concepts which are typical of postcolonial theory, memory studies, trauma studies, and psychoanalysis. However, the most significant methodological tool the thesis incorporates in the discussion of the selected novels is close reading. The method itself focuses on an in-depth examination of a literary work by means of a minute and thorough analysis. The analysis entails a text's language, its structure, and literary techniques, with the intention to reveal underlying meanings, interpret themes, and comprehend the author's artistry.

As regards the methodological structure of the dissertation, Chapter One opens with an exploration of issues which are relevant to the domain of postcolonial theory. Therefore, it introduces the most significant postcolonial terminology and provides the reader with a historical framework regarding imperialism, colonialism, decolonization and neo-colonialism. Apart from introducing a historical context which later led to the emergence of postcolonial theory, Chapter One discusses a category of otherness, with reference to suppressed and marginalized colonial subjects. To this end, Jacques Lacan's viewpoint on the concept will be provided, distinguishing two types of the "o/Other."

Moreover, the first chapter of the research discusses the category of the female subaltern, using the methodology provided by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her critically acclaimed essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988). The study on otherness in Chapter One is also based on Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, with its biased and one-sided Western discourse on the so-called third world and its peoples. Chapter Two, on the other hand, is structured around the category of black womanhood in a broad context. It introduces stereotypical representations of the African American woman that had permeated the discourse on black womanhood in the US for a substantial period of time. To this end, the research is be based on Julia Sheron Jordan-Zachery's *Black Women, Cultural Images, and Social Policy* (2009). In her study, Jordan-Zachery analyzes five stereotypical discourses on black women, i.e., Mammy, Jezebel, Sapphire, Welfare Queen, and Urban Teen Mother. The

aim of presenting all the abovementioned characteristics is to highlight a common tendency to depict the African American woman unfavorably.

Chapter Two offers a historical foundation for feminism and examines the movement in relation to its ideology, distinguishing between mainstream white feminism and marginalized black feminism. The subsequent chapters of the thesis offer an in-depth analysis of the concepts of violence, haunting, and the uncanny, with each term being meticulously researched. With reference to the category of violence, the discussion is based on Frantz Fanon's seminal work, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), in which the scholar analyzes violence from the perspective of the colonized other who, being the subject of victimization and aggression, applies violence in order to fight the oppressor.

What is more, the thesis draws upon the work of Michael Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1978* (1980) in which the relation between these two concepts is studied. In his discussion, Foucault comes to the conclusion that knowledge is constructed in such a way as to favor the dominant group. Therefore, it does not reflect reality as it is, but rather shapes it in order to maintain power relations. The study of violence also relies upon Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's perspective on the subject. In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), the scholar provides a definition of what epistemic violence is and explains its role in positioning the colonial subject as "other."

Other methodological tools the thesis incorporates in its research are motherhood studies, with particular emphasis on the texts by Adrienne Rich, Elizabeth Podnieks and Andrea O'Reilly, Marianne Hirsch, and Heather Ingman. The issue of white hegemony and white gaze, along with the marginalization of people of color in American context are discussed in the dissertation, as well. To this end, the research is grounded on George Yancy's *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race in America* (2017 [2008]) and Richard Dyer's *White* (1997). Since the focus is on the concept of violence, the research is based on psychological theories pertaining to memory and trauma. Among them are Maurice Halbwach's study on collective memory, Marianne Hirsch's discussion on postmemory, and Eva Hoffman's research on memory and its role in the identity formation.

Furthermore, the historical context of slavery and the transgenerational trauma it engendered is examined in relation to the construction of black identity and the ensuing crisis stemming from the repressed history of African Americans. In order to discuss the matter of trauma as a consequence of slavery, the analysis is grounded on Roy Eyerman's *Cultural Trauma. Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (2002) and Gabriele

Schwab's *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (2010). The category of transgenerational trauma is also studied by M. Gerard Fromm in *Lost in Transmission: Studies of Trauma Across Generations* (2018) and Maurice Apprey's "Reinventing the Self in the Face of Received Transgenerational Hatred in the African American Community" (1999). The thesis strongly relies on the abovementioned research, using it as a crucial methodological instrument in the study of trauma, the haunting past, and the uncanny sensation it evokes.

The haunting past of slavery is analyzed with reference to Kathleen Brogan's *Cultural Haunting: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature* (1998), A. Timothy Spaulding's article "Ghosts, Haunted Houses, and the Legacy of Slavery: Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and the Gothic Impulse" (2005), and Avery Gordon's *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Social Imagination* (1997). The discussion on the category of the uncanny, on the other hand, is grounded on two seminal works in the field of psychiatry, i.e., Ernst Jentsch's 1906-essay, "On the Psychology of the Uncanny" and Sigmund Freud's fundamental piece of work from 1919, "The Uncanny" (German: *das Unheimlich*). Both texts play a vital role in defining the uncanny as an essential concept for comprehending human psychology and cultural expression. Whereas Jentsch's research highlights the significance of cognitive uncertainty and ambiguity, Freud's psychoanalytic framework connects the uncanny to suppressed fears and unconscious mechanisms. Collectively, both works establish an extensive framework for examining the reasons behind why specific stimuli or narratives elicit sensations of eeriness, fear, and fascination. The reason why the discussion is firmly rooted in the concept of haunting and the uncanny is to illustrate how past traumas continue to influence present experiences of the victims and their subsequent generations, hindering their ability to face the painful past and initiate the healing process.

Considering all the aforementioned methodological tools and arguments, it can be concluded that the thesis embodies a complex approach to the issues of violence, haunting, and the uncanny in Morrison's selected novels. By integrating various academic disciplines and applying them to the study, the research attempts to provide substantial insights into the psychological and cultural aspects of racial trauma stemming from slavery and the belief in subordinate and marginalized status of African Americans. As the research concerns black womanhood and girlhood in Morrison's selected *oeuvre*, its aim is to demonstrate the various forms of violence experienced by female protagonists of the novels under discussion, along

with the physical and psychological consequences of these violent acts on their mentality and physicality.

Despite the abundance of scholarly research on Morrison's literary output, a fresh discussion on *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* is crucial, as the new study may uncover new layers of meaning and contribute to the ongoing academic exploration of black female literature in terms of the notion of violence and trauma experienced by African Americans over the centuries. Through the thorough discussion of the novels, it is hoped that essential understanding of the lasting impacts of racial and cultural oppression will be provided, along with a deep analysis of transgenerational trauma, the haunting dimension of the past and the healing process which is necessary to recover from a dramatic experience. In this context, the research may constitute a crucial reference point to further scholarly dialogue on Toni Morrison's literature, shedding a new light on the subject and providing a novel opportunity for an academic discussion.

CHAPTER ONE
Postcolonial Theory

Imperialism, Colonialism, and Neo-Colonialism

The quest for supremacy and influence among nations has persistently marked the course of human history. To assert their dominance and esteemed status over other regions, the Greeks and Romans, dating back to ancient times, founded colonies not merely for economic gain but primarily to emphasize their imperial authority and influence over the periphery. As Ania Loomba, an Indian postcolonial scholar, argues in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (1998), the expansion of imperial powers has been "a recurrent and widespread feature of human history," since the conquest of other lands became a common practice among such early civilizations as the Aztecs, Incas, the Ottoman or Chinese Empires (2-3). Nevertheless, in spite of a long history of one country's subjugation by another, the notion of colonialism was rather reserved for "defining the specific form of cultural exploitation that developed within the expansion of Europe over the last 400 years," in the post-Renaissance Era (Ashcroft et al. 2007 [2000]: 40). Therefore, the question concerning the validity of such a distinction may be raised, since all the imperial practices, including ancient ones, involved control and exploitation of the weak. An explanation of this issue, though, lies in a capitalist character of modern European colonialism, which will be accounted for further in the paper. Nevertheless, to effectively define colonialism, it is essential to introduce additional concepts that are vital for comprehending the complexities of colonial reality, i.e., imperialism and capitalism.

According to Edward Said, in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), imperialism refers to "the practice, the theory and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory" (9). The center's priority in establishing overseas colonies was profit-driven, aiming for lucrative trade, wealth accumulation, and dominance over peripheral regions. Motivated by greed and ambition for global supremacy in political, cultural, or religious domains, imperial powers dispatched their emissaries to remote regions to establish colonies and exert control over indigenous populations. Although the primary emphasis was on the economic dimensions of colonial conquests, with profits derived from the indigenous labor enriching the colonizing European center, it is essential to acknowledge that other motives for colonial conquests existed as well. The plan for financial gain was achieved at the expense of the

colonized, whose labor, suffering, and oppression facilitated the attainment of global power, dominance, and superiority over marginalized populations. Therefore, in order to strengthen the imperial dominance worldwide, the process of colonization became a common strategy for European centers, including England, France, Spain, Portugal or the Netherlands.

Denis Judd, the author of *Empire: The British Imperial Experience from 1765 to the Present* (1996), supports Edward Said's view, as he argues that "[n]o one can doubt that the desire for profitable trade, plunder and enrichment was the primary force that led to the establishment of the imperial structure" (3). The possibility of generating profit from the colonized workforce, the chance to control far-flung territories, as well as their markets and population, seemed to be fundamental in the process of colonization. What is more, Michael W. Doyle, in *Empires* (1986), asserts that the aim of Western empires was to establish and maintain their power, dominance, and influence either violently, by collaboration or by financial, cultural or social dependence (45). Such a strategy was to emphasize imperial superiority over conquered lands and their inhabitants who, in the view of colonizers, embodied inferiority and backwardness. The deliberate portrayal of the colonized as barbaric, uncivilized, and savage served to rationalize their subjugation and exploitation by European powers, thereby legitimizing their dominion over the militarily, economically, and ideologically weaker populations.

The term imperialism, as it has already been mentioned, has its origins in ancient times, coming from a Latin word *imperium* and referring to Roman sovereignty over the Mediterranean lands. However, it has been used more specifically in reference to Europe's political and economic expansion into unknown regions of the globe from the fifteenth to early twenty-first century (Ashcroft et al. 2007: 112). Although European empires dominated much of the globe economically, politically and culturally, there had been other instances of pre-capitalist forms of imperial dominance, as shown on the example of the Ottoman Empire or the Chinese Empire. The capitalist character of European superpowers, such as Great Britain, Spain or France, is the issue distinguishing them from ancient empires and imperial East, which are often described as pre-capitalist. This perspective is articulated by Vladimir Lenin, a Russian politician, Marxist, and the author of *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917). Lenin, whose theory of imperialism derives from Marx's theory of accumulation, defines the term as "the monopoly stage of capitalism" (1999 [1917]: 91). As he argues, imperialism is characterized by five key characteristics:

1) the concentration of production and capital has developed to such a high stage that it has created monopolies which play a decisive role in economic life; 2) the merging of bank capital with industrial capital, and the creation, on the basis of this "finance capital," of a financial oligarchy; 3) the export of capital as distinguished from the export of commodities acquires exceptional importance; 4) the formation of international monopolist capitalist combines which share the world among themselves, and 5) the territorial division of the whole world among the biggest capitalist powers is completed. (1999: 92)

As a result of capital accumulation by Western empires and its "superabundance of money," the capital could not be invested in the center, since the workforce on the European continent was limited. On the other hand, as Ania Loomba notices, the situation in remote colonies was quite the opposite, with the access to human resources, but the lack of finance capital (1998: 5). Therefore, the flow of money to subordinate colonies became a practice, emphasizing the division of the world into advanced and underdeveloped countries and highlighting one land's superiority and privileged position over another. It is also essential to highlight the competitive dynamics among Western powers concerning their global influence and importance when examining the capitalist nature of imperialism. The drive for imperial expansion into distant and uncharted lands was not the sole objective of Western empires. Alongside their control over less developed nations, European powers actively compete with one another to attain global recognition and reduce the influence of opposing empires. The accumulation and enhancement of capital were essential as well, since financial dominance over other European nations placed the country in a favorable and advantageous position.

The abovementioned argument is supported by Lenin who considers "the rivalry between several Great Powers in the striving for hegemony, i.e., for the conquest of territory, not so much directly for themselves as to weaken the adversary and undermine his hegemony" as one of the characteristics of imperialism (1999: 94). As an instance Lenin gives an example of Belgium, being of a great importance for Germany, since it was a vital base for German operations aimed against England. Therefore, aspiring for financial and territorial dominance all over the globe, the imperial nations resorted to various and often brutal practices in order to achieve their goals. Among them were military interventions in colonies, eradication of native populations or atrocities committed on the subordinate.

Ania Loomba observes that imperialism created a division, categorizing the world into metropolises and satellites, where the latter relied on the civilized centers for support. From

her perspective, this division contributed to the "unequal development of capitalism itself," both in the empire and its dependencies (1998: 130). What followed was the continuous exploitation of the third-world populations with the simultaneous capitalist progress in Europe. For capitalism to exist and function effectively, the reliance on class and racial distinctions was essential, as the division into hierarchies provided a rationale for the mistreatment of the colonized. As a consequence, people were grouped according to their biological suitability for certain tasks. It resulted in the capitalist inequality between so-called civilized and uncivilized countries, where the peoples of the occupied lands were treated as capital whose main task, from the imperial point of view, was to generate profit for the use of the empire. Such a perspective has been articulated by A. Gunder Frank in whose opinion plantation slavery was a form of capitalist practice, with the slaves treated as property (qtd in Loomba 1998: 130). A similar line of reasoning is presented by Stewart Hall in "Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance" (1980). Hall emphasizes a pre-capitalist character of slave labor on plantations, comparing the work of slaves in colonies to that performed by workers in capitalism (1980: 131). The slave labor, as well as the effects of its production, enter a capitalist market globally, since the fruits of slaves' production are distributed worldwide, generating profit for the empire and contributing to the development of capitalism. However, Hall explains that the relation between pre-capitalist plantation slavery and capitalist mode of worldwide distribution of goods produced by the colonized is not a matter of coexistence, but rather "an articulation between different modes of production, structured in some relation of dominance" (1980: 131). Thus, it is clear to understand why it is so crucial for capitalism to preserve the *status quo* and the dominance over the slave workforce. In consequence, the financial world order remains unchanged, with cheap labor and constant subordinate character of the colonized.

Imperialism and Colonialism

In postcolonial discourse, the concept of imperialism is frequently conflated with colonialism, resulting in confusion and misunderstandings regarding both terms. To address the uncertainties and elucidate the distinctions between colonialism and imperialism, it is essential to focus on the definitions put forth by scholars and experts in the field. One of the numerous explanations for both terms is the one put forth by Matthew Stephen, an expert in global political economy and international relations. In "Imperialism" (2012), Stephen points

out the distinction between colonialism and imperialism and demonstrates how the meaning of the latter has changed over time. According to the researcher,

> [t]he widespread use of the word mostly dates from the later nineteenth century, in reference to the competitive carving up of the world into formal and informal spheres of influence by European powers, the Unites States and Japan. In this context it was used almost interchangeably with colonialism. More recently, imperialism is more precisely distinguished from colonialism. Whereas colonialism is associated with population transfer from a metropolis to a colony, and often with the formal transfer of political authority to a colonial power, imperialism refers also to a more diffuse and indirect form of relations by which one community comes to dominate another. By this definition imperialism is a broader category of which colonialism and empire are manifestations. (2012: 885)

To paraphrase, imperialism is manifested through colonization, as colonization serves as one of the mechanisms of imperialism, reliant on the metropolis for its existence. John McLeod, the author of *Beginning Postcolonialism* (2010 [2000]), shares a similar perspective, claiming that "colonialism […] is only *one form of practice, one modality of control* which results from the ideology of imperialism, and it specifically concerns the *settlement* of people in a new location" (9). Therefore, the difference between colonization and imperialism lies in the matter of land possession, as the former involves occupation of distant locations, while the latter does not require the settlement of remote colonies in order to function properly. Imperialism can operate effectively without the necessity of colonizing distant regions; however, for colonization to manifest, imperialism is indispensable, as colonialism is "almost always a consequence of imperialism," resulting in the settlement of remote territories and the transference of culture, language, and traditions from the colonizing center to newly encountered lands inhabited by indigenous populations (Said 1994: 9).

The importance of land settlement is also emphasized by Elleke Boehmer in *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (2005 [1995]). According to Boehmer, the exploitation of native inhabitants and the efforts to subjugate and control them through force are defining characteristics of colonialism (2). In other words, colonialism, unlike imperialism, prioritizes the act of settlement and is specifically one of the active ways imperialism manifests itself. Imperialism, on the other hand, constitutes a larger structure of domination and authority in

which the conquest of another country is not obligatory for the imperialistic system to function.

Periodization of Global European Dominance

The historical periodization of worldwide European domination consists of three phases: "the age of discovery during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; the age of mercantilism during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; and the age of imperialism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (Ashcroft et al 2007: 112). The period of discovery, also referred to as the age of exploration, was characterized by significant voyages conducted by European sailors. The exploration of new territories by Spain, Portugal, or Britain encompassed Basco da Gama's voyage to India in 1498, Christopher Columbus's arrival in America in 1492 or Ferdinand Magellan's discovery of the passage in 1520, known nowadays as the Strait of Magellan (Voorhies 2002: n.pag. Web). Moreover, it was the period of the first British circumnavigation of the world, undertaken by Sir Francis Drake in 1579. The voyage resulted in the discovery of what is now called the San Francisco Bay, the territory later claimed for Queen Elizabeth I. Consequently, the discoveries of new and unknown lands strengthened Europe's imperial position worldwide and led to the formation of Spanish, French, Portuguese and British colonies in remote parts of the globe.

The second phase of global European supremacy, emblematic of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is referred to as the age of mercantilism. In the view of William Appleman Williams, the author of "The Age of Mercantilism: An Interpretation of the American Political Economy, 1763 to 1828" (1958), mercantilism was "the basic outlook of those who labored to build a dynamic balanced economy of agriculture and business organized on a capitalistic basis within a nationalistic framework" (422). The establishment of a structured national market, alongside the expansion of global market share, seemed essential. With regards to colonies, mercantilism was of importance in reference to land occupation in distant locations. Beginning with Cromwell's Navigation Act of 1651, the age of mercantilism was characterized by competition and rivalry between European empires regarding the acquisition of wealth, gold and silver in particular. George Lichteim states in *Imperialism* (1971) that the significance of mercantilism was not the matter of welfare maximization, but rather the promotion of nation-state independence from economic and political perspective (51). Consequently, the colonization of distant territories was lucrative

solely when it precluded other European centers from achieving profit, as one nation's gain constituted another's loss.

The age of imperialism, considered a final stage in the periodization of European dominance globally, was characterized with rivalry between European superpowers. Focused on power superiority and large-scale dominance, Britain and France competed with each other over the position of the world leader. As a consequence of the Industrial Revolution and the victory of England over France in the Seven Years' War, Great Britain became a leading colonial power worldwide, since "as a result of the Treaty of Paris, France lost nearly the whole of its colonial empire" (Magdoff 1979: 21). The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries witnessed Britain's dominance internationally, with its conquest of India and the formation of colonies in North America. What followed was a successful period in the history of the second British Empire, with British global influence broadening significantly to cover the Far East, the South Pacific and Atlantic and the African Coast (Magdoff 1979: 22). Nevertheless, dated for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the global expansion of European centers differed considerably from previous attempts of empires to rule worldwide. Those changes were the result of the Industrial Revolution and contributed to the formation of new practices concerning acquisitions of non-European territories. In a pre-industrial period, the colonized experienced various atrocities, involving occupation of their mother lands, their enslavement and the interference of white Europeans into their territories by establishing colonies or trading posts (Magdoff 1979: 18-19). During that era, colonies were predominantly situated on islands or coastal regions. The situation changed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as the policy of colonial acquisition evolved into continental exploration and expansion. According to Harry Magdoff, as articulated in *Imperialism from the Colonial Age to the Present* (1979), the continental exploration of colonized territories involved the eradication of local communities, either through extermination or by confining them to reserved areas (19). The objective of this practice was to provide European settlers with more lands for agriculture and industry development. Furthermore, a significant reason from an imperial viewpoint was the aspiration of European settlers to impose Western values, culture, and traditions upon the indigenous populations of subordinate regions. Given that Western empires possessed superior technological and military capabilities compared to their colonies, their aim was to reshape the colonized populations to better equip them for forthcoming technological advancements. The increasing disparity between European imperial powers and their dependent colonies contributed to a heightened sense of superiority among the colonizers.

Colonial Discourse

In addition to economic factors, including the expansion of trade and commerce, colonialism significantly influenced the cultures, languages, and self-perception of the colonized populations. According to John McLeod in *Beginning Postcolonialism* (2010), it is not only a matter of power demonstration or violence inflicted on the colonized, as "colonialism suggests certain ways of seeing, specific modes of understanding the world and one's place in it that assist in justifying the subservience of colonized peoples to the (oft-assumed) 'superior,' civilized order of the colonizers" (24). In this context, the right to colonize other nations is justified, as the mission of European settlers was to civilize the uncivilized and save them from their own backwardness.

By emphasizing the disparities between colonizers and native populations of occupied territories, indigenous communities developed a sense of worthlessness and inferiority within themselves. What became a common characteristic in the representation of undeveloped countries and their inhabitants was the use of binarism, with negative depictions of the colonized. This strategy proposed specific methods for perceiving and comprehending the world, along with rationalizations for colonial domination and the exploitation of indigenous populations. Colonial discourse often endorsed the values of settlers and imposed them on subjugated peoples, as the cultures, traditions, and values of the oppressed were deemed uncivilized and inferior from an imperial position. With the use of negative modes of representation, a set of beliefs was formed in order to explain and support continuous occupation of other territories by imperial centers. As Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson point out in *De-Scribing Empire: Postcolonialism and Textuality* (1994), "[c]olonialism (like its counterpart, racism), then, is an operation of discourse, and as an operation of discourse it interpellates colonial subjects by incorporating them in a system of representation" (3). In other words, the subjugated are depicted in a manner that serves to demonstrate their backwardness, primitivism, and inferior societal status. Derogatory depictions of the colonized severely undermine their self-esteem, as they are subjected to disrespect and consequently start to regard each other with contempt. The beliefs of a dominant group are assimilated by colonized minorities, resulting in the oppressed embracing these ideologies as their own. As a result, they firmly believe in their own inferiority and the legitimacy of being governed by the occupying West.

Decolonization

The long-lasting process of colonization shaped the spatial world order considerably, dividing the globe into privileged and unprivileged areas. It was a multifaceted worldwide practice which had a great impact on social, cultural, economic, and religious spheres of life. Since the relation between the center and its dependencies was asymmetrical in terms of exercising power and global influence, anti-colonial attitudes began to develop among the indigenous. As one of the features of colonialism was inequality in power division between the colonizer and the colonized, the latter attempted to liberate themselves from the influence of the West. Their self-determination resulted in anti-colonial movements, the aim of which was to destroy colonial order and inequality. However, not only did the acts of resistance originate from native populations of colonized lands, but Europeans who settled in the colonies (either freely or involuntarily) were also opposed to their total dependence on the center and agitated for liberation from the imperial influence. Such was the case with the British colonies in North America, Australia, New Zealand or South Africa. Inhabited not only by indigenous peoples of dominated lands, their populations consisted of European settlers who aspired for autonomy and self-government. What followed was a long-term process of decolonization which spanned three centuries, "ranging from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the Americas, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, to the 1970s in the case of Angola and Mozambique" (Loomba 1998: 7-8). In consequence, the colonies inhabited by European settlers were granted some form of autonomy, as they became dominions. Nevertheless, as dominions, they still "recognised and pledged allegiance to the ultimate authority of Britain as the 'mother country'" (McLeod 2010: 19).

As regards the decolonization process, it varied considerably between white European settlers and native populations in dependent colonies. From Ania Loomba's standpoint, "the politics of decolonization in parts of Latin America or Australia or South Africa where white settlers formed their own independent nations is different from the dynamics of those societies where indigenous populations overthrew their European masters" (1998: 8). White settlers, as she continues, were the agents of colonial rule and did not fall victim to genocide or economic exploitation, unlike native peoples of colonized lands (1998: 10). A similar approach is expressed by J. Jorge Klor de Alva in "The Postcolonization of the (Latin) American Experience: A Reconsideration of 'Colonialism,' 'Postcolonialism' and 'Mestizaje'" (1995). According to de Alva, the settlers "were never colonial subjects," since they "established their

own nation-states in the image of the mother-land, tinged by the local color of some precontact practices and symbols, framed by many imperial period adaptations and suffused with European ideals, practices and material objects" (1995: 270). Despite their aspiration for liberation from the European center, the settlers stayed true to its values, traditions, and the beliefs on white supremacy. Therefore, their condition could not be referred to as postcolonial, since their conflict with colonial powers was not based on violence, aggression or their dehumanization by the center.

The last stage of decolonization dates back to post-World-War-Two period, with the liberation of British colonies in South Asia and Africa. The diminishing position of Great Britain as a world power led to anti-colonial nationalist movements initiated by indigenous peoples who were opposed to British authority and took up an active armed resistance against the imperial oppressor. According to Dietmar Rothermund in *The Routledge Companion to Decolonization* (2006), British imperialism experienced difficult moments during the First World War, "emerging from this war with a much reduced political and economic power" (18). After 1945, the British imperial venture was coming to an end, with the rise of newly-founded, independent Asian and African countries. The formation of autonomous nations which were previously subjugated by the British began in the 1940s, with India and Pakistan gaining independence in 1947 and Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) in 1948 (McLeod 2010: 11). As McLeod points out,

> [i]n 1957 Ghana became the first 'majority-rule' independent African country, followed by Nigeria in 1960. In 1962, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago in the Caribbean followed suit. The decades of the 1960s and 1970s saw busy decolonization throughout the declining Empire. So, with the passing of Hong Kong from Britain to China on 1 July 1997, the numbers of those living under British rule fell below one million for the first time in centuries—a far cry from the days when British colonialism subjected millions around the globe. (2010: 11)

The massive process of decolonization created an opportunity for previously colonized populations to form an autonomous and independent nation, liberated from colonial influence and its power. Nevertheless, decolonization was only seemingly "the process of revealing and dismantling colonialist power in all its forms" (Ashcroft et al. 2007: 56). Despite the perception that colonial rule has ceased to exist, following the liberation of formerly subjugated nations, there are still those affected by colonial oppression and the consequences

of colonial order. As Carol Boyce-Davies states in *Black Women, Writing and Identity* (1994), "numerous peoples […] are still existing in a colonial relationship […] (Native Americans, African-Americans, South Africans, Aboriginal Australians)" (83). By drawing attention to this issue, Davies points out that colonial violence and oppression still function in previously-dependent countries, taking a form of internal colonialism, racism, and economic exploitation of the weaker for the benefit of those more powerful. Alex Callinicos, in "Imperialism Today" (1994), expresses a similar viewpoint, asserting that decolonization was just a superficial change in the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, since

> [t]he ties of economic dependence on the advanced countries have, on this account, kept the ex-colonies in effectively the same position as they were before independence. Constitutionally these 'neo-colonies' or 'semicolonies' may be sovereign, but the real relations of global power mean that they are still finally subordinated to the Western imperialist countries. (46)

McLeod also claims that colonialism does not stop with a subjugated terrain gaining its independence and freedom. According to the scholar, "it is crucial to realize that colonial values do not simply evaporate on the first day of independence," as they keep functioning in newly-formed and independent countries, being present in the form of language, values, social order, religion or education (2010: 38). The same perspective is expressed by Kwame Nkrumah in *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965). Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana and an advocate of independence of former colonies in Africa, claims that the newly-formed states turned out to be incapable of their own representation and independent development and continued to rely on the former imperial power (1965: xiii). The politician emphasizes that despite the vast process of decolonization in the 20th century, colonialism was not abolished and became known under the term neo-colonialism (1965: ix). In Nkrumah's view, "[t]he result of neo-colonialism is that foreign capital is used for the exploitation rather than development of the less developed parts of the world. Investment under neo-colonialism increases rather than decreases the gap between the rich and the poor countries of the world" (1965: x). To paraphraze, liberation, autonomy, and complete independence from more developed nations remain largely theoretical, as newly-formed countries continue to be economically and culturally exploited and impoverished, supplying raw materials and natural resources for the benefit of Western nations.

The economic exploitation of developing countries exemplifies a continual trend in the global power hierarchy, with interactions benefitting Western nations and multinational corporations. In this context, disparities are sustained, as seemingly decolonized and independent countries still remain controlled and exploited by economically stronger ones. Among many instances proving this point is garment industries based in Vietnam. As Dahli Le reports, "Vietnam clothing manufacturers have emerged as leaders in global garment exports, attracting notable fashion brands like H&M, The North Face, and ZARA. With over 6,000 clothing manufacturers and 2.4 million workers, Vietnam holds a 12-30% market share in the textile and garment industry" (2024: n.pag. Web.). Nevertheless, the working conditions and compensation generate numerous questions and concerns regarding the fair and humane treatment of Asian employees. In 2016, the International Trade Union Corporation conducted a survey about the world's fifty largest firms that implemented practices based on forced labor, inadequate wages, and unsafe working conditions. The survey indicates that 50 corporations ranked among the world's largest multinationals in terms of employment and supply chain have their factories located in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, India, Hong Kong and the Philippines (ITUC 2016: 41. Web). Among them are such multinational corporations as Apple Inc., GAP Inc., the Coca-Cola Company, and many others.

In terms of contemporary division of power worldwide, the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine serves as a case study of imperial dominance, illustrating the general trends in which powerful nations impose their control over other territories. The 2022 invasion of Ukraine by Russia is frequently viewed as a manifestation of imperial ambitions, marked by the annexation of territories like Crimea in 2014 and the effort to assert control over Ukraine's sovereignty. This illustrates historical trends of empires extending their reach beyond their territories to sustain their supremacy. Another modern illustration of global supremacy and the attempt to colonize other territory is President Donald Trump's interest in the Danish overseas region of Greenland which "is the world's biggest island, between the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans, [and] has been controlled by Denmark, nearly 3,000km (1,860 miles) away, for about 300 years" (Khalil 2025: n. pag. Web). Trump's interest in Greenland is influenced by a number of factors, including its unique geopolitical position between the United States and Europe. Experts contend that Greenland's geographic location is crucial, as it constitutes an essential part of the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom gap, making the island a strategic maritime region in the event of a potential Russian attack (Blackburn and

Yeung 2025: n.pag. Web). What is more, specialists believe that Trump is considering additional elements of Greenland, including its wealth of natural resources, namely oil and gas, along with the rare earth metals that are in significant demand for electric vehicles, wind turbines, and military apparatus. As climate change causes the region's ice to melt, natural resources would become increasingly reachable and ready for exploitation (Blackburn and Yeung 2025: n.pag. Web). This instance, along with Russia's ambitions regarding Ukraine, affirms that the imperial aspirations of the most powerful nations continue to hold significance in current discussions, regardless of the fact that the era of colonization theoretically came to an end.

Postcolonial Studies

Paraphrasing Jane Hiddlestone, the author of *Understanding Postcolonialism* (2009), postcolonialism constitutes a major field of intellectual debate which has evoked interest, as well as controversy, among the academia (1). Since the 1970s, the interest in the dynamics of colonial power and exploitation has significantly increased among scholars, being a result of independence fights of the 1950s and 1960s in the then-colonized countries. Postcolonialism, or postcolonial theory, is a multidisciplinary academic discipline that examines and addresses the repercussions of Western colonialism on the colonized territories and their populations. Its focus is on the culture-power relationship between imperial countries and the cultures of resistance which are represented by the oppressed. In the view of Robert J. C. Young, a British postcolonial and cultural theorist and the author of *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (1990), the objective of postcolonial studies is to "shift the dominant ways in which the relations between Western and non-Western people and their worlds are viewed" (2). These relationships, as Young argues, have been presented through juxtaposition and elucidated in terms of racial classifications, portraying whites as superior to peoples of color. The inclination to portray the world in binary oppositions, as previously mentioned, is emblematic of colonial discourse, since the employment of polarities stresses the distinction between the conqueror and the conquered. The discourse emphasizes the supremacy of the colonizer, depicting the colonized as weak, voiceless, and unable to achieve self-sufficiency. Considering the aforementioned mechanisms, postcolonial theory, as a reaction to colonialism, focuses on global issues that were previously neglected by Western scholars and

addresses the marginalization of colonized minorities and their quest for recognition and validation.

In Ewa Domańska's view, postcolonial studies is a collection of theoretical and cultural practices, representations and performances which are related to the experience of colonial encounters between the West and the rest of the world (2008: 158—translation, MSz). It prominently examines the interplay between culture and power, particularly through the analysis of imperial cultures and the cultures of resistance. As postcolonial studies responds to various forms of colonization and examines their impacts on individuals subjected to imperial power structures, its focus is on the condition of the decolonized. Furthermore, postcolonial studies examines the impact of colonialism on those in authority, i.e., the colonizers accountable for the subjugation of the indigenous populations. Domańska also asserts that postcolonialism illustrates the role of stereotypes in constructing the perception of the colonized as other, weak, and subordinate. This rigid perception of the subjugated perpetuated a belief in their inferiority and dehumanization, prevalent in colonial contexts. What the scholar also posits is the fact that postcolonialism constitutes a rebellion against the Western world and its imperialistic beliefs regarding the superiority and civilization of the imperial West (2008: 159). Consequently, the objective of the studies is to enlighten the oppressed about the imperative to resist and confront those in power. Following this perspective, it can be assumed that postcolonial studies serves as a political instrument engaged in the fight against the unjust division of the world into those in control and those who are controlled.

From a historical perspective, the development of postcolonial studies was the result of independence and revolutionary movements initiated by former European colonies in the 1950s and 1960s. As Robert J. C. Young notices, "much of the 20th century involved the long struggle and eventual triumph against colonial rule, often at enormous cost of life and resources. In Asia, in Africa, in Latin America, people struggled against the politicians and administrators of European powers that ruled empires or the colonists who had settled their world" (1990: 3). During that period, most subordinate territories reliant on British, French, or Portuguese influence were granted independence and autonomy from the imperial powers. While numerous regions worldwide experienced the impacts of colonization and its brutal tactics of exploitation and oppression, major postcolonial critics primarily concentrate on British and French colonialism (Hiddleston 2009: 3).

With regard to the spelling of the term, it is important to highlight the distinction between its hyphenated and unhyphenated form. It appears that the spelling of the concept may not hold much importance, allowing for both versions to be used interchangeably. Nevertheless, according to postcolonial critics, there is a significant distinction between the postcolonial and the post-colonial. As Jane Hiddleston notices, the hyphenated term is limited to the period that followed the collapse of direct colonial rule, while postcolonialism, with no hyphen, is a broader notion embracing not only the period after the end of colonial rule but also the time before decolonization and the demise of colonialism (2009: 4-5). Another explanation of the difference in spelling is proposed by John McLeod. In his opinion, post-colonial denotes "*historical period or epoch*, like those suggested by phrases such as 'after colonialism,' 'after independence' or 'after the end of Empire'" (2010: 5). The unhyphenated form, on the other hand, refers to modes of representations, reading practices, ways of thinking, or methods of analysis which range across past and present (2010: 6).

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, in *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (2007 [1998]), also provide an explanation of the difference in the spelling of the term, emphasizing that

> [it] was a potential site of disciplinary and interpretative contestation almost from the beginning, especially the implications involved in the signifying hyphen or its absence. The heavily poststructuralist influence of the major exponents of colonial discourse theory, Said (Foucault), Homi Bhabha (Althusser and Lacan) and Gayatri Spivak (Derrida), led many critics, concerned to focus on the material effects of the historical condition of colonialism, as well as on its discursive power, to insist on the hyphen to distinguish post-colonial studies *as a field* from colonial discourse theory *per se*, which formed only one aspect of the many approaches and interests that the term 'postcolonial' sought to embrace and discuss. (168-169)

In other words, the term's hyphenated form refers to a specific period which follows colonial rule. The purpose of the hyphenated spelling is to emphasize the chronology and reinforce a linear understanding. However, the non-hyphenated form extends beyond a chronological period to include the continuing consequences of colonialism and its impact on identity, culture, and power dynamics. To paraphrase, it endures and develops beyond the end of imperial rule.

Despite the existing differences between hyphenated and unhyphenated forms of the term, though, the notions tend to interweave and be used interchangeably, as they analyze territorial conquests of European empires, the functioning of their colonial institutions, the construction of their subjects and the resistance of the oppressed to colonial reality and its mechanisms (Ashcroft et al. 2007: 169). In this dissertation, the term is unhyphenated, as it pertains to broader mechanisms characteristic of the colonial world and the trajectories of newly-established nations that were formerly colonized and oppressed. Initially, the notion was confined to literary circles within colonial societies and their postcolonial literary endeavors. Over time, though, the concept has been more broadly applied to encompass the experiences of former European colonies in politics, culture, and linguistics (Ashcroft et al. 2007: 168).

The Concept of Otherness in Postcolonial Theory

One of the fundamental features of colonial reality was the colonizer's racist and biased attitude towards indigenous peoples. With the lack of understanding towards those who were considered different and did not meet generally acceptable standards of the West as regards skin color, traditions, religion, and culture, the sense of hatred and disrespect for the colonized developed. The asymmetry between the dominant group and the subjugated other resulted in polarities that differentiated blackness from whiteness, femininity from masculinity, and humanity from animalism. It has been established that imperialism, along with colonialism as a mechanism of the center, was responsible for generating prejudiced and biased narratives regarding the colonized other, contrasting superior colonialists with inferior natives. The portrayal of the subjugated by the powerful was founded on unjust stereotypes intended to devalue and stigmatize them as an inferior segment of humanity. Consequently, as postcolonial theory functions as a methodological instrument for an in-depth examination, the concept of the other within the framework of postcolonialism will be addressed in the subsequent chapters.

The effort to categorize otherness has often relied on differentiation between what seems normal and acceptable and what is perceived as unique and challenging to understand. In other words, the other is defined as something which "is separate from one's self" and, thus, holds a lesser status in relation to the self (Ashcroft et al. 2007: 154). In the context of postcolonial theory, the distinction between the category of otherness and selfness was based

on the relation between the subjugated colonized and the dominant colonizer. As mentioned before, the tendency to locate those in power in a more privileged position to those under control was a fundamental premise in colonial mentality. With regard to the origin of the term in a postcolonial discourse, it is rooted in the work of Jacques Lacan who developed a distinctive viewpoint on the concept of the self and "otherness." For Lacan, the self is a fragmented and incomplete construct that undergoes constant changes. Therefore, the experience of otherness is crucial to the formation and development of one's identity since it emerges from interactions between the self and others. Lacan distinguishes two types of the "o/Other", i.e., the one spelled with a lower-case "o" and the other beginning with the capital "O." The former refers to the resemblance of the self, formed during the so-called mirror stage when a child recognizes its own reflection and sees itself as a separate and individual being. It is "[t]he little other […] who is not really other, but a reflection and projection of the EGO […] He is simultaneously the COUNTERPART and the SPECULAR IMAGE. The little other is thus entirely inscribed in the imaginary order" (Evans 1996: 135). The perception of the self does not reflect reality but it is rather based on distortion and refers to the imaginary formation of one's self, along with the constructions of one's alter egos. When considering others as one's alter-egos, a subject attempts to imagine them as similar and familiar. As an infant, one idealizes the other, mimics them and in doing so, one domesticates and familiarizes what seems to be distant, foreign, enigmatic and, thus, frightening (Johnson 2024: n.pag. Web).

As regards capital-o Other, it refers to "radical alterity, an otherness which transcends the illusory otherness of the imaginary because it cannot be assimilated through identification" (Evans 1996: 136). It is the great Other in whose gaze subject's identity comes into being and who may embody the figures of the mother or father:

> Thus the Other can refer to the mother whose separation from the subject locates her as the first focus of desire; it can refer to the father whose Otherness locates the subject in the Symbolic order; it can refer to the unconscious itself because the unconscious is structured like a language that is separate from the language of the subject. Fundamentally, the Other is crucial to the subject because the subject exists in its gaze. (Ashcroft et al. 2007: 155)

The figure of an adult symbolizes the support of the infant in the identity formation process. Once a child recognizes its own image, it turns to an adult in whose gaze the subject

comes into existence. In other words, the "big" Other represents those other subjects whom an individual encounters in life. It also refers to a linguistic system and social standards that regulate subject's social being and let them function in a law-based and ordered reality. Apart from that, upper case Other designates "the Other sex" which is always defined in terms of femininity for both sexes: "Man here acts as the relay, whereby the woman becomes this Other for herself as she is this Other for him" (Evans 1996: 136).

Within the colonial framework, the process of othering was manifested in the creation of a subordinate other, who was rendered subject to the prevailing imperialistic authority. The practice of othering classified individuals or groups on the basis of racial, cultural, religious or linguistic differences. Any feature distinguishing one from the rest of the collective could be regarded as a marker of one's otherness and oddness. In consequence, the process of othering perpetuated and reinforced inequality and oppression of the colonized and led to their victimization and social exclusion. By establishing a dichotomy between the superior empire and the periphery, the colonizers demonstrated their supremacy through the formation of stereotypes and myths on the subjugated other. A general tendency of dominating colonial discourse was to portray the colonized as primitive and subhuman other who needed to undergo the civilizing mission of the center. A colonial subject was both a child of the empire and a degraded other (Ashcroft et al. 2007: 155). In this sense the imperialist Other was a M/other justified to exert its control over its colonial offspring, i.e., the colonized other.

From a postcolonial perspective, the concept of othering is a central element for the examination and analysis of the ways how power relations and cultural structures are formed and still endured in civilizations marked by imperialism and colonial rule. Since the theory aims to reveal and confront the mechanisms that are responsible for constructing and sustaining myths, stereotypes, and inequalities on the subjugated colonized, the process of othering undergoes a thorough discussion by postcolonial thinkers. Among them is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, an Indian theorist and a great contributor to the development of a postcolonial thought. Referring to the distinction introduced by Jacques Lacan, in her research, Spivak uses the same division as regards otherness. Her academic *oeuvre* proves her deep commitment to the issues of subjugated others. Along with other prominent postcolonial scholars, such as Edward Said or Homi Bhabha, "Spivak has challenged the disciplinary conventions of literary criticism and academic philosophy by focusing on the cultural texts of those people who are often marginalized by dominant Western culture: the new immigrant, the working class, women and the postcolonial subject" (Morton 2003: 1). Her involvement

into the matters of the silenced and subjugated resulted in her writing of a very eponymous essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988). The term subaltern refers to those colonized groups and individuals who are marginalized and oppressed by imperial power, and, therefore, denied a right to free expression. In the essay, Spivak asserts that the attempt of Western intellectuals to give voice and visibility to the oppressed ironically deepens their silence and makes them even more voiceless (McLeod 2010 [2000]: 129). What she focuses on is the issue of gender which, as the ideological construction, prioritizes men: "[a]s object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (Spivak 1988: 82-83). As a result, it is the female subaltern who undergoes double victimization and whose representation is made from colonial and male perspective, leaving them equally silenced as before. From Spivak's point of view, it is impossible to retrieve the consciousness of the subaltern and their perception of themselves as 'sovereign subjects,' since the methods used for their representations are deeply rooted in their objectification. What may seem confusing in the title of Spivak's essay is the issue of the voice and verbal articulation of the oppressed female. What the thinker understands by silence or muteness of the subaltern is not their literal inability to speak. It is actually the inability of others to comprehend their utterances properly.

Robert J. C. Young also emphasizes the problem of miscommunication in *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (1990), arguing it is "not that the women cannot speak as such, that no records of the subject-consciousness of women exist, but that she is assigned no position of enunciation [and therefore] everyone speaks for her, so that she is rewritten continuously as the object of patriarchy or of imperialism" (164). The position of the subaltern female, as Stephen Morton claims in *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (2003), is often presented and filtered through the systems that are dominant in political representation of the weak other (66). Consequently, the subaltern female is marginalized and falsely represented as self-conscious and granted the right to speak. What Spivak suggests in order to avoid and eliminate such a continuous misrepresentation is the criticism of the discourses that are responsible for muting the subaltern, since further attempts to rescue their real voices just deepen their silence and inferior position.

Despite the fact that numerous former colonies achieved independence from Western dominance and became ostensibly self-governing, starting in the mid-twentieth century, racial

stereotypes and a continued lack of respect for the formerly-colonized individuals persisted within Western societies. Among those who experienced imperial exploitation and eradication of their native traditions were colored inhabitants of British, French, Spanish or Portuguese colonies who, because of their skin color and a common belief in their inferiority and otherness, were disregarded, humiliated and discriminated against by imperial centers. The core of such racist attitudes to non-whites was a deep conviction on their uncivilized nature and savageness. In order to demonstrate biased duality of imperial discourse with regard to non-Western cultures, postcolonial scholars focused on the polarities that were characteristic of colonial representations of the conquered. Some of the postcolonial intellectuals fell victim to racism, marginalization and humiliation themselves. Among them was Frantz Fanon, regarded by many critics as "the most influential anticolonial thinker of his time" (Jansen et al. 2017: 165). In one of his seminal works, i.e., *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Fanon provides a psychological study on how blackness was perceived by the white Western world, France in particular. Fanon's study constitutes a mirror for his own experience upon his arrival in France where, as a black new-comer from the French colony of Martinique, he was exposed to racism at the hands of white locals. In one of the chapters of *Black Skin, White Masks*, "The Negro and Language," Fanon introduces a fixed concept of the black individual that was characteristic of colonial discourse. According to this concept, colonial thought defined blackness pejoratively, as the link between wild nature and civilized whiteness. As Fanon notices,

> [a] white man addressing a Negro behaves exactly like an adult with a child and starts smirking, whispering, patronizing, cozening. It is not one white man I have watched, but hundreds; and I have not limited my investigation to any one class but, if I may claim an essentially objective position, I have made a point of observing such behavior in physicians, policemen, employers. (1986 [1952]: 31)

To prove his point, Fanon recalls an incident from the public health services in France. While European patients were addressed in a formal and appropriate way, blacks or non-Europeans were humiliated by the physicians who spoke to them in a infantile and childish manner, simplifying the language and using basic phrases, including: "Sit there, boy. What's bothering you? Where does it hurt, huh?" (Fanon 1986: 32). Such an approach to people of

color led to their categorization, showing a destructive impact of colonialism on their self-esteem.

Since colonial discourse was characterized by the use of polarities which were always in favor of those in power, it is not controversial to say that depictions of the colonized other were loaded with bias and unfairness. For instance, in another chapter of Fanon's study, i.e., "The Fact of Blackness," he analyzes what blackness is and how it is stereotypically presented in relation to the white men, since "[t]he Negro is a toy in the white man's hands" (1986: 140). Historically and culturally, the perception of colored people often rested upon moral and physical dirtiness associated with blackness:

> [t]he torturer is the black man, Satan is black, one talks of shadows, when one is dirty one is black-whether one is thinking of physical dirtiness or of moral dirtiness […] Blackness, darkness, shadow, shades, night, the labyrinths of the earth. abysmal depths, blacken someone's reputation; and, on the other side, the bright look of innocence, the white dove of peace, magical. heavenly light. A magnificent blond child-how much peace there is in that phrase, how much joy, and above all how much hope. There is no comparison with a magnificent black child: literally, such a thing is unwonted. Just the same, I shall not go back into the stories of black angels. In Europe, that is to say, in every civilized and civilizing country, the Negro is the symbol of sin. The archetype of the lowest values is represented by the Negro. (Fanon 1986: 189)

Blackness, having elicited negative connotations broadly, emerged as a symbol of all that was undesirable and immoral. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon emphasizes the prevalent inclination among white Europeans to depict blackness as malevolent, asserting that the sole function of a black individual is to represent inferiority and primitive emotions, referred to as "the dark side of the soul" (1986: 190). Based on his personal experiences, Fanon concludes that black people residing in France are destined for exclusion and alienation, as they are not treated as citizens, but rather as unwelcome outsiders who are regarded with suspicion and contempt.

Another example of Fanon's personal experience of objectification during his time in France is his encounter with a white French boy who, as a result of the blackness of Fanon's skin, cries out, "Mama, see the Negro, I'm frightened" (1986: 79). The boy's response to Fanon's dark skin demonstrates a broader trend in the way blackness was perceived in the

Western world. Jane Hiddleston, in *Understanding Postcolonialism* (2009), highlights the objectification of the black self by the occidental world and its consequences, noticing that objectified by the white man's gaze, "the black man fails to identify with the image projected onto him and is disjoined and ruptured from himself" (2009: 29). As a result, an identity crisis and confusion arise, since the black man fails to identify with the representations imposed upon him by the Western world.

Edward Said is one of the most prominent scholars in the field of postcolonialism. His crucial work, published in 1978 and regarded by the academia as one of the most influential studies shaping postcolonial thought, is *Orientalism*. As Henry Schwartz asserts, "the publication of Edward Said's canonical work *Orientalism* […] is widely considered to be the hallmark text of postcolonial studies as a field" (2005: 11). The study challenges false conceptions of the Orient, frequently portrayed as a fictitious realm and contrasted with the cultured and enlightened Western world. Said posits that the West fabricates a disparaging portrayal of the East as the 'other' to assert its superiority over the Orient and to consolidate its dominance over non-Western cultures. The scholar concentrates on the Arab world and its pervasive misinterpretation within European discourse, highlighting the inequitable distinction between Western and non-Western cultures. As Said notices,

> [t]he Orient and Islam have a kind of extrareal, phenomenologically reduced status that puts them out of reach of everyone except the Western expert. From the beginning of Western speculation about the Orient, the one thing the orient could not do was to represent itself. Evidence of the Orient was credible only after it had passed through and been made firm by the refining fire of the Orientalist's work. (1979 [1978]: 283)

In other words, the Orient was a construct of European discourse, which posited a certain level of peculiarity and mystery surrounding the concept. By portraying the East and its inhabitants as exotic, the West could define its identity in opposition to remote lands and cultures. Said asserts in another significant work of his, i.e., *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), that Orientalism constitutes a mode of thinking that differentiates between the Orient (the East) and the Occident (the West) (2). This simplistic dichotomy was embraced by authors, poets, novelists, and political theorists whose portrayals of the Orient were based on misconceptions and inaccurate representations of what appeared to be distinct and enigmatic. As Said continues in the Introduction to *Orientalism*, the concept of European identity is

defined in terms of superiority and civilization, while the East is characterized with oriental backwardness and primitivism (1979: 7). As a result, the use of binary oppositions and unequal dichotomy is what characterizes colonial discourse on the Orient the most. The Orient always stands in contrast to the Occident, since the former constitutes the West's alter ego (McLeod 2010: 49). Consequently, the Occident occupies a superior position over the Orient which is perceived as other and subservient. Therefore, the relations between them are unjust and asymmetrical, since the exotic East is always degenerated and the West represented as an epitome of culture and civilization. Moreover, in the introductory part of *Orientalism*, Said emphasizes the fundamentality of the Orient in defining the West "as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (1979: 2). As he stresses further in the Introduction, the Orient is integral when it comes to "European *material* civilization and culture" as "[it] gained its strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (1979: 2-3).

Orientalism, as it has been argued above, is a discourse introduced by the West with the intention of creating a false image of oriental lands and its inhabitants. Said's fundamental argument, as John McLeod claims, is that the Western perception of the East is full of false assumptions and is "first and foremost a *fabricated* thing, a series of images, ways of seeing and thinking that come to stand (in) as the Orient's 'reality' for those in the West. Orientalism constitutes a vision of the Orient; it does not mirror what is there" (2010: 50). Those fabricated images of the Orient lead to the creation of general and imaginative representations of the East which are frequently taken as facts. The purpose of this practice was to rationalize the supremacy of the West and validate its violent actions against the colonized and vulnerable populations. In contrast to intellectually and economically advanced West, the Orient was represented in a peculiar, yet, pejorative way. On the one hand, its uniqueness and individual character were the source of interest and curiosity for Western intellectuals; on the other, though, its mystery just proved the East's inferiority and irrationality that stand in opposition to the civilized West.

As regards peoples of the East, their representation was full of false assumptions which pictured them as uncivilized and mentally retarded:

> [a]long with all other peoples variously designated as backward, degenerate, uncivilized, and retarded, the Orientals were viewed in a framework constructed out of biological determinism and moral-political admonishment. The Oriental was linked

> thus to elements in Western society (delinquents, the insane, women, the poor) having in common an identity best described as lamentably alien. Orientals were rarely seen or looked at; they were seen through, analyzed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined or—as the colonial openly coveted their territory—taken over. […] Since the Oriental was a member of a subject race, he had to be subjected: it was that simple. (Said 1979: 207)

The assumptions were also rooted in gendered stereotypes that characterized oriental masculinity as insufficient, while oriental femininity was exoticized and regarded as sexually active and immoral. In general, oriental men and women did not conform to Western gender standards, as their roles and identities frequently contradicted Western representations of masculinity and femininity. Furthermore, Orientalism employed stereotypical representations of the West and East, portraying the occidental as masculine and the Orient as more feminized and submissive. In colonial discourse, the West was defined in terms of heroism, rationality, dominance, and strength. Conversely, the East was often portrayed through a lens of sexualization and characterized by erotic language. This aspect of colonial discourse is emphasized by McLeod in *Beginning Postcolonialism* (2010) where the scholar draws attention to the way Westerners tended to describe the East, treating it legitimate to be possessed, penetrated, or domesticated by the colonizer (54). The employment of sexual language associated with possession and domination, as articulated by McLeod, uncovers the colonizer's desire to exert control over the feminized Orient, highlighting their (Western) readiness to render it submissive. The sexual fantasies held by Europeans regarding the East reveal a profound yearning to dominate the unfamiliar, distinct, and exotic other.

In order to support the idea of the worthlessness and dehumanization of the colonized other, a common practice applied by colonial discourses was the implementation of stereotypes. The stereotype, as one of the key concepts in postcolonial theory, was introduced to the academic world by Homi K. Bhabha, an Indian postcolonial thinker whose contribution to the development of postcolonialism is undoubtedly crucial. In his collection of essays, *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha claims that the role of stereotyping in a colonial and postcolonial reality is to justify the imperial act of subjugation and oppression over the colonized. By creating unjust stereotypes and constructing false representations of the inferior, the colonial power emphasized its dominance and intellectual superiority over the powerless and subjugated. As Bhabha argues,

> the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always "in place," already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated […] as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual licence of the African needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved. (1994: 66)

The creation of stereotypes, as he reckons, masks the uncertainty of those who are responsible for producing them. By constructing fixed visions of the other, the colonial discourse attempts to justify violence and aggression aimed at those in underprivileged position. Stereotypes are to familiarize the other, to explain and understand the strangeness of those who differ. In this context, stereotyping shortens the distance between the privileged and the controlled, as it makes it possible for the colonizer to form colonial modes of representation.

According to John McLeod, the stereotype "functions in a contrary direction to maintain a sense of difference and distinction between the colonizer and the colonized […]. [t]he stereotype both installs and disavows difference: it ensures that the colonized are at the same time radically other yet capable of being understood" (2010: 64). In his view, by repeating colonial stereotypes, one tries to locate the subjugated other in a fixed position. Instead of fixity, though, what follows is the ambivalence and anxiety of colonial discourses, since by attempting to present the colonized as both familiar and other, colonial representation of the subjugated fails at constructing a fixed image and knowledge of otherness. The necessity to repeat colonial stereotypes just confirms that the fixity and passiveness of created images of otherness cannot be achieved.

Focusing on the problem of otherness, Bhabha draws attention to the binary oppositions created by Western discourse when representing itself and the so-called undeveloped and colonized peoples. Being opposed to such an objectified and biased approach, the theorist claims there is no purity or essence of cultures or nations, as each of them carries traces of one another. Developing the concept of hybridity, understood as "the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization," Bhabha's theory emphasizes interactions between the center and the periphery, the consequence of which is the exchange of ideas, traditions, and the formation of mixed cultures and identities (Ashcroft et al. 2007: 108). The fluid nature of cultures and identities,

their constant change and motion lead to the formation of a new contact zone, known as The Third Space of enunciation. According to the theorist, the Third Space of enunciation "constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (1994: 37). It is a place of interactions between at least two distinct cultures that influence one another linguistically, religiously, literarily or educationally. In Bhabha's opinion, there is no absolute cultural model to follow, since each culture or identity is characterized by changeability and interdependence when it comes to crosscultural encounters and experience. The active aspect of crosscultural experience influences both the colonizer and the colonized, as their encounter results in the formation of new, hybrid forms.

The reason why Bhabha introduces and develops the notion of hybridity is to highlight the sense of simultaneous belonging to two cultures, i.e., the culture of the colonizer and the culture of the colonized. In this sense, Bhabha challenges the purity of identity and claims that it cannot be fixed, as the postcolonial subject is dislocated and difficult to place. He perceives hybridity as "a sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities" (1994: 112). As he continues, "hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other 'denied' knowledge enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority—its rules of recognition" (1994: 114). In other words, the colonial power loses its stable position and centrality, as other so-far-rejected cultures and minorities finally mark their presence. Moreover, as Bhabha puts it, hybridity "displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination" (1994:112). Not only does it lead to the assimilation of the oppressed, but it also weakens the authority of the oppressor and his culture.

Additionally, Homi Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture*, presents the concept of mimicry, which defines the dynamics between the oppressed and the colonizer. As the scholar highlights, the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is based on mimicry, the term analyzing the way in which the latter imitates the former. Since colonial discourse motivates subjugated others to adopt the values of the dominant culture, what is formed by mimicking the oppressor is just a copy, far from the original. From Bhabha's perspective, mimicry leads to the creation of the colonized subject who is "almost the same, but not quite," as the act of imitation involves changes and alternations (1994: 86). According to him, the act

of imitating the behavior and culture of the colonizer is characterized not only by resemblance but also by mockery, since by mimicking the colonizer, the subjugated deconstructs colonial discourse (1994: 86). While mimicry, as Jane Hiddleston puts it, ensures the control of the native, it also "inserts difference into the dominant discourse of colonial power" (2009: 118). By imitating the oppressor, Hiddleston continues, the limitations of colonial authority are revealed since mimicry "plays by the rules of the colonizer but at the same time works against them" (2009: 119). Therefore, the act of mimicry is threatening to the *status quo* of the colonial reality, as it seemingly strengthens the position of the dominant culture, yet it borders on mockery which ridicules and weakens the imperial center.

CHAPTER TWO

Black Womanhood in the American Context: Historical Developments, Stereotypes, and Sociocultural Dynamics

Discourse on Black Womanhood: Mammy, Jezebel, Sapphire, Welfare Queen and Urban Teen Mother

Colonial discourse and its representation of the other were imbued with stereotypes, myths, and stigmatizations that depicted the subjugated weak in an unfavorable way. Following Gayatri Spivak's view on the position of a third world woman, colonialism contributed to the formation of a rigid concept of the female subaltern who, as the Indian intellectual claims, is subjected to dual victimization. The representation of the subaltern female, formed from a patriarchal and colonial perspective, was based on socially constructed biases that consistently portrayed women as inferior others. Throughout history, women have faced victimization and stereotyping within a reality shaped by patriarchal values. However, it is the women from developing nations who have endured significant inequalities and unjust treatment from both their local men and colonizing Western powers. The patriarchal model, defined as a "sexual system of power in which the male possesses superior power and economic privilege," had a massive impact on all spheres of women's everyday life, shaping their lack of self-confidence and the belief in their own worthlessness (Eisenstein 1979: 17). The patriarchal and binary social structure emphasised the distinction between masculinity and femininity, with the former defined as dominant, powerful and intellectually superior, whereas the latter symbolised sexuality, subordination and inferiority. This was particularly severe for the women of colour who fell victim to slavery, violence, and social exclusion.

The horror of slavery that came to an end in 1865 with the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution created a specific image of the promiscuous black woman who, unlike her white counterpart, epitomized sexual licentiousness and immorality. As Julia Sheron Jordan-Zachery observes in *Black Women, Cultural Images, and Social Policy* (2009), white women in nineteenth-century North America were portrayed through the virtues of true womanhood and exemplified its traits (32). One of the instances Jordan-Zachery presents in her study refers to John R. Lynch's perspective on women being classified according to their race. A former slave and a Mississippi politician, Lynch shed light on the matter of

categorisation among women with different skin colour. In his view, the society had constructed a specific image of a colored woman who, in spite of her virtues and impeccable morals, would never be perceived as a real "lady," since such a term was reserved solely for white women (Lynch qtd in Jordan-Zachery 2009: 32). On the contrary, black womanhood was classified as "non-human" in terms of morality and sexuality. In *Black Women, Cultural Images, and Social Policy* (2009), Jordan-Zachery distinguishes five prevailing images of black womanhood that have persisted in American society for decades. Her typology consists of such representations of the black woman as Mammy, Jezebel, Sapphire, Welfare Queen and Urban Teen Mother (2009: 6). The scholar highlights two common elements present in all the aforementioned images, i.e., morality and sexuality. Each of these images addresses morality and sexuality from distinct perspectives, encompassing virtue, morality, and asexuality, as well as promiscuity, looseness, and immoral behavior.

The first image Jordan-Zachery discusses in her study is that of Mammy. Constructed in times of slavery, the image referred to a black servant whose main characteristics were her obedience, subordination, and servitude to a white family. Stereotypically, Mammy was considered a loyal, kind, and devoted caregiver. Nevertheless, as Jordan-Zachery notices, the figure of Mammy was not one-dimensional. On the one hand, she was a dedicated, warm, and gentle caretaker in a white American household. On the other hand, however, her strong personality and physicality were appreciated by her white employers who felt safe and protected in her presence (Jordan-Zachery 2009: 38). The fullness of her breasts and buttocks, her obesity and roundness were among the most characteristic features of her appearance:

> All the functions of mammy are magnificently physical. They involve the body as sensuous, as funky, the part of woman that white Southern America was profoundly afraid of. *Mammy*, harmless in her position as a slave and unable because of her all-giving nature to do harm, is needed as an image, a surrogate to contain all those fears of the physical female. (Christian 1985: 2)

In the eyes of a white lady of the house, Mammy was regarded as asexual and, therefore, harmless. Jordan-Zachery observes that her asexuality was "a required trait to allow for black women to care for the white family" (2009: 46). Mammy was not perceived as a threat to white womanhood due to her lack of physical attractiveness and her lack of sexual interest in men, particularly the white man of the house.

Another construction of black womanhood Jordan-Zachery takes into discussion is Jezebel. Jezebel, in contrast to Mammy, was driven by her sexual desires and, therefore, considered immoral and promiscuous. The name Jezebel originates from the Bible, as Jezebel was king Ahab's wife, notorious for her sexual aggression and looseness (Jordan-Zachery 2009: 39). With reference to black womanhood in the slavery and post-slavery times, the reception of Jezebel was ambiguous. In the slavery period, her seductiveness and promiscuity were regarded *in plus*, as her sexuality contributed to the rise in the number of childbirths. That was especially significant for white slaveholders for whom new labor force was of a great importance. Moreover, from white slaveholders' perspective, Jezebel's sexual eagerness was perfect justification for rape, as "[t]his was important for the slave era as it was for the post-slave era because it justified the rape and sexual violence committed routinely against female slaves—she "wants" it [sexual abuse] and thus, the white perpetrator is not guilty of any wrongdoing (Jordan-Zachery 2009: 40). On the other hand, however, with the abolition of slavery, white men could not exert as much power over black women as they used to. As Jordan-Zachery puts it,

> [n]ow (in the post-slavery era), Jezebel seduces in order to get something beyond mere sex—such as money or protection from the atrocities suffered by her sister. […] Jezebel is the image of the "bad black woman" (inherently debased, sex-crazed, greedy, tricky, threatening, out to seek revenge against white society), while *Mammy* is the image of the "good" black woman (good worker, passive, non-threatening, loyal to white culture). (2009: 40)

Apart from the image of Mammy or Jezebel, Julia Sheron Jordan-Zachery distinguishes three more categorizations of black womanhood. All of them prevailed in the twentieth-century representation of African American women and included the images of Sapphire, Matriarch, Welfare Queen, and Urban Teen Mother. The first one, i.e., Sapphire, is an embodiment of a sassy, talkative and all-knowing African American woman who constantly preaches her immoral and devious husband, often referred to as Kingfish. As she abuses him verbally and tries to tame him, Sapphire is often accused of emasculating her man and blamed for the crisis of his masculinity (Jordan-Zachery 2009: 41). By controlling him, Sapphire marks her position in the family as a head of the household, therefore contributing to the death of black manhood.

With regards to the figure of Matriarch, her representation is based on cultural practices of matrilineal dominance. Matriarch is portrayed as both a leader of the family and community. While her image bears some resemblance to that of Mammy, the Matriarch is entrenched within the black household in the post-slavery era. In contrast to Mammy who represents an ideal servant and caregiver for white children, Matriarch is incapable of nurturing her own offspring and lacks the favorable qualities associated with the Mammy archetype. In numerous instances, Matriarch raises her children single-handedly, frequently serving as the sole provider for the family. Due to solo-parenting, her financial circumstances are dire, as she struggles to support her children and often fails to meet basic expenses. Society often perceives Matriarch as an inadequate parent who does not fulfill the role of a good mother. Her portrayal in social discourse is derogatory, as she is "constructed as a bad mother who is responsible for low educational attainment, crime, delinquency of her charges, and for ostracizing black men" (Jordan-Zachery 2009: 43).

The representations of black womanhood prevalent in North America during the 1980s and 1990s also include the Welfare Queen and the Urban Teen Mother archetypes. Both categories are loaded with derogatory descriptions and pejorative connotations, with Welfare Queen being depicted as "the agenda of destruction, the creator of the pathological, black, urban, poor family from which all ills flow […] a monster creating crack dealers, addicts, muggers, and rapists—men who become those things because of being immersed in her culture of poverty" (Lubiano 1992: 323, 339). Unemployed and reliant on welfare, she is not a figure to follow, as her lack of initiative in the workforce and exploitation of the social system pose a threat on the economic stability of the country (Collins 1991: 76). Like Welfare Queen, Urban Teen Mother also relies on welfare for financial support and her passivity is viewed as a manifestation of financial dependence on government assistance. Therefore, she is socially stigmatized as a lethargic and irresponsible young woman whose sexual impulses and unrestrained desires lead to premature pregnancy and parenthood.

Black Womanhood and the Category of Beauty

Considering all the categories of black womanhood discussed above, it can be asserted that a derogatory and negative representation of black femininity has been a prevalent factor in the formation of a negative and pathological image of an African American woman. Stereotypes referring to black womanhood as lustful, degenerate and lazy have prevailed in the US

perception of African American femininity for many decades. As it has already been stated, initiated during the slavery era and continued up to the twentieth century, the pejorative image of blackness as inferior and secondary was a frequent characteristic of black femininity. In addition to issues related to work, motherhood, welfare, or sexual freedom, their marginalization and inferiority were defined in terms of beauty. Throughout the years, aesthetic standards have transformed, establishing new ideals of perfection; yet, the concept of beauty has frequently been interpreted through the prism of skin tone, favoring one shade over another. Stephanie M. H. Camp, in "Black Is Beautiful: An American History" (2015), points out that "during the age of European exploration […] the sight of humans different from themselves raised questions for Europeans about the nature of human difference from other earthly creatures and from one another" (676). The visual experience served as the foundation for categorizing individuals into different races. Facial characteristics, including complexion, hair, and eye color, played a significant role in determining an individual's position within the social hierarchy, as greater pigmentation of the skin often correlated with a lower societal rank.

In the course of colonial discovery, the notion of beauty was linked to Eurocentric ideals that glorified whiteness. Margaret L. Hunter, in *Race, Gender and the Politics of Skin Tone* (2005), asserts that "black people and blackness were defined as barbaric, savage, heathen and ugly; white people and whiteness were defined as civilised, modern, Christian and beautiful" (20). The binary representation of races, inherent in colonial discourse, assigned positive connotations to whiteness, while blackness was linked to irrationality and otherness. What dominated colonial rhetoric was the portrayal of African slaves as more animalistic than human, the objective of which was to bolster the concept of white supremacy and to fabricate a distorted representation of the colonized populations. In doing so, the imperial center rationalized its aggression and atrocities, asserting that the indigenous populations of Africa were savage and subhuman.

The institution of slavery, as already discussed, played a significant role in the derogatory classification of colored people, women in particular. Angela Y. Davis, the author of *Women, Race and Class* (1983), asserts that "in the eyes of the slave holders, slave women were not mothers, not at all, they were simply instruments guaranteeing the growth of the slave labor force" (7). Davis's observation aligns with Robert Staples's argument in his *Exploring Black Sexuality* (2006). Staples highlights that sexual promiscuity among slaves was promoted by their white owners to enhance the productivity of the labor force (2006: 18).

Moreover, black females experienced sexual victimization and exploitation at the hands of white slave owners who, as noted by Staples, fulfilled their most profound sexual fantasies (2006: 19). In this context, their victimization was regarded legitimate, as they were perceived immoral and promiscuous.

In the aftermath of slavery, the adverse portrayal of African Americans continued to manifest across various domains. Stephanie M. H. Camp, in her essay "Making Racial Beauty in the United States" (2016), appears to endorse this perspective. Camp posits that, from the perspective of white America, blackness and beauty represent two opposing categories that cannot coexist (2016: 120). The discourse surrounding blackness has often been overshadowed by negative connotations linked to mental and physical primitiveness, resulting in a scarcity of discussions focused on its aesthetic dimensions. While black society faced marginalization and subjugation broadly, it was the black woman who endured the compounded effects of racial and sexual exploitation with particular severity. In contrast to white American women, often viewed as embodying virtue through their roles as supportive spouses and caregivers, the representations of African American women were crafted to illuminate their subordinate position in society. Reduced to physical chores and primarily subjected to forced labor, they cultivated in themselves a profound sense of inferiority and self-loathing.

The criteria for beauty have transformed throughout history and continue to evolve in an ongoing manner. In her work, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (2002), Naomi Wolf emphasizes that "beauty is not universal or changeless"—it is rather a fluid construct that shifts across time and cultures, reflecting prevailing societal norms and values (12). While in the past it was deemed socially inappropriate to recognize women of color as embodiments of genuine beauty, in today's society, the notion of attractiveness undergoes constant changes. Modern civilization has experienced considerable tendency towards inclusivity and diversification in the representations of beauty. The emergence of global media, the impact of social movements promoting racial equality, and the advocacy of models and celebrities from diverse backgrounds have contested Eurocentric beauty norms. Currently, a variety of skin tones, hair textures, and body shapes are prominently featured in fashion magazines, runway shows, and campaigns. This transformation indicates a growing awareness that beauty encompasses various dimensions and that individuals ought to have the autonomy to establish their own criteria for attractiveness, free from dominant societal standards. Given the ever-evolving nature of

reality, “there is a bit more room today to be oneself” (Wolf 2002: 6). Every individual, irrespective of their skin color or gender, possesses the fundamental right to express themselves freely, without the apprehension of judgment.

Feminism from a Black Female Perspective

The main objective of the feminist movement was to elaborate on the social experience of women who were repeatedly ignored and marginalized, being perceived as secondary and inferior to men. The movement struggled to challenge the *status quo* of a patriarchal world structure, drawing attention to such hardships of feminine reality as social inequality and exclusion, sexual victimization, and violence. Beginning as early as in the nineteenth century, first-wave feminism expressed its dissatisfaction with unequal treatment of women and their inferior position in a male-centered society. Its main aim was to dismantle discriminatory laws and exclusionary social norms that were based on prejudiced division between men and women. Therefore, the movement advocated equal rights for the so-called second sex in the areas of labor, education, property, procreation, or marital status. Historically, it was connected with the emergence of women’s organizations, such as suffrage organizations and feminist periodicals, offering a forum for women’s voices and activities. The International Woman Suffrage Alliance, formed in 1904, became its main organization (Malinowska 2020: 2). Nevertheless, the feminist interest in the experience and representation of women in the male-dominated world was limited to the situation of privileged white women and their main concerns. It focused solely on the representation of white femininity, ignoring the issues and challenges faced by non-white womanhood.

Although the first-wave feminism in the US came to an end with the successful recognition of women’s right to vote in 1920, the inter-war period, with its harsh and difficult environment caused by the Great Depression of the 1930s made the life of American women more challenging. During the First and Second World Wars, women were permitted to join the workforce to support their families. However, the financial crisis of the 1930s and the conclusion of the wars led to their return to domestic roles and household responsibilities. The postwar instability, along with the prevailing belief that women were obligated to bear children and manage domestic responsibilities, played a significant role in the rise of the second-wave feminist movement. One of its goals was deconstruction of biologically-determined gender roles, according to which woman’s only obligations were childcare and

obedience to her spouse. Second-wave feminism was strongly opposed to such a vision of femininity, claiming there was no scientific evidence proving superiority of men over women. On the contrary, it claimed that the differences between men and women were socially constructed rather than determined by biology and nature. According to a French feminist and philosopher, Simone de Beauvoir, "[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine" (1989 [1949]: 273). From Beauvoir's perspective, "the whole of feminine history has been man-made" and defined through masculine lens (1989: 148).

In her seminal work, *The Second Sex* (1989 [1949]), Beauvoir emphasizes the women's lack of autonomy and independence in the man-dominated world, as their representation is made from a masculine point of view: "[s]he is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other" (15-16). Her existence is reliant on the presence of men, since "men have always held the lot of woman in their hands; and they have determined what it should be, not according to her interest, but rather with regard to their own projects, their fears, and their needs" (Beauvoir 1989: 148). As the author highlights, defined as the second sex, women are diminished to the role of wives and mothers. Beauvoir, however, expresses her dissatisfaction with the idea of woman as a "natural" caregiver and nurturer, contending that these roles are enforced by patriarchal structures rather than being inherent or innate to women. As she believes, "woman is no longer limited to the reproductive function, which has lost in large part its character as natural servitude and has come to be regarded as a function to be voluntarily assumed" (1989: 415). Instead, she stresses the need for women to decide about their lots freely. What the feminist suggests is active participation in confronting and overturning patriarchal norms and systems which tend to oppress and objectify women.

Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* contributed to the formation of theoretical underpinnings of the second wave of feminism which highlighted the issue of unequal treatment in the workplace, freedom of choice as regards sexuality, birth control or abortion. In the US, the second stage of feminism developed in the context of civil rights movements, beginning in the 1960s. It was a period of increasing self-awareness among ethnical and sexual minorities, as well as the emergence of anti-war movements and organizations fighting for racial equality.

In contrast to the first-wave feminism, which was typically driven by middle-class, white women from Western countries, the second phase of the movement drew in non-white female representatives, frequently from developing countries (Rampton 2008: 2). As Martha Rampton puts it,

> [t]he second wave was increasingly theoretical, based on a fusion of neo-Marxism and psycho-analytical theory, and began to associate the subjugation of women with broader critiques of patriarchy, capitalism, normative heterosexuality, and the woman's role as wife and mother. Sex and gender were differentiated—the former being biological, and the later a social construct that varies culture-to-culture and over time. (2008: 2)

Feminists of the second wave were struggling to liberate themselves from a traditional view on their femininity which defined them as a weak and inferior sex. Their involvement in breaking harmful and unfair stereotypes became one of the dominant concerns of the feminist activity in the US of the 1960s and the 1970s. The 1963-publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* was one of the major catalysts for the development of the second-wave feminist thought. The work discusses the situation of white American women in the mid-twentieth century US. As Frieden observes, they were trapped in domestic space, as their everyday functioning was limited to housework, childcare and being a good wife:

> [t]he problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night—she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question—Is this all? (1977 [1963]: 11)

By illustrating the female experience of the 1950s and the 1960s, Friedan shows her dissatisfaction with traditional norms framing women into domestic arena of household duties. As she contends, women cannot suppress the voice encouraging them to pursue professional career or fulfill their ambitions outside the home. In her opinion, they cannot be silenced anymore and must be given the right to express themselves limitlessly, since "we can

no longer ignore that voice within women that says: 'I want something more than my husband and my children and my home'" (Friedan 1977: 27). Moreover, as Friedan believes, limiting women to domestic and family spheres is not only detrimental to them, but it also influences the whole society negatively, since not granting women with the opportunity to participate in other spheres of public life is destructive for the society as well.

Despite the fact Friedan's work is believed to have paved the way for the second-wave feminism, it also provoked criticism, especially among African American women. For instance, bell hooks, in *Feminist Theory. From Margin to Center* (1984), accuses Friedan of excluding non-white womanhood from the discussion on the condition of American women. As she claims, Friedan's work describes "a select group of college-educated, middle and upper class, married white women—housewives bored with leisure, with the home, with children, with buying products, who wanted more out of life" (1984: 1). By marginalizing and ignoring the issues of their colored counterparts, the feminist movement proved to be one-sided and in favor of white women and their dilemmas. In the preface to *Feminist Theory. From Margin to Center*, hooks observes that the feminist thought in general lacked the knowledge and experience of the women of color who were often ignored and put in a marginalized position (1984: preface). Instead, it concentrated on the condition of white middle-class women who were located on the pedestal of admiration and idealized femininity. With its one-dimensional focus, the movement tended to ignore the collective experience of colored women, as it isolated and excluded those non-white female representatives who differed ethnically, socially, and economically from the mainstream model of white femininity.

Although the general understanding of the term feminism defines it as "the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way," practically it refers more to the dominating group of white women who struggle for equality and fairness in the world loaded with patriarchal superiority and the belief in male dominance *(Cambridge Online Dictionary*). As bell hooks emphasizes, feminism is the United States never concerns those who are "most victimized by sexist oppression; women who are daily beaten down, mentally, physically, and spiritually—women who are powerless to change their condition in life. They are a silent majority" (1984: 1). According to hooks, the feminist theory fails to recognize its underlying beliefs in white supremacy and exhibits a racist attitude towards women of color, as it does not address the issues affecting all women, irrespective of their ethnicity or social status (1984: 4). In other

words, the feminist discourse prevailing in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s was a biased bourgeois ideology, favoring white middle-class feminists, while excluding women of color. bell hooks, whose upbringing was rooted in a patriarchal reality and a father-dominated household, herself experienced what it was like to live in the world controlled by men. It was the reality in which the role of women was diminished to childbirth and household chores, with little or no regard for their well-being or self-realization.

Apart from hooks' awareness of a patriarchal world structure, the activist draws attention to what is missing from the feminist movement blooming in the 1970s in the US and Canada. Recalling her own experience form university times, hooks depicts what it was like to be a black female participating in feminist groups. As she recalls,

> [...] I found that white women adopted a condescending attitude towards me and other non-white participants. The condescension they directed at black women was one of the means they employed to remind us that the women's movement was "theirs"—that we were able to participate because they allowed it, even encouraged it. […] They did not treat us as equals. (1984: 11)

As a result of bias and prejudice towards women of color, their voices were ignored and silenced. Thus, one may claim that feminism, by distinguishing between white and non-white womanhood, parallels the patriarchal system through its reliance on binary oppositions and dualities. While in patriarchy, the division favored men and their superior status over women, feminism highlighted the disparities between white women and women of color. According to Helena Michie, the author of "Not One of the Family: The Repression of the Other Woman in Feminist Theory" (1991), the aim of such a strategy was to objectify colored women and preserve the position of white feminists as speaking subjects (60). Theoretically, feminism prioritized equality for all groups of women, regardless of their skin color or social background. In practice, though, it excluded non-white females, treating them as insignificant.

Simplifying the notion of feminism, one can comprehend it as a fight of women to be granted social equality with men. Nevertheless, there was more to it than just a mere aspiration for being treated fairly. As bell hooks in another classic work of hers, *Ain't I a Woman? Black Woman and Feminism* (2015 [1981]), puts it, the feminist movement not only desired equal opportunities for women, as it also longed for a revolution and a transformation in the social structure which for ages centralized and prioritized men (165). The revolution

and transformation, though, excluded black women from everything white women's movement aspired for. Since its very beginning, the feminist movement was based on racism and the belief in white supremacy. Its struggle for social equality was limited only to white American women who denied the existence of women of color and difficulties they were facing. Despite the fact both groups were victimized sexually, only the situation of white women was highlighted and analyzed by white feminist activists. Racist victimization of black womanhood was of no concern to the feminist thought. On the contrary, they tended to use the word woman with reference to whiteness only: "[i]n America, white racist ideology has always allowed white women to assume that the word woman is synonymous with white woman, for women of other races are always perceived as Others, as de-humanized beings who do not fall under the heading woman" (hooks 2015: 188). The division between black and white womanhood made it impossible to treat the feminist movement as unbiased and impartial. As it turned out, it did not represent women of all social and ethnic backgrounds collectively. In contrast, it was based on racist premises and the belief in white women's superiority over women of color.

Early Black Feminists

Despite the attempts of feminist movements to exclude black women form active participation in the fight for equality in the male-dominated world, black activists did not surrender in their battle for justice and fair treatment. As early as in 1852 in Akron, Ohio, during the Second Annual Convention of the Women's Rights Movement, Sojourner Truth, a former slave and one of the first black activists concerned about the issues of black womanhood, attacked the exclusion of African American women from the category of womanhood:

> Look at me! Look at my arm! [...] I have plowed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me—ain't I a woman? I could work as much as any man (when I could get it), and bear de lash as well—ain't I a woman? I have borne five children and seen 'em mos all sold off into slavery, and when I cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus hear—ain't I a woman? (Truth qtd in hooks 2015: 215)

As bell hooks reports, Sojourner Truth's public speech received strong disapproval and criticism at the hands of white men and women assembled at the anti-slavery convention

in Akron, Ohio (2015: 214). Nevertheless, in spite of humiliation and disrespect she experienced, Truth stayed a strong advocate of black women's rights, giving an example to other black activists in their fight for dignity and equality.

The number of black female activists in the nineteenth-century America who were deeply involved in the matters of black womanhood was impressive. Among them was Mary Church Terrell (1863-1954), the founder of the National Association of Colored Women and an advocate for the rights of black Americans (hooks 2015: 217). Not only did she desire the change in the harsh reality of black females in America, but she was also committed to the issue of race in general. Similarly to Mary Church Terrell, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin was another black activist and reformer prioritizing the matters of all women, regardless of their race. During the First National Conference of Colored Women that was held in Boston in 1895, Ruffin encouraged all men and women, regardless of their ethnic heritage, to cooperate in their mutual battle for a better future:

> [o]ur woman's movement […] is led and directed by women for the good of women and men, for the benefit of all humanity, which is more that any one branch or section of it. […] we are not drawing the color line … we are not alienating or withdrawing, we are only coming to the front, willing to join any others in the same work and cordially inviting and welcoming any others to join us. (Ruffin qtd in hooks 2015: 221)

While black female activists sought to unite in the struggle for liberation and equality for all women, white American feminists often displayed a narrow focus, primarily concerned with their own issues related to education access and charity work. Because of their different experiences, the focus of white and black activists varied significantly. Black female organizations were concerned with poverty and difficult situation of the elderly, not forgetting about the problem of forced prostitution among young black women who, migrating from the South to the North in search of a better life, ended up as sexual workers exploited by white "pimps" (hooks 2015: 223).

When contrasting black feminism with the white feminist movement, it is evident that colored activists were engaged more deeply with the challenges faced by both black and white women as a united collective. Such a perspective is supported by bell hooks who states that, despite the marginalization of black women within white feminist movements and their

experiences of racial victimization by whites, black female activists remained true to their belief in solidarity and a collective struggle for the rights of all women in America (2015: 221). In this context, united womanhood, both black and white, was the priority for colored feminists. A good example proving this point concerns Anna Julia Cooper whose "A Voice from the South" was of the earliest feminist texts addressing black womanhood and the challenges it faced. Apart from highlighting difficult aspects of being a black female in America, Cooper paid attention to a more collective issue, i.e., the access to higher education (hooks 2015: 224). According to Cooper, as bell hooks reports, educated women, regardless of their skin color, were able to serve the country best, as the access to education opened a new opportunity for them to "explore worlds outside the traditional realm of home and family" (2015: 226).

Intellectual development, the right to vote and express themselves freely were one of the many aspirations both black and white female activists of the nineteenth-century America desired to achieve. However, the struggle for solidarity was favored only by black representatives of feminist movements who were convinced that women collectively could be politically strong in their mutual fight for suffrage and social equality in all sectors of life (hooks 2015: 228). Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, a poet, author, and antislavery activist, best captured the situation and position of women in the reality of the nineteenth-century US. From Harper's perspective, the nineteenth century was a crucial moment for women collectively, marking a period of their self-discovery and personal growth. According to Harper, "if the fifteenth century discovered America to the Old World, the nineteenth is discovering woman to herself" (hooks 2015: 228).

The intense fight for equal treatment and dignity persisted throughout the twentieth century. It was in August 1920 when the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment granted all white and non-white women the right to vote: "[t]he right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation" (Nineteenth Amendment, Web). Nevertheless, the voting privileges for all American women were altering the *status quo* of electoral male-dominated reality only theoretically. As a result of the ratification, women were granted the right to vote. Their voting, however, did not support the issues about which black American women were most concerned. On the contrary, as bell hooks reports, their voting privileges did not change their position, since their newly-granted right to vote merely reinforced "the existing white racist imperialist patriarchal social order"

(2015: 230). June Sochen, an American history professor and the author of *Herstory: A Woman's View of American History* (1974), in her study illustrates the black women's voting reality after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. According to the historian, although black women were finally granted the right to vote, in practice white election officials frequently found a reason to prevent them from voting:

> […] when black women went to the polls in Alabama or Georgia, they found that white election officials had a bag of tricks ready to prevent them from voting. If a black woman could read a complicated text put before her, the white official would find some other obscure reason why she was ineligible to vote. And any woman who persisted was threatened with violence if she did not obediently slink away. (1974: 279)

Consequently, women of color soon realized that the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment did not improve their social status. The feminist movement with its one-sided, elitist and racist character, focused only on the issues concerning white womanhood. Therefore, many black female activists felt betrayed and disappointed with the movement, since it was used as a tool to strengthen white hegemony and the oppression of black African Americans, both men and women. Since white feminists supported imperialist vision of white supremacy and distanced themselves from the issues of black womanhood, women of color were left alone in their fight for a better future. However, instead of focusing on the hardship of their harsh reality and the inequality of the sexes, black women chose to set aside their own issues and actively fought against racism, oppression, and exclusion directed at black Americans as a whole. Despite the fact that in 1865 the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified, stating that "[n]either slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction," the reality for black Americans still remained difficult (Thirteenth Amendment, Web). The situation was particularly challenging in the southern states of the US, where the newly-ratified amendment faced disapproval, allowing the continuation of slavery and servitude among people of color. Furthermore, even though former slaves received their freedom, discrimination and prejudice towards them continued to persist in American society well into the mid-twentieth century.

Jim Crow Laws

With the introduction of the system of racial apartheid, commonly known as Jim Crow laws, racial discrimination and segregation were formally institutionalized in the southern American states after the Reconstruction Era (1865-1877). As David K. Fremon, the author of *Jim Crow Laws and Racism in American History* (2000), puts it,

> "Jim Crow" laws passed in the late 1800s greatly limited blacks' freedom. After a while, the term Jim Crow became more than a set of laws. It referred to a way of life that was full of limitations for African Americans. In some ways, these humiliations were as bad as slavery. (27)

Consequently, Jim Crow laws systematically undermined the dignity of black communities and denied them the fundamental rights to equality and freedom. They created a stark separation between black and white individuals across multiple sectors, including education, healthcare, public transportation, and burial sites. All the rights to equality, fair treatment, and freedom that black people were granted with during the Reconstruction Era were taken away by Jim Crow regulations. Fremon reports that as a result of those laws, life in the South for the black community got unbearable, since it "had become a caste system" (2000: 29). Regardless of one's education or skills, being born as a black was viewed a lifelong burden. Having faced inequalities on many levels of social life, African Americans initiated their fight against racism, discrimination and prejudice. As stated before, black female activists, instead of concentrating on their own rights to equality in a white and male-dominated world, shifted their attention to the problem of racial oppression and discrimination directed at black Americans. Social equality and the struggle for liberation became a priority and a main goal on their way to liberty.

Jim Crow regulations were not the only limitations black Americans were experiencing in the second half of the nineteenth century. According to the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution ratified in 1868 and considered one of the Reconstruction amendments,

> [a]ll persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of

> citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws. (Fourteenth Amendment, Web)

Practically, though, with the U.S. Supreme Court decision from 1896 that introduced the doctrine "separate but equal," the Fourteenth Amendment and its premises did not guarantee the equality and privileges for each and every citizen of the United Stated. As explained in *Encyclopedia of American Riots*,

> [by] establishing the ''separate but equal'' doctrine, this pivotal decision essentially rendered two previous civil rights acts (those of 1866 and 1875) and the Fourteenth Amendment null and void. Without protection provided by the federal government, the collective fate of millions of African Americans hung in the balance. (2007: xlviii)

Hostility towards non-white citizens led to racial violence and oppression, being one of the main incentives for the formation of white racist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, the Knights of the White Camellia or the White Caps. Their main priority was to maintain the *status quo* of white dominance and supremacy, with the white man as the master of the inferior and subjugated black man (*Encyclopedia of American Riots* 2007: xlviii).

The Role and Position of Black Womanhood in African American Liberation Movements

The participation of women of color in the black liberation movement, along with their fight against racism and brutality directed at African Americans, became critically significant for black female activists. One of the reasons they abandoned their struggle for women's rights concerned their fear of being accused of hostility towards black liberation movement and the lack of interest in black-related issues. As bell hooks states, from the 1920s till the mid-1960s, black female activists disassociated themselves from a feminist fight for women's rights, since

> [t]he struggle for black liberation and the struggle for women's liberation were seen as inimical largely because black civil rights leaders did not want the white American public to see their demands for full citizenship as synonymous with a radical demand

> for equality of the sexes. They made black liberation synonymous with gaining full participation in the existing patriarchal nation-state and their demands were for the elimination of racism, not capitalism or patriarchy. (2015: 236)

By confining their role to supporting black men in the struggle for racial equality and freedom, black women continued to play a part in perpetuating the existing patriarchal *status quo.* They accepted their submissive and subordinate role in the society and rejected the feminist fight for women's rights, focusing particularly on the domestic life and the support of black manhood in their struggle for dignity and respect. What black women did not anticipate, though, was the pushback from black men concerning the idea of gender equality (hooks 2015: 37). The social status of black women was designed to remain unchanged in order to maintain the enduring pattern of patriarchal control that had existed within a society dominated by white males. Their subordination and passiveness played a significant role in reinforcing black masculinity and upholding the inferior status of black women, as silencing them synonymously meant controlling them.

The analysis of the historical contexts of black womanhood uncovers the resilience, autonomy, and courage that African American women demonstrated in their efforts to survive and support their families. Throughout the difficult periods of slavery, the World Wars, and the black liberation movement, women of color exhibited remarkable strength, showcasing both physical and mental determination, frequently taking on the role of primary family providers. Nonetheless, this perspective was frequently viewed as an assault on the identity of black men and a means of undermining their masculinity. One of the critics who viewed the independence and active role of black womanhood as a threat to the status of men of color was Danial Moynihan, the author of the 1965-report, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action" (1965). In the report, Moynihan highlights challenging and adverse circumstances faced by black men in American society, claiming that

> […] the Negro male, particularly in the South, became an object of intense hostility, an attitude unquestionably based in some measure of fear. When Jim Crow made its appearance towards the end of the 19th century, it may be speculated that it was the Negro male who was most humiliated thereby; the male was more likely to use public facilities, which rapidly became segregated once the process began, and just as important, segregation, and the submissiveness it exacts, is surely more destructive to the male than to the female personality. Keeping the Negro "in his place" can be

> translated as keeping the Negro male in his place: the female was not a threat to anyone. (1965: 12)

Moynihan asserts that the black woman significantly contributed to the castration and emasculation of her partner. His thesis is based on the observation that typical gender roles in many black families were often reversed, with a black woman serving as the primary provider. In the wake of historical events such as revolutions, wars, or social upheaval, black women emerged as prominent figures within their households. They were frequently referred to as matriarchs and adversaries of black masculinity due to their dominant roles in their family structures:

> [i]n essence, the Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which, because it is to out of line with the rest of the American society, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole, and imposes a crushing burden on the Negro male and, in consequence, on a great many Negro women as well. (1965: 18)

The consequence of Moynihan's report was a widespread perception of black men's deficiency in masculinity and a crisis inside the patriarchal family structure among African Americans. Due to the fact many black households were female-headed, black womanhood was attacked for reversing a traditional sex pattern and faced accusations of having a destructive impact on black manhood.

With regard to white American family structures, the man was a dominant figure in the household, preserving the *status quo* of a patriarchal reality. Therefore, since black men aspired to enter male-dominated white society, they accepted the same patriarchal ideology of oppression towards women as white men did. Michelle Wallace, the author of *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (2015 [1979]), demonstrates the attitude of black men towards black women and depicts it as misogynist, hostile and attacking, since, as she notices,

> [m]isogyny was an integral part of Black Macho. Its philosophy, which maintained that black men had been more oppressed than black women, that black women had, in fact, contributed to that oppression, that black men were sexually and morally superior and also exempt from most of the responsibilities human beings had to other human beings, could only be detrimental to black women. (2015: n. pag. Web)

Consequently, African American women remained silent, exploited and oppressed, as that was the core of a patriarchal vision of the society. By supporting their men and assuming a subordinate position in both a family and society, black women believed that their submissiveness and invisibility could empower black manhood with self-confidence, fostering their sense of superiority and dominance. To confirm their inferiority to men, numerous black women refrained from participating in politics or women's liberation movements due to their concerns about being labeled as traitors or engaging in anti-black activities. As Michelle Wallace puts it,

> [s]he [black woman] was not allowed to participate in political planning. She was also not allowed to go to the hairdresser or church, to attend most clubs, or to participate in sororities, all of which had been declared counterrevolutionary. It could only be said with certainty that she hated white women, hated Women's Liberation, that she was having babies for the revolution, and that she wanted a man who would provide for her and keep her in a manner to which she had never been accustomed. (2015: n. pag. Web)

As previously discussed, while black Americans achieved equal rights through black liberation movements, the status of black women continued to be unstable and insecure. According to bell hooks, liberation from racism and inequality became a synonym for black men's right to sexist oppression towards black women (2015: 243). What hooks highlights in her study is the formation of a strong black patriarchal society, in which the role of a woman is diminished. Despite her observation that many African American women opposed a sex-based and patriarchal social structure, some campaigned for a strong and dominant position of black men, asserting that black manhood represented the black race as a whole (2015: 244). Their desire to be seen as powerful, independent, and self-reliant shifted towards a more idealized notion of femininity. Regardless of their education, age, or socioeconomic status, black women aimed to attain the status traditionally associated with idealized white womanhood: "They would no longer have to admire another woman on the pedestal. The pedestal would be theirs. They would no longer have to do their own fighting. They would be fought for. The knight in white armor would ride for them. The beautiful fairy princess would be black" (Wallace 2015: n.pag. Web). At last, African American women wished to be taken care of, admired and treated as weak, subtle and vulnerable individuals. In the world defined by notions of masculine dominance and power, they chose to embrace a subordinate position

and distanced themselves from feminist movements, believing that supporting feminism was synonymous with opposing black liberation and black masculinity.

Black Feminism

The discourse regarding the situation of African American women in the United States necessitates a deeper examination of the concept of agency. Explained by Maria del Guadalupe Davidson in *Black Women, Agency, and the New Black Feminism* (2017) as "the ability to act and to be perceived as an actor," agency became a crucial element in the feminist struggle for equality, freedom and recognition (17). One of the main markers of agency, along with rationality and the ability to make one's own choices, is recognition. It is one of the constituents in the process of identity formation since

> [o]ur identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by *mis*recognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being. (Taylor-Guthrie 1994: 25)

The fact of being granted agency was crucial for both white and black feminist advocates. While in case of the former the construction of agency was gendered, defining the agent as masculine, from black feminists' perspective not only was it attributed to men, but it was also raced—"the agent is *white man*" (Davidson 2017: 17). In other words, the experience of black women differed from the situation of white American women, as black womanhood fell victim to "interlocking system of oppression" that consisted of the category of race, gender, and class. The concept of "interlocking system of oppression" was developed by African American feminist movement, the Combahee River Collective, which was formed in 1974 in Boston (Belkhir 2009: 303). The representatives of the movement claimed that the category of race, gender, and class were strictly connected, as the analysis of merely one of these concepts rendered the discourse on feminism insufficient and incomplete (Thompson 2002: 353).

Although there were differences in the frameworks among black feminist organizations, a notable shared characteristic was their focus on the interconnectedness of

systems of oppression. As Benita Roth states in her discussion on black feminism, "Second Wave Black Feminism in the African Diaspora: News from New Scholarship" (2003), its "ideology was characterized by a consistent examination of interlocking oppressions and oriented toward action agendas that linked solutions for gender oppression with solutions to other forms of oppressions" (52). Their mutual overlapping made the discussion on black female experience whole and comprehensive. In the view of Jean Ait Belkhir, the author of "The 'Johnny's story': Founder of the race, gender and class journal" (2009), black feminist thought in the US contributed greatly to the development of the concept of intersectionality between the category of race, class and gender. Belkhir asserts that prior to the rise of black feminism in the United States, no social theorist adequately engaged with the notion of the simultaneity of race, gender, and class intersectionality in people's lives. As the theorist contends, the concept of intersectionality constitutes one of the most significant contributions of black women's studies to the broader field of social theory (2009: 303).

Widely known for "The Combahee River Collective Statement," the organization emphasized the connections between different forms of oppression such as racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia. The statement proved to be groundbreaking, as it centered on the uniqueness of black women's experience, shaped by race, gender, and class. Barbara Smith, one of the members of the Collective, provided a model explanation of the notion of feminism. According to Smith, feminism is "the political theory and practice to free all women: women of color, working-class women, poor women, physically challenged women, as well as white economically privileged heterosexual women. Anything less than this is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement" (Smith qtd in Thompson 2002: 340). Smith, as one of the founding figures of the Combahee River Collective, contributed significantly to the growth of the modern understanding of feminism. In her work, the activist struggled to extend the definition of feminism in order to encompass the experiences of non-white women and queer women. As Second Wave Feminism was merely concerned about the issues of white, middle-class women, it was often referred to as "hegemonic feminism" (Sandoval 2000: 41-42). It tended to marginalize the issue of class and race oppression, concentrating mostly on sexual oppression and gender equality as its basic goal. By overlooking the situations of underrepresented groups, it proved to be one-sided and biased, treating sexism as the ultimate threat to women's freedom and equality. The dominating and hegemonic nature of Second Wave Feminism prompted black female activists to articulate their experiences inside the feminist discourse in the United States.

In the last decades of the twentieth century, academic researchers challenged the idea of singular second wave feminism as the only movement supporting the situation of women in the US. As Benita Roth points out, "the second wave was comprised of feminisms, plural: organizationally distinct feminist movements that developed and grew along different paths" (2003: 46). In her article, "Second wave Black feminism in the African diaspora: News from New Scholarship" (2003), Roth undermines the myth of black women trapped in their choice between fighting against racism and sexual oppression. As she believes and proves in another work of hers, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (2004), second wave feminism was relevant to black womanhood as well. Despite the myth of hostility of African American women to feminism, many black female activists of the 1960s and the 1970s were vigorously involved in feminist organizations. However, instead of joining white feminist movements, black feminists formed their own organizations with the focus on everyday experiences of women of color who were victimized by intersectional systems of oppressions. Although it is widely believed that black feminism developed in response to the shortcomings of the white feminism movement, academic research shows that black feminism actually emerged at the same time as its white counterpart and was a response to the Black Liberation Movement rather than Second Wave Feminism (Roth 2003: 47).

One of the main characteristics of black civil rights movement of the 1960s, apart from new legislation, the fight for equal opportunities, and fair treatment of all American citizens, was its masculine domination. As Toni Cade Bambara states in "On the Issue of roles" (1970), black women who were involved in black organizations had to face discrimination due to biased gender roles: "every organization you can name has had to struggle at one time or another with seemingly mutinous cadres of women getting salty about having to man the telephones or fix the coffee while the men wrote the position papers and decided on policy" (107). Often did they fall victim to sexism of black men and their chauvinistic behavior within the organizations. Despite black women's active participation in non-violent movements of the 1960s, their role was rarely appreciated. Their involvement in historically significant events such as freedom summer of 1964 or the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was often neglected, as they were believed to occupy subordinate roles in the movement. For instance, during freedom summer of 1964, as Sara Margaret Evans reports in *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Right Movement and the New Left* (2010 [1979]), black female activists "received their share of beatings and incarcerations,

but back at the headquarters—the 'freedom house'—they still, along with white women, did the housework; in the offices they typed, and when the media sought a public spokesperson they took a back seat" (83). Nevertheless, the position and influence of black women in the institution "was actually increasing at the time […]. It was white women who were being relegated to minor responsibilities, in part because of indiscriminate sexual behavior" (Giddings 1984: 302). It is crucial to note that while both black and white women participating in the black civil rights movement faced chauvinistic and sexist behavior, the roots of their oppression were different. In the context of social perceptions, African American women were often viewed through a lens of dominance, unfairly associated with the erosion of black masculinity; white women, on the other hand, were regarded as elusive and unattainable, akin to "forbidden fruit" (Taylor 1998: 241).

Unlike the Black Civil Rights movement which prioritized non-violent actions to achieve its goals, Black Power movement became more nationalist and radical in its views. What both organizations had in common, though, was their sexist attitude to women in general. The Black Panther Party, which proved to be the most dominant and influential African American organization in the US, consisted mostly of male members. The role they attributed to women was basically representational, as they were "treated more as symbols than as active participants" (Enloe 1989: 42). From the Black Panther Party's perspective, the main obligation of women in the organization was to fulfill a supportive role, without imposing any threat on the black masculinity. What they strongly supported was a traditional model of a woman obliged to occupy a secondary position to a man. As Michele Wallace reports, the late 1960s and early 1970s was the period "in which the political and philosophical weight of the black woman was either erased or divided between black men and white women, who then proceeded to go their separate ways" (qtd in Breines 1996: 107). Despite their deep commitment to the movement, the voices of black female activists were ignored and regarded insignificant as whatever "came from a woman gave it lesser value" (Cleaver qtd in Taylor 1998: 244). Such an attitude of male representatives of the Black Panther Party encountered hostility and protest of its female activists who strongly opposed discriminatory and biased treatment of women in general. As a response to increasing sexism in the Black Panther movement, many black women decided to gather collectively against sexism and discrimination.

The Third World Women's Alliance, established in 1970, was one of the pioneering organizations that arose in response to the discrimination and victimization faced by black

female activists within both the Civil Rights movement and Black Power organizations. The movement originated from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee branches located on the East Coast (SNCC) and focused on the intersectionality of class, race, and gender oppression (Thompson 2002: 339). Its aim was to draw public attention to the issue of sexism and gender-based victimization in the Black Power and Civil Rights movements. It also supported the need for the formation of black feminist groups. Among prominent activists of the Third World Women's Alliance was Frances Beale, the author of "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female" (1970) which played a major role in shaping a black feminist thought in the US. According to Beale, for a successful revolution to take place, it is necessary to treat all its participants equally, since "those who consider themselves to be revolutionaries must begin to deal with other revolutionaries as equals. And as far as I [Beale] know, revolutionaries are not determined by sex" (1970: 122). In Beale's view, for a revolution to succeed, it is unacceptable to assign women the domestic and parenting responsibilities while letting men participate in a fight (1970: 122). What she believes in is a mutual participation of all the members of the society in the liberation of the oppressed and an active role of black women. As Beale puts it, "in bringing about the kind of society where our children, our loved ones, and each citizen can grow up and live as decent human beings, free from the pressures of racism and capitalist exploitation," it is necessary to treat everyone with due respect (1970: 122). Frances Beale's work was published in Toni Cade Bambara's collection of stories, essays and poems, *The Black Woman: An Anthology* (1970). The anthology's portrayal of black women's experiences in America includes writings by other well-known black female authors, including Nikki Giovanni, Audre Lorde, and Alice Walker. When the anthology was first released in 1970, it was pioneering and revolutionary in its approach to the issues of black women's experiences, combining the intersections of race, gender, and class victimization and the hardships and triumphs of black women throughout history. It was also a space for African American women to finally speak out and be heard.

Another black feminist organization that was founded in the 1970s was the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO). As Deborah Gray White puts it, the movement "more than any organization in the century […] launched a frontal assault on sexism and racism" (1999: 242). It fought against stereotypical representations of black womanhood as Matriarchs, Jezebels or Welfare Queens. The movement also addressed the discriminatory treatment of women of color in the workplace, highlighting the inequalities and challenges they faced overall. Among the members of NBFO were distinguished black female activists,

namely Michelle Wallace, Alice Walker, Faith Ringgold, and Barbara Smith. The group, together with other black feminist initiatives, served as the starting point for the broadest and most extensive organizing by women of color. The movements encouraged a genuinely explosive growth in the amount of writings by women of color, including the abovementioned *The Black Woman: An Anthology* (1970) by Toni Cade Bambara, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1977) or Michele Wallace's *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (1979).

Many white feminists held the belief that black women, predominantly from working-class backgrounds, had similar gender interpretations to those of white middle-class women. Their advantages stemming from their social background often hindered their ability to grasp the distinct experiences of black womanhood. While white middle-class feminists advocated for their own right to step away from the roles of full-time wives and mothers to pursue careers, African American women encountered a distinct experience in their active participation in the job market. The disparity served as a significant source of resistance among black women towards the white feminist organizing efforts. As Wallace reports,

> [t]he Women's Movement made employment a primary goal of liberation … But the fact was that the black woman's "Liberation" consisted of being bound to the most unpleasant, unrewarding kind of work, work that did not enlarge her universe or increase her fulfillment. The black woman had not chosen her work. It was something she had to do, either because of the whip or to keep her family from starving—a necessity, a drudgery. That she worked did not mean that she viewed herself outside a traditional female role but only that she had, because of the urgent demands of her life, expanded upon that role to include a few very circumscribed areas of employment—domestic, field, and factory work; or, if she was middle-class, teaching, nursing, secretarial work, and social work. (1979: n. pag. Web)

The varying viewpoints on employment served as a starting point for divergence between black and white women, leading to a significant miscommunication between the two groups. While white middle-class women viewed dream job opportunities as positions in the executive suite, for black women, active participation in the job market was often linked to handling "someone else's dirty laundry" (Wallace 1979: n.pag. Web). In this regard, what proved liberating for white women did not alter the circumstances for African American

women in the United States, as "[w]omen's Liberation, the black woman reasoned, would chain her to Ms. Anne's stove forever" (Wallace 1979: n.pag. Web).

As discussed before, African American women's reluctance to engage themselves in white feminist movements had its origins in their fear of being accused of the betrayal of the black community. As Wini Breines, the author of "Sixties Stories' Silences: White Feminism, Black Feminism, Black Power" (1996), contends, black women often chose silence, as they wished to avoid being perceived as adversaries of their own community and as supporters of white dominance (107). Their silence was seen as a means of safeguarding the black community, since any effort to highlight the intersectionality of sexual, gender, and racial oppressions encountered by African American women led to their ostracism. This frequently led to branding them as "either man-haters or pawns of white feminists, two of the more predictable modes of disciplining and discrediting black feminists" (Crenshaw qtd in Breines 1996: 108). Consequently, numerous African American women chose not to align themselves with white feminist ideologies. Instead, they committed their activism to the distinct experiences of their own womanhood by founding black feminist movements. Patricia Collins, in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (1991), presents a similar line of thinking, stating that "[b]lack women's political and economic status provides them with a distinctive set of experiences that offer a different view of material reality than that available to other groups" (1989: 746-747). Due to the diverse experiences of oppression, victimization, and neglect faced by black women, black feminists established their own platform for activism, as their concerns were overlooked by the mainstream feminist movements predominantly led by middle-class white women.

Black Womanhood in African American Female Literature

As the activism of African American women in their fight for fair and equal treatment in all areas of life was increasing in the 1970s in the US, literature became one of the platforms of their expression and a tool to be heard. During that period, American literature experienced a growing presence and evolution of black women writers who crafted narratives from a female viewpoint. Moreover, their literary activism significantly influenced the awareness of black women as a whole, since many of them engaged with various artistic organizations or social movements. Among them were Black Arts or Civil Rights Movement that came into existence in the 1960s. With reference to the emergence of black female writings in the 1970s, it is

often referred to as the Black Women's Literary Renaissance, marking a significant and productive era in American literature. The movement became an artistic space for African American female voices who wished to highlight the overlooked and neglected experiences of black womanhood. While the 1960s was characterized with its focus on political issues such as racial injustices and the struggle for equality, with the Black Women's Literary Renaissance a new period of self-definition and self-determination began (Walker 2021: n.pag. Web).

One of the most prolific literary creations of the 1970s is a compilation of poems, essays, and stories by black female writers, known under the title of *The Black Woman. An Anthology* (1970) and edited by Toni Cade Bambara. In the collection, Bambara offers a portrayal of the black womanhood experience in the US, stating:

> She is a college graduate. *A drop-out*. A student. *A wife*. A divorcee. *A mother*. A lover. *A child of the ghetto*. A product of the bourgeoisie. *A professional writer*. A person who never dreamed of publication. *A solitary individual*. A member of the Movement. *A gentle humanist*. A violent revolutionary. *She is angry and tender, loving and hating. She is all these things-and more. And she is represented in a collection that for the first time truly lets her bare her soul and speak her mind*. (Bambara qtd in Traylor 2005 [1970]: xvii-xviii).

The anthology presents the texts through a distinct female perspective, illuminating the true significance of being an African American woman in the United States. One of the many writings from the collection is Paule Marshall's "Reena," where the author highlights a crucial issue that influences the identity formation of African American women in the US, namely, the perception of black womanhood as seen by others. Marshall expresses a profound critique of the ways in which black women are socially constructed and perceived through a distorted and objectifying lens. As she puts it, black women in the US are defined "by others to serve out their fantasies, a definition we [black women] have to combat at an unconscionable cost to the self and even use, at times, in order to survive; the cause of so much shame and rage as well as, oddly enough, a source of pride: simply, what it has meant, what it means, to be a black woman in America" (2005: 20). To paraphrase, black women are defined by external forces that serve to diminish their humanity and reduce their identities to mere embodiments of others' fantasies and projections. Marshall also asserts that black

female intellectuals have a duty to challenge misconceptions about black womanhood and to articulate the authentic experience of being a black woman in America. In this context, her discourse underscores the importance of scholarship, activism, and cultural production as tools for resistance and liberation.

Toni Morrison

The most outstanding and productive African American female authors who contributed to the rise in literary writings and who continuously symbolize the movement of literary revival of the 1970s are Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Maya Angelou. Their *oeuvre* exemplifies significant changes in American literature which began in the 1970s, highlighting a crucial step towards more inclusive and diverse narratives emphasizing the experiences of black womanhood. Through their artistic outputs, African American female writing in the US not only attained recognition, but it also introduced new dimensions of storytelling that contested established literary traditions. Consequently, their efforts enabled the acknowledgment of black women's perspectives and their experiences in academia.

Toni Morrison, a recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993, stands as one of the most eminent and acclaimed literary figures of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in the realm of African American literature. Her literary contribution deserves notable recognition for its incisive examination of the social and psychological realities encountered by black Americans, particularly highlighting the lived experiences of African American women. Morrison's narrative creativity frequently seeks to deconstruct and confront the silence enveloping black womanhood, amplifying the voices of those disadvantaged by systematic racism, misogyny, and both physical and psychological abuse in American culture. Morrison's work, in conjunction with notable authors like Zora Neale Hurston, Maya Angelou, Lorraine Hansberry, Alice Walker, and bell hooks, plays a vital role in expressing the intricacies of black identities and challenging narratives that diminish black women to stereotypes or peripheral roles in American history and literature (Walters 2007: 15). Her novels often center on black female characters—protagonists whose lives are profoundly affected by the overlapping oppressions of racism, misogyny, and violence. Nevertheless, they also exemplify resilience and agency in their efforts to construct identities in a frequently hostile environment. Morrison's narrative concept centrally focuses on the portrayal of their

continuous effort to affirm their identity and define their existence autonomously amid a society marked by widespread intolerance and discrimination.

Morrison's path as a writer was as intriguing as her accomplishments in literature. She embarked on her professional journey not only as a novelist but also as an educator—serving as a lecturer and editor—while simultaneously raising two sons as a single mother. In various interviews, Morrison expressed how her personal experiences of anguish, isolation, and perseverance as a single parent fueled her literary creativity. Her aspiration to authentically represent black communities in American literature drove her to create narratives that depict black lives with dignity and complexity, challenging the stereotypical representations that frequently prevailed in literary and popular media. Morrison articulated a clear intention to portray the daily experiences of black individuals, especially those residing in the Midwest, who frequently went unrecognized in the literary canon. During the interview conducted by Charlie Rose in 1998, Morrison clarified the motivation behind her writing of *The Bluest Eye* (1970), highlighting her aim to center on a black girl from Lorraine, Ohio—a character "who never appeared in American literature, except as a joke, which is a little black girl with no redeeming qualities whatsoever except she was lovely" (Web). Morrison aimed to shed light on the characters who were frequently sidelined or made invisible. In doing so, the novelist strived to empower them by restoring their presence in the American literary scene.

Morrison's body of work primarily investigates the intricate social, psychological, and historical traumas faced by black communities in the United States. Her novels predominantly take place in African American neighborhoods and frequently delve into themes of social exclusion, racial discrimination, and the enduring impacts of slavery and its aftermath. Her emphasis on the trauma experienced by black women provides essential understanding of the interplay between gender and race, underscoring the distinct and frequently overlapping oppressions they encounter. Morrison's depiction of this dual oppression highlights the strength of African American women who are forced to maneuver through a society that marginalizes them. Her writings traverse various historical periods, ranging from the 19th-century era of slavery and post-slavery years to the 1940s to the more contemporary times of the 20th and 21st centuries. Despite this diversity, a central theme persists: the portrayal of black female characters who endure suffering, marginalization, and demonstrate resilience in environments characterized by systemic violence and social exclusion. As regards Morrison's narrative artistry, it is marked by a multifaceted approach to storytelling, melodious language, and an extraordinary command of English. All of these characteristics transcend conventional

storytelling, transforming her work into a blend of poetic and political discourse. Morrison's skill in intertwining various voices and viewpoints in her narratives—frequently through a richly layered and poetic style—allows her to create engaging and complex representations of her characters' inner lives and social contexts. This remarkable stylistic skill, paired with her sharp exploration of themes such as trauma, memory, and identity, establishes Morrison as a significant figure in the American literary canon who, despite her death in 2019, still continues to play an important role in the realm of literature.

CHAPTER THREE

Violence, Rejection and Internalized Racism in *The Bluest Eye*

Violence through Postcolonial Lens

Violence, as a category examined within postcolonial studies, has been and remains a subject of profound exploration by scholars, researchers, and writers who have personally experienced the impacts of colonial and postcolonial realities. Their unique perspectives enable them to grasp the complexity of subjugation and control by the dominating Western culture more intimately than those who have not faced such experiences. One example illustrating this point is the figure of Frantz Fanon. Born and raised in Martinique and later educated in France, Fanon encountered the experience of marginalization due to his skin color and ethnicity. In his seminal work, *The Wretched of the Earth* (2004 [1961]), Fanon analyzes the concept of violence from the perspective of the colonized other who, being the subject of victimization and aggression, applies violence in order to fight the oppressor. The use of violence, according to Fanon, is a vital tool for the colonized to defeat their oppressors and attain liberation. As he believes, "violence is a cleansing force. It rids the colonized of their inferiority complex, of their passive and despairing attitude. It emboldens them, and restores their selfconfidence" (2004: 51). In other words, to stand against the oppressor, it is essential to use the same weapon as he does, namely violence. The concept of violence suggested by Fanon involves aggressive acts inflicted on the colonizer in order to terminate the colonial reality. Paraphrasing his way of thinking, violence is the way to liberation and the only solution to deconstruct colonial *status quo*. It is essential to acknowledge, however, that violence is a multifaceted concept that can present itself in numerous forms. It concerns not only the physical injury inflicted upon an individual but also impacts the mental well-being of the victim. Since postcolonial studies addresses the consequences of colonial dominance across the globe, the concept of violence is extensively examined and analyzed by scholars within the field.

In simple terms, violence can be understood as the application of force and aggression that negatively impacts an individual's well-being. Within the colonial framework, it functioned as an instrument for the colonizer to suppress and dominate the colonized. The whole process was carried out under the guise of promoting civilization and rationality, since through acts of violence and aggression, imperial power was established over a colony,

allowing the oppressor to maintain control. Violence, as a political tactic for exercising power, is often viewed as a multifaceted concept that can take on different forms. For instance, the link between knowledge and power is thoroughly analyzed by Michel Foulcault in his *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1978* (1980). According to Foucault, the creation of knowledge is deliberately designed to demonstrate power and control over the weak other. To paraphrase, power and knowledge are fundamentally intertwined, since to wield power effectively, it is crucial to create knowledge that reinforces the dominant narrative of those in authority. Foulcault's theories on power offer a framework for comprehending how both knowledge and power are related to each other. In his opinion, the construction of knowledge supports the dominant group and maintains power relations. Therefore, knowledge is not a mere reflection of reality. It is rather a subjective and biased concept which serves in favor of those in power.

As Foulcault contends, exerting power does not have to involve aggressive or violent acts. It can be achieved through a variety of social practices and discourses, including the already-mentioned production of knowledge. In this context, violence takes an epistemological form which is evident in the power-knowledge relations. Epistemology itself examines the creation and acquisition of knowledge that shapes social practices (Teo 2014: 597). It is grounded in a prevailing Western ideology that establishes the parameters of what is considered true and universal. From a postcolonial and feminist viewpoint, imperialist expansion significantly influenced the evolution and implementation of Western epistemology. The construction of the Occident and its values as more desirable, civilized, and human led to the marginalization and oppression of other discourses represented by the colonized, which were deemed unworthy of any interest.

The conviction on European superiority and centrality over the rest of the globe created a certain type of violence that had a negative impact on native cultures and their peoples. The violence took a form of its epistemic dimension and introduced a new body of knowledge supporting those in power. By replacing native systems of values, beliefs, and traditions with so-called more European and *per se* civilized ones, the process of eradication of local peoples and their foundational beliefs began. In other words, epistemic violence constituted an assault on the culture, ideas, and value system of the colonized. It was the unavoidable and compelling substitution of one collection of beliefs and systems with another. The introduction of Europe-based, imperial public institutions to newly-conquered lands exemplified this situation. The sectors encompassed various aspects of life, including education, law, religion, culture, and trade. In the view of an African postcolonial intellectual,

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, one of the most horrific parts of the colonial reality was the eradication of native cultures and languages and replacing them with imperial languages, i.e., English, Spanish, or French. Wa Thiong'o, the author of *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986), claims that culture and language are two inseparable forms of expression and are the products of each other:

> Communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication. Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. How people perceive themselves affects how they look at their culture, at their places politics and at the social production of wealth, at their entire relationship to nature and to other beings. Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world. (1986: 16).

By replacing local languages with the language of the colonizer, the colonized were deprived of their own identity and sense of communal belonging. According to Wa Thiong'o, colonial powers silenced and neglected African languages to dominate the minds of the oppressed, instilling in them the belief in their own inferiority and marginalization. The eradication of native languages led to a distorted image and self-perception among African people, causing them to view themselves through a white, European lens.

With regard to the etymology of the term, epistemic violence was coined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak to describe a variety of historical, cultural, philosophical, and literary activities that have established the colonial subject as "other." The term was incorporated in the scholar's influential essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), in which the thinker discusses the category of subalternity of the third-world women. In her work, Spivak argues that the subaltern woman was not only oppressed or dispossessed on a political or economic level. In both Western and Eastern discourses, she experienced violence in the form of erasure and lack of representation in a mainstream culture. Her existence was placed in a shadow, her voice muted as if she had never existed. Being doubly victimized by both colonial and patriarchal realities, she was moved to the periphery and for centuries regarded secondary in the male-dominated, white world. The patriarchal model, defined as a "sexual system of power in which the male possesses superior power and economic privilege," had a massive impact on all spheres of women's everyday life, including education, career, and family

(Eisenstein 1979: 17). Denied the right to express themselves freely, frequently victimized, humiliated and subjugated, women fell victim to gender inequalities, sexual abuse, and economic exploitation.

In African American literature, violence and oppression are recurring motives which permeate black narratives, serving as a tool to depict violence and its multiple forms. The exploration of the motif of violence involves the analysis of struggles and difficulties black communities in general have been experiencing for ages. With the aim to draw attention to the matter of racism, social injustices, and inequalities directed at African Americans, black authors illustrate various forms of oppression inflicted on their protagonists. By doing so, they use fiction as a demonstrative tool to emphasize numerous social problems, including racial violence, domestic violence, or violence aimed at oneself. However, racial violence to which African Americans fall victim does not limit itself to the oppression they face at the hands of white people. Such violence is also evident in the form of internalized racism and cultural erasure of an individual by the same ethnic group to which they belong. Not only is black subjectivity undermined by white American society, which views itself as the foundation of human reason and progress. The perception of black inferiority and existential worthlessness is so ingrained in the mentality and self-image of African Americans that it leads to not only a disdain for their own race but also to self-hatred and a lack of self-acceptance.

As previously stated, black writers have historically employed literature as a powerful and transformative method of conveying complex hardships and systemic challenges that define African American existence. Through their integration of fictional elements with real real-life events, they create narratives which function both as artistic expressions and essential archives of shared memory and history. This combination of creativity with historical facts enables a detailed examination of harsh experiences faced by black communities—both on a personal scale and within their wider social and political frameworks. In other words, literature goes beyond its traditional role as simply an artistic pursuit, as it serves as an active medium through which history is reconstructed and represented. This process of reenactment and reinterpretation leads to the creation of new narrative forms that contest prevailing historiographies and offer marginalized voices the opportunity to express their histories from their unique viewpoints. It may be concluded that by integrating events and experiences frequently overlooked or misrepresented in a mainstream discourse, African American authors act as guardians of cultural memory, undertaking the duty of restoring and protecting what has been systematically erased or silenced. The process of recovering and rearticulating fractured histories serves as a means of resistance and self-affirmation, allowing black writers

to reclaim control over their collective narrative and to confront the persistent marginalization of their histories within the wider socio-historical conversation. It is also important to emphasize the fact that by rearticulating these histories, literature serves as a mechanism for cultural preservation, a way to affirm identity, and an instrument for socio-political analysis. Additionally, African American authors frequently highlight the significance of memory in their writings as a means to preserve historical truths for future generations, nurturing a sense of continuity and resilience in the face of ongoing social challenges. As a result, narrating black history through fiction serves as a means of historical restitution—it restores the integrity of a past that was forcefully denied.

In reference to Toni Morrioson's literary *oeuvre*, it is clear that her narratives deeply explore the intricate challenges and diverse experiences encountered by black individuals throughout different historical periods, ranging from the transatlantic Middle Passage, through slavery and the Civil War, to more contemporary times in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Morrison's body of work consistently centers on the depiction and exploration of the black female experience, highlighting the various ways in which black women have faced exclusion, humiliation, and victimization within a racially and gendered oppressive social framework. Her narratives shed light on the widespread and subtle characteristics of structural violence and systemic marginalization, demonstrating how these injustices are perpetrated not just by institutions but also through personal interactions at various societal levels. Morrison's depiction of violence encompasses multiple dimensions and reveals itself through both physical and verbal acts of brutality, each carrying significant psychological and emotional consequences. Furthermore, one may observe that the novelist's intricate portrayal of violence and brutality has a larger narrative function: it acts as a critique of institutional frameworks that reinforce systemic racism, misogyny, and class exploitation. In her fiction, Morrison reveals how these manifestations of violence are integrated into the fabric of daily existence and are sustained by cultural conventions, stereotypes, and historical legacies.

The key protagonists in Toni Morrison's novels face violence which is fundamentally linked to institutionalized societal ideals asserting their supposed inferiority. The foundation of this violence can be attributed to a communal perception of worthlessness placed on black individuals, primarily arising from racist beliefs that glorify Caucasian features and degrade non-European origins and African heritage. Morrison's depiction highlights that these racist ideas are both systemic and absorbed by individuals, significantly impacting their self-perception and psychological well-being. This intellectual foundation is seen in racial violence, discrimination, and marginalization, which perpetuate the subservient status of black

characters in familial and societal contexts. Moreover, Morrison's discussion on violence uncovers a multifaceted and multidimensional understanding of oppression, with gender serving as a fundamental component that intensifies the severity and intricacy of victimization. Black women endure a distinct sort of double victimization which results from their race and gender, causing a heightened experience of trauma that is influenced by cultural and social factors. This dual marginalization places them at the intersection of racial and gender-based violence, rendering their subjugation more severe. As regards the victimization of African American children within Morrison's literary output, it is further exacerbated by their perceived innocence and young age. Prepubescent girls are particularly vulnerable to the dual forces of racism and misogyny, which intensify their emotional trauma and social exclusion. However, their marginalization is not solely a result of external violence and discrimination. It is also a consequence of the societal inclination to perceive children, particularly these of African origin, as inherently innocent. Their innocence renders them ideal targets for violence and exploitation, whether through overt acts of physical assault or emotional dehumanization and cultural erasure.

The Bluest Eye—Introductory Framework

Chapter Three of the following thesis provides an in-depth exploration of the motif of violence in Morrison's debut novel published in 1970, *The Bluest Eye*. The intricacy of the term is rooted in its multifaceted nature, which manifests in various forms. For the purpose of this thesis, violence is examined through the lens of domestic oppression, sexual abuse, and internalized violence.

With reference to the plot, *The Bluest Eye* tells a story of an eleven-year-old girl, Pecola Breedlove, whose life is deeply determined by the blackness of her skin. In the preceding chapter of this dissertation, it has been asserted that Morrison's primary motivation for depicting a narrative centered on a black, prepubescent girl stemmed from the scarcity of such characters in literature. For the novelist, *The Bluest Eye* was an effort to craft a new piece of literature centered on the protagonist who had been largely overlooked and distanced from conventional literary discourse. In the foreword to the novel, Morrison elaborates on the genesis of the narrative and a catalyst behind her choice to explore the experiences of "the one least likely to withstand such damaging forces because of youth, gender, and race," focusing on a black girl who nurtures within herself a profound sense of racial self-loathing and disdain (2007 [1970]: x). The novelist's intention is to focus on the effects of, as she calls it, "the

demonization of an entire race" and what influence it has on "the most delicate member of society: a child; the most vulnerable member: a female" (2007: xi). Therefore, the protagonist of the story is unique rather than representative, which makes *The Bluest Eye* be perceived as a pioneering piece of narrative, portraying the realities of a black girl living in the mid-twentieth-century US.

In the 1960s, when Morrison began writing *The Bluest Eye*, the "Black is Beautiful" slogan was increasingly resonating within African American communities throughout the United States. African Americans began to challenge racist beauty standards and embraced their distinct African heritage. Rather than conforming to white standards of beauty through hair straightening or skin bleaching, black women started to embrace pride in their culture, history, and heritage. By writing a story that centers on a black child who fails to see any value or beauty within herself, Morrison highlights the issue of internalized racism that fosters self-hatred and a lack of acceptance among black Americans regarding their own identity. On the example of Pecola Breedlove, the writer illustrates how "the vulnerability of youth with indifferent parents, dismissive adults, and a world, which, in its language, laws and images, re-inforces despair" and leads to destruction and collapse of a child (2007: x).

Mother-Daughter Relationship as an Example of Domestic Violence

Historically, the theme of the mother–daughter relationship was often overlooked within the dominant academic discourse, frequently sidelined or rendered invisible in disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and literary criticism. The recognition of this bond as a crucial area of both personal and social importance is largely attributed to the groundbreaking work of feminist theorists and cultural critics. Adrienne Rich stands out as a pioneer in this field, providing an in-depth and analytical examination of motherhood. Rich's seminal work, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1995), critically examines the prevailing narratives that have historically marginalized women's experiences of being a mother. According to the scholar, the dominant social discourse creates a duality in which the "man's world" is perceived as the "real world" (1995: 16). In this context, the experiences of women in motherhood are often overlooked and pushed to the margins, as the dominant narrative is shaped from a patriarchal perspective. Rich, however, views the bond between mother and daughter as a crucial and transformative relationship in a woman's life, claiming it is an emotional, psychological, and cultural core which is responsible for shaping her growth and sense of self. As she puts it, "the cathexis between mother and daughter—essential,

distorted, misused—is the great unwritten story. Probably there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flow of energy between two biologically alike bodies, one of which has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other, one of which has labored to give birth to the other" (1995: 225). In other words, Rich emphasizes the intrinsic and intuitive nature of the mother-daughter relationship, which is founded on shared biology, history, and emotional investment. The theorist also argues that the bond is concurrently a source of immense creativity and nurturing, as well as potential distortions, i.e., guilt, rivalry, or betrayal. This contradictory representation of feelings and emotions surrounding motherhood is deeply ingrained in the cultural and personal narratives surrounding the mother-daughter bond.

Despite its significance, nineteenth-century American authors—akin to their European counterparts, such as Jane Austen or the Brontës—depicted the maternal figure as absent and remote (Hirsch 1989: 10). In the twentieth century, however, the role of the mother, as portrayed by Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette and Virginia Woolf, became increasingly important. Her significance stemmed from the substantial role she played in fostering her daughter's confidence and self-awareness. According to Elizabeth Podnieks and Andrea O'Reilly, the authors of *Textual Mothers/Maternal Texts: Motherhood in Contemporary Women's Literatures* (2010), the emergence of motherhood studies in the 1970s led to a significant transformation in the mother's voice, making it more prominent and recognizable (2). This period experienced an increasing focus on the dynamics of the mother–daughter relationship, particularly within the realm of black female literature. Marianne Hirsch, in her 1989-discussion on motherhood, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism,* claims that the narratives of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker exemplify a significant shift, as they play a crucial role in recovering the bond between a mother and a daughter (16). Morrison and Walker, along with other female writers of color, acknowledge their maternal heritage by connecting themselves to the histories of their ancestors. Heather Ingman, in *Mothers and Daughters in the Twentieth Century: A Literary Anthology* (1999), shares the same perspective, asserting that in a society marked by widespread racism, discrimination, and social marginalization, women of color are necessitated to persistently strive to validate and uphold the inherent value and dignity of their existence. In this socio-historical context, the interconnected systems of racial, gender, and socio-economic oppression exacerbate the vulnerabilities of women from marginalized backgrounds, thereby heightening their psychological and cultural need to reclaim and affirm an identity grounded in a resilient matrilineal heritage (Ingman 1999: 28).

In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison portrays a complex dynamic between a mother and a daughter, as exemplified by Pecola and Pauline Breedlove. Their relationship is influenced by pervasive ideals of white culture and internalized racism experienced within black communities. Pecola and Pauline's adoration for whiteness, steeped in their love for the beauty standards it embodies, illustrates the detrimental impact of white hegemony on their bond. The women, influenced by the notion of racial inferiority of blackness, cultivate a misguided belief in their own worthlessness and surrender to societal beauty standards. For instance, Pauline finds solace from the difficulties of her reality by watching films starring white American actors. For Pauline, every trip to the cinema is a moment the woman eagerly anticipates:

> [t]he onliest time I be happy seem like was when I was in the picture show. Every time I got, I went. I'd go early, before the show started. They'd cut off the lights, and everything be black. Then the screen would light up, and I'd move right on in them pictures …. Them pictures gave me a lot of pleasure, but it made coming home hard, and looking at Cholly hard. I don't know. (*The Bluest Eye* henceforth abbreviated to *BE* 123)

For Pauline, the cinema serves as one of the rare environments where she can encounter a moment of true happiness and escape. In the dimly lit space of the cinema, she immerses herself in a thoughtful reflection, where the bright images displayed on the screen act as both visual delight and meaningful rescue. It is the movie theater where Pauline becomes engrossed in the captivating nature of cinematic narratives, frequently showcasing glamorous, empowered, and prominent figures of American actresses who embody ideals of beauty, success, and social recognition. The woman's intrigue with them reveals a longing not just to break free from her marginalized existence but also to achieve a similar degree of visibility and affirmation that their glamorous portrayals provide. As her fascination intensifies, Pauline starts to build a more intricate facade, one that obscures the lines between her true identity and fiction. By weaving together her reality with invented narratives, the woman constructs her own self and fosters an identity deeply connected to the charm and status of American film culture. For Pauline, whiteness serves as a marker of visibility, power, and recognition—qualities that the woman seeks to attain. Drawing on the insights of George Yancy in his influential work, *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race in America* (2017), Pauline's relationship with cinema can be

conceptualized as engaging with a realm of white cinematic hyperreality. Yancy explains how media representations serve as a cultural spectacle that creates a hyperreal environment, i.e., an illusory space where the boundaries between reality and fiction blur and become less distinct. For Pauline, her involvement with Hollywood imagery and narratives places her in a mediated space where the constructed illusions of whiteness and glamour risk overshadowing her understanding of genuine reality. As a result, this environment makes it progressively difficult for her to differentiate between the constructed portrayal of whiteness in media and the concrete social realities that shape her existence and sense of self (Yancy 2017: 181).

The juxtaposition of the cinema's darkness against the screen's brightness reinforces Richard Dyer's perspective on the marginalization of non-white individuals. In his view,

> [i]t is at least arguable that white society has found it hard to see non-white people as individuals; the very notion of the individual, of the freely developing, autonomous human person, is only applicable to those who are seen to be free and autonomous, who are not slaves or subject peoples. Movie lighting discriminates against nonwhite people because it is used in a cinema and a culture that finds it hard to recognize them as appropriate subjects for such lighting, that is, as individuals. (1997: 102)

As Richard Dyer observes in *White* (1997), the employment of light in cinema serves a concealed function: to exert control and authority over the vulnerable. The lighting often favors white bodies, thereby reinforcing the notion of white supremacy within the medium. The absence of non-white actors in American cinema underscores the prejudiced and discriminatory mindset prevalent within the film industry during the early twentieth century. As a result, this practice fostered the belief that individuals of color were deemed unworthy of visual representation on the cinematic screen. In contrast to the associations of order, beauty, and cleanliness attributed to white aesthetics, the representation of a black individual often invoked negative connotations. Consequently, the standards of behavior associated with whiteness were esteemed and mimicked by individuals of color, as they perceived whiteness as flawless and ideal. This was similarly true for Pauline, whose obsession with white beauty standards caused her to unthinkingly imitate American actresses, Jean Harlow in particular. According to Gary Schwartz, in "Toni Morrison at the Movies: Theorizing Race Through Imitation of Life" (1997), "Pauline, as the viewer and learner, has absorbed the visions of light and darkness and becomes the engine of their reproduction. […] Wittingly or otherwise, Pauline not only becomes the Imitation but, in turn, imitates it. She is an imitation of an

imitation" (123). Schwartz argues that Pauline's interaction with cinematic imagery places her in a dual role, as both a passive recipient and an active reproducer of racialized visual stereotypes. As he points out, Pauline, in her role as an observer and student, absorbs the dualistic representations of light and darkness—metaphors frequently used by Hollywood to denote racial hierarchies, moral values, and societal views of blackness. What is more, by stating that Pauline "has absorbed the visions of light and darkness and becomes the engine of their reproduction," Schwartz emphasizes the paradoxical relationship where consumption transforms into production, as Pauline's comprehension of racial identity is influenced through her interaction with cinematic representations.

Pauline's admiration for whiteness is further manifested in her idealization of the Fisher family. As a Mammy, she embodies unwavering dedication and aligns seamlessly with the archetype of black womanhood. The portrayal of the Mammy, as previously discussed in Chapter Two, served as a quintessential and cultural depiction of women of color in the United States. Her worth was determined by the position she occupied within a white American family, being perceived as a "passive nurturer, a mother figure who gave all without expectation of return, who not only acknowledged her inferiority to whites but who loved them" (hooks 2015: 85). However, the positive depiction of a nurturing, compassionate, and affectionate maternal figure was limited to her interactions with the white family she worked for. In relation to her children, the Mammy did not embody the characteristics of a nurturing and reliable caregiver.

With reference to Pauline Breedlove, the woman represents an archetype of the subservient figure of the Mammy, as her primary commitment lies in her professional endeavors and the nurturing of the young Fisher girl. Referred to as Polly, she embodies "an ideal servant, for such a role filled practically all her needs" (*BE* 100). Within the confines of the Fishers' residence, Pauline discovers a profound sense of contentment and stability. Her employment with a white American family leads her to overlook her own racial identity and adopt the prejudiced notions surrounding individuals of color. Amidst immaculate white porcelain and impeccably maintained floors and furnishings, the woman momentarily distances herself from both her African history and family, particularly Pecola. A situation that clearly demonstrates Pauline's animosity towards her daughter occurs in the Fishers' residence, where Pecola accidentally spills blueberries in the kitchen of her mother's employers and faces punishment from Pauline:

> Mrs. Breedlove yanked [Pecola] up by the arm, slapped her again, and in a voice thin with anger, abused Pecola directly and Frieda and me by implication. "Crazy fool . . . my floor, mess . . . look what you. . . work . . . get on out . . . now that . . . crazy . . . my floor, my floor . . . my floor." Her words were hotter and darker than the smoking berries, and we backed away in dread. (*BE* 109)

By designating Pecola as "a crazy fool" and inflicting physical punishment upon her, Pauline reinforces her loyalty to the Fishers and the domestic duties she feels obligated to fulfill. Pauline's aggressive attitude towards Pecola demonstrates the absence of nurturing instincts towards the girl, as Pauline focuses instead on the messy kitchen floor and the Fisher girl's dirty dress. Moreover, the aforementioned passage explicitly confirms Pauline's inclination towards white culture, as the white body is linked to love, worth, and care, while the black body endures insults and is subjected to physical and psychological victimization. Vanessa D. Dickerson states that "while the narrative represents Pecola's body as the real, embraceable body and the Fisher girl's as the specterised and distant body, Pecola's is socially assaulted, the Fisher's girl's held dear" (qtd in Yancy 2017: 183–184). This binary depiction stems from a prevalent perception of whiteness and its privileged status. Consequently, given the darkness of her skin, Pecola is neglected and disregarded by her mother. In contrast, the comforting and tender emotions that Pauline experiences are inherent to the white Fisher girl. Due to Pauline's intense preoccupation with whiteness and the aspirational ideals promoted by cinematic and cultural imagery, Pecola becomes susceptible to the detrimental effects of these internalized racial hierarchies. This obsession highlights Pauline's distorted views and mental struggles while negatively affecting her daughter's psychological and emotional health. According to Vanessa D. Dickerson, Pecola represents a wider trend in racialized societies, where the needs, desires, and welfare of black children are systematically marginalized or sacrificed to ensure the psychological comfort and gratification of whiteness. As Dickerson notes, the girl "is one example of the black child whose need for his or her mother is sacrificed to the white child's pleasure or comfort in a mammy" (Dickerson qtd in Yancy 2017: 183). Pecola's tragic path exemplifies the detrimental consequences of internalized racism and the societal devaluation of black identity. It also highlights how the needs and welfare of black children are marginalized in favor of whiteness.

The Story Behind Pauline Breedlove

As Marianne Hirsch argues in *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (1989), understanding the mother requires starting with her story (5). Thus, to discuss the bond between Pauline and Pecola, it is essential to illuminate Pauline's history and her difficult upbringing. In the early years of her life, Pauline experienced a notable absence of parental love and affection. Marginalized and relegated to solitude due to her physical deformity, the girl faced social rejection from her earliest years. Because of her disability and indifference exhibited by others, little Pauline cultivated a profound sense of isolation within herself:

> There were no funny jokes and anecdotes about funny things she had done; why no one ever remarked on her food preferences—no saving of the wing or neck for her—no cooking of the peas in a separate pot without rice because she did not like rice; why nobody teased her; why she never felt at Home anywhere, or that she belonged any place. (*BE* 110–111)

Pauline's youth was marked by isolation and rejection, which influenced her psychological landscape and molded her self-image. Having been forsaken regularly and deprived of maternal nurturing as a child, Pauline eventually fails to develop any maternal instincts for Pecola. Instead, "into her daughter she beat fear of growing up, fear of other people, fear of life" (*BE* 128). Given that Pecola serves as a reflection of Pauline's own perceived shortcomings, the woman creates a separation from her daughter. What is more, the disdain Pecola encounters from Pauline stems from the Breedloves' deeply ingrained belief in their own ugliness and lack of value: "You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction" (*BE* 38–39). The conviction of their unattractiveness profoundly affects Pecola, as she comprehends the concept of beauty through the lens of her parents. The Breedloves, constrained by their racial identity and economic hardships, find themselves incapable of providing the girl with affection typically associated with parental love. As Paul Douglas Mahaffey puts it in "The Adolescent Complexities of Race, Gender, and Class in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*" (2004), "when [Pecola] turns to her parents in order to establish a positive link between childhood and adulthood, she only finds an overwhelming source of racial self-hatred" (158). From the moment of Pecola's birth, Pauline's disposition

towards the girl has been marked by contempt and aversion. Consequently, the woman's uncritical admiration for whiteness compels her to formulate a personal conception of beauty. The belief in the superiority of white bodies over black ones affects Pauline's perception of both herself and Pecola in a negative way.

In contrast to blackness, whiteness is often viewed as a representation of flawlessness and purity, as it is "the product of a generative context of white hegemony" (Yancy 2017: 188). Black bodies, conversely, bring to mind negative associations and their portrayal as evil, immoral, and dirty fosters mutual aversion among people of color. As a result, the stereotypical depiction of blackness and the absence of self-awareness in black bodies reveal the harmful effects of white dominance on people of color. Such is the case with Pecola who, at her early age, understands the reason behind her rejection. The girl's yearning for blue eyes powerfully represents her deep longing for acceptance. Pecola, constantly aware of her otherness and overlooked by both her family and the community of Lorain, Ohio, finds her sole comfort in the captivating allure of blue eyes. As noted by George Yancy, blue eyes serve as a metonymy for white hegemony, reflecting the standards of white aesthetics (2017: 181). Pecola's blackness fails to align with the ideals of universal white beauty, leading her to perceive herself through the distorted perspectives of those who view whiteness as superior. Her strong desire to be visible and accepted makes Pecola resort to magical thinking, as the girl believes that with a single sip of milk from a Shirley Temple mug and every bite of Mary Jane candies, she will change into a beautiful, white child with blue eyes. Upon realizing that her naïve aspirations are unattainable, she develops in herself a deep sense of invisibility and rejection.

As discussed before, the relationship between Pauline and Pecola reflects the harmful effects of white hegemony on the mother-daughter bond. Eunsook Koo, in *The Politics of Race and Gender: Mothers and Daughters in the Novels of Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Joy Kogawa* (1993), asserts that the cruelty and hate manifested in Mrs. Breedlove's physical violence towards her daughter indicates the complete alienation between mother and daughter (115). This deep sense of isolation, compounded by the disdain, animosity, and disrespect she experiences from others, acts as a catalyst pushing Pecola further into psychological breakdown. Morrison poignantly depicts Pecola's psychological condition through a poetic, symbolic imagery:

> The damage done was total. She spent her days, her tendril, sap-green days, walking up and down, up and down, her head jerking to the beat of a drummer so distant only she could hear. Elbows bent, hands on shoulders, she flailed her arms like a Bird in an eternal, grotesquely futile effort to fly. Beating the air, a winged but grounded bird, intent on the blue void it could not Reach—could not even see – but which filled the valleys of the mind. (*BE* 204)

This analogy of a flightless bird highlights Pecola's longing for freedom—the fundamental urge to break free from her stifling environment, her painful recollections, and the overwhelming societal frameworks that undermine her sense of value. The depiction of the bird, anchored, yet yearning to ascend into the "blue void," represents a deep-seated ambition to rise above the limitations of her existence and achieve a sense of liberation and completeness. Nonetheless, this ambition remains out of reach, as Morrison highlights that Pecola's psyche is trapped in a relentless cycle of delusion, which serves as an obstacle to her dreams. The girl's mental state reflects the impacts of systemic racism, familial neglect, and cultural devaluation, demonstrating how these elements work together to leave her life tragically unfulfilled. Moreover, her emotional disconnection from the world around her isolates Pecola from a sense of belonging and captures her tragic fate in the harmful cycles of racial and psychological trauma.

White Gaze and Blackness

As Doreatha D. Mbalia asserts in *Toni Morrison's Developing Class Consciousness* (2004), "the thesis of [*The Bluest Eye*] is that racism devastates the self-image of the African female in general and the African female child in particular" (32-33). The character of Pecola proves this point, as the girl falls victim to prevailing standards of beauty that are predominantly influenced by the cult of whiteness. As a result, she endures social exclusion imposed on her by other community members and attributes the difficulties of her existence to the blackness of her skin. Pecola's self-image is founded on the dominant norms of white American popular culture, which asserts that "adults, older girls, shop[s], magazines, newspapers, window signs—all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured" (*BE* 20). During the early decades of the twentieth century in the US, girls and women of color encountered an omnipresent influx of images featuring white dolls and female celebrities. Their images dominated television screens, billboards along

American Main Streets, and cinema advertisements. In turn, colored girls and women measured their own beauty against white representations, which, from a general perspective, epitomized the ideal of attractiveness. In pursuit of approval, black girls and women subconsciously absorbed the white supremacist mindset, cultivating within themselves feelings of self-hatred.

Through her body of work, Toni Morrison illustrates that whiteness plays a pivotal role in perpetuating racial inequality within American society. Black individuals are often viewed through the critical lens of a dominant culture that conveys disdain for racial difference. In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison skillfully illustrates the mechanisms of the white gaze in relation to blackness. Pecola's visit to Mr. Yacobowski's corner shop is a perfect example of how the white gaze functions. In the shop, the girl purchases Mary Jane candy, as "to eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane, Love Mary Jane, Be Mary Jane" (*BE* 38). What Pecola experiences from the white immigrant is his hostility, as the man looks at the child through the lens of prejudiced representations of black identity. Following George Yancy's viewpoint, Yacobowski views Pecola in a distorted and racist manner, thereby "reinforcing the illusion that he lives his own white identity/his body as real and stable" (2017: 173). His attitude to the girl, though, seems to be contradictory. On the one hand, Yacobowski treats her as if "there is nothing to see" (Yancy 2017: 43). In this context, the man emphasizes Pecola's invisibility and worthlessness. On the other hand, however, the man acknowledges the girl, as he hesitates to grasp her hand to receive payment for the candy. As Yancy explains, Yacobowski's skepticism validates his racist disposition towards Pecola, whom the man "reduces to an epidermal Blackness, something to be avoided" (2017: 175). To him, the girl is merely an object unworthy of his attention or gaze. He strips Pecola of her humanity and exhibits a complete lack of human recognition towards her. Therefore, it can be claimed that the challenges and obstacles Pecola encounters parallel the experiences of Ralph Ellison's invisible man. Similar to the girl, Ellison's character grapples with a profound sense of non-existence, perceiving his identity through the perspectives of others. Barriers and prejudices, shaped by social constructs, dictate his absence of self-worth and influence his status as an outsider. Similarly to Pecola's sense of being rejected, the man feels invisible, as

> people refuse to see me […] When they approach me, they only see my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination indeed, everything and anything except me […] That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. (Ellison 1995 [1952]: 7)

Pecola's understanding of the origins of her pain, along with the hostility she encounters, is rooted in a complex interplay between internalized racial self-hatred and societal standards that prioritize whiteness. The girl acknowledges her identity, characterized by her dark skin and eyes, as the primary elements that lead to her marginalization and feelings of shame. This internal conflict is most clearly articulated in her fervent nightly prayers, where she sincerely seeks the blessing of blue eyes. Pecola's conviction that possessing blue eyes would drastically transform her self-image underscores her reliance on a form of magical thinking. She firmly believes that the blue eyes hold a unique power that can grant her visibility, validation, and, in the end, rescue her from her profound sense of worthlessness. In this context, Pecola serves as a prime example of a tragic figure, highlighting the harmful effects of internalized racial inferiority.

Incest and Paternal Violence

The maternal figure has long been acknowledged as paramount in fostering a child's emotional and cognitive growth, as well as ensuring their safety and overall well-being. Attachment theory, developed in the 1960s by British psychologist and psychiatrist, John Bowlby, posits that the formation of a bond between a child and their parents is essential, as this relationship significantly influences the child's development in both physical and mental domains. Bowbly, in his seminal work, *Attachment and Loss: Volume 1. Attachment* (1969), posits that children are inherently designed to forge intimate relationships and connections with their primary attachment figure, which is usually the mother. The principal attachment figure, however, may be any individual with whom a child establishes a connection. Bowlby articulates a definition of attachment behaviors characterized as "seeking and maintaining proximity to another individual" (1969: 194). These behaviors encompass various acts that signify the fundamental needs of an infant, such as crying, cooing, or smiling. As he elaborates, should the primary attachment figure be unavailable, the secondary attachment figure, typically familiar to the primary attachment figure, assumes their role.

In *The Bluest Eye*, with regard to the character of Cholly Breedlove, the second attachment figure is his aunt. The woman takes care of the boy when his birth mother leaves him by the railroad when the infant is just four days old. The experience of being abandoned by his mother, coupled with being raised by Aunt Jimmy until Cholly reaches the age of

sixteen, along with growing up without a father figure, undoubtedly influences the young boy's perception of the world. Having endured a lack of affection from his parents, Cholly struggles to convey any positive feelings towards either his wife or his children. Thus, to comprehend the anguish and violence that Cholly imposes on his family, it is essential to briefly outline the story of his life, with particular emphasis on the early years and adolescence. From the very beginning, Cholly's life is filled with traumatic events that result in his destructive and abusing bahaviors towards others. As Linda O'Neill argues, "complex trauma focuses on early life experiences, which may include physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, serious attachment disruption, deculturization, repeated invasive medical procedures, and other adverse childhood events occurring in the first decade of life" (2018: 175). As regards Cholly Breedlove, in the course of his early life, the boy experiences profound emotions of rejection, abandonment, and isolation. Referring to John Bowbly's theory, the primary attachment figures are absent from the boy's life, since he is nurtured only by his aunt. Although the woman does her best to provide for the boy, she fails to establish a strong bond with Cholly. On the contrary, the boy feels revulsion towards his elderly caretaker, which is clearly reflected in his reactions to her physicality:

> Sometimes when he watched Aunt Jimmy eating collards with her fingers, sucking her four gold teeth, or smelled her when she wore the asafetida bag around her neck, or when she made him sleep with her for warmth in winter and he could see her old, wrinkled breasts sagging in her nightgown—then he wondered whether it would have been just as well to have died there. Down in the rim of a tire under a soft black Georgia sky. (*BE* 132-133)

Their relationship lacks the profound, authentic emotion which is characteristic of a parent-child bond. Instead, it is filled with disgust and repulsion Cholly experiences at the thought of physical closeness and tenderness with the woman. Nevertheless, as he makes new acquaintances and encounters new people on his path, he comes across Blue Jack—the drayman who is the first and only male figure with whom Cholly establishes a positive bond. Blue Jack acts as a father figure to Cholly since it is him who tells the boy "old-timey stories about how it was when the Emancipation Proclamation came" (*BE* 133). These simple acts from the past remain with Cholly for a long time, as he recalls the moments spent with Blue Jack and appreciates the nostalgia they evoke. Unfortunately, as Cholly's aunt passes away, the boy is left to himself. On the day of her funeral, he experiences his first sexual intercourse

with a girl, Darlene. The intimacy of the young lovers, though, is disturbed by the gaze of two white men who humiliate the young couple by watching them. Cholly, instead of directing his fury and hatred towards the white witnesses of their intercourse, he pours out all the loathing on the girl:

> he cultivated his hatred of Darlene. Never did he once consider directing his hatred toward the hunters. Such an emotion would have destroyed him. They were big, white, armed men. He was small, black, helpless. […] hating them would have consumed him, burned him up like a piece of soft coal, leaving only flakes of ash and a question mark of smoke […] For now, he hated the one who had created the situation, the one who bore witness to his failure, his impotence. The one whom he had not been able to protect, to spare, to cover from the round moon glow of the flashlight. (*BE* 150-151)

The experience of being watched within an intimate context serves as a pivotal moment for Cholly. It is when the man begins to channel his rage and resentment towards others through sex. In this context, his sexual compulsions are interconnected with and serve as a conduit for his deep-seated rage, resentment, and emotional pain, which he directs toward himself and others. Within this framework, Darlene emerges both as a victim of the white and the black gaze, as Cholly's hatred and brutality towards her illustrate the repetitive and structural aspects of racial and gender-based oppression.

Cholly Breedlove is unable to recover from the trauma of the white gaze and, as Judith Herman states in her influential piece of writing, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terrorism* (2015 [1992]), the experience of it destroys "the victim's fundamental assumptions about the safety of the world, the positive value of self, and the meaningful order of creation" (52). As Herman continues, to recuperate from traumatic experiences, it is crucial to restore the sensation of being nurtured and protected. The gradual transition from danger to safety is what Herman views as an essential element in the journey towards complete recovery. As she asserts, "it should be possible to recognize a gradual shift from unpredictable danger to reliable safety, from dissociated isolation to restored social connection" (155). All the steps taken to achieve freedom from the traumatic past are to release the victim from the burden of drama. Otherwise, the victim will not be able to come to terms with their past and move forward. Such is the case with Cholly Breedlove who becomes a victim of the humiliation and neglect inflicted by his biological

father. The boy's meeting with the man is a deeply distressing event for Cholly, as he defecates "on a street full of grown men and women," liquid stools running down his legs (*BE* 157). Cholly's traumas of being "set adrift by the death of his guardian, taunted and humiliated by white men during his first sexual encounter" and rejected by his parents influence the man's future to a great extend (Bakerman 1981: 544). As a result, the man is unable to form healthy relationships in his adult life, being a consequence of his pathological childhood and turbulent adolescence.

The moment of meeting Pauline Williams, though, appears to be a turning point for Cholly. The man marries the girl and the couple moves up North in search of better job opportunities. On their arrival in Lorain, Ohio, Cholly and Pauline are "young, loving, and full of energy" (*BE* 116). Nevertheless, as the man does not recover from the trauma of his painful past, he cannot regain any sense of security or communal belonging. Over time, the Breedloves get more and more distant from each other, as Cholly begins to get frustrated with Pauline's total dependence on him, caused by her disability. Consequently, they begin to have arguments with each other and the main source of their quarrels lies in Pauline's wastefulness, as the woman spends too much money on clothes and make-up. Cholly, on the other hand, abuses alcohol and acts violently towards his spouse. His aggressive behavior is also seen during Cholly's sexual intercourse with his wife, as the act of making love to Pauline is filled with force. The man becomes more and more distant from his wife and in Pauline's eyes he epitomizes "a model of sin and failure, she bore him like a crown of thorns" (*BE* 126-127). The distance between the couple and the aggressive nature of their intimacy may stem from Cholly's distorted perception of sex, which is linked to his first intimate experience with Darlene. Cholly's memories of losing his virginity in front of the white oppressors leads him to connect sex with trauma. As a result, his seemingly intimate act of lovemaking is rooted in violence, aggression, and the control exerted by the man over his partner. In this manner, he seeks to showcase his power over those the man perceives as weaker, i.e., women and children. Rather than demonstrating affection and commitment to his family, Cholly's distorted perception of love revolves around violence, since the man believes that demonstrating his superior position over Pauline is the sole way to express his affection for the woman.

As observed before, Cholly's acts of violence, control, and domination serve as a means to empower the man, since inflicting pain on others grants him a sense of unlimited freedom and satisfaction:

> Only a musician would sense, know, without even knowing that he knew, that Cholly was free. Dangerously free. Free to feel whatever he felt—fear, guilt, shame, love, grief, pity. Free to be tender or violent, to whistle or weep […] Free to take a woman's insults, for his body had already conquered hers. Free even to knock her in the head, for he had already cradled that head in his arms […] He was free to live his fantasies, and free even to die […] In those days, Cholly was truly free. (*BE* 159-160)

Cholly's freedom, however, is misleading, as he is, in many ways, a captive of his own life. His act of hurting others only serves to highlight the man's inability to confront and manage his traumatic past. As Sigmund Freud puts it in "Mourning and Melancholia" (1947), when hatred appears and cannot be directed at the oppressor, a victim directs it at "this substitute object, abusing it, debasing it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic satisfaction from its suffering" (45). Recalling the scene of Cholly and Darlene's interrupted intercourse, it can be stated that although both of the lovers are victimized by the white gaze, it is Darlene who experiences double victimization. Her abuse and objectification arise from Cholly's failure to confront the oppressors, whom he fears and views as superior to himself. The men refer to Cholly as "nigger," thereby subjecting him to racial humiliation and asserting their privileged status over his perceived "dirty" blackness. By intimidating the couple with a firearm and blinding them with a flashlight, the men emasculate Cholly and seize his sexual desire as their own. As a result, both Cholly and Darlene find themselves as victims of sexual abuse, with Darlene being raped by Cholly in the presence of the white oppressors. He, in a metaphorical sense, experiences a form of sexual oppression as well, since the act of being observed in an intimate context can be likened to the traumatic experience of rape.

In line with Fanon's perspective on violence, the colonized often mirrors the actions of the colonizer, inflicting suffering on the vulnerable. Rather than resisting the oppressor, the colonized individual mirrors the violent actions of their perpetrator, directing their anger and desire for revenge towards others within the same marginalized community. Examining Cholly's behavior through a postcolonial perspective demonstrates that his internalization of oppressive structural dynamics equips him with many of the traits of his oppressors, ultimately transforming the man into one himself. The internalization process is closely associated with the absence of a stable, caring environment during his early years, which significantly influences his ability for emotional expression and relational intimacy. Cholly's challenges in experiencing and showing pleasant emotions stem from the lack of a supportive home environment. Leester Thomas, in "When Home Fails to Nurture the Self: Tragedy of

Being Homeless at Home" (1997), asserts that the notion of an authentic home is essential for fostering a sense of security, cultural affiliation, and emotional intimacy. According to the scholar, "to be outside … without a birthplace, without a cultural/racial identity; without family bonding; and finally without self-esteem" lead to dramatic consequences (3). Thomas contends that existing "outside"—lacking a birthplace, cultural or racial identity, familial connections, and ultimately self-esteem—yields profound emotional and psychological repercussions. The lack of a stable cultural identity and familial connection results in a fragmented self-concept and significant alienation. This emptiness hinders the individual's ability to cultivate essential skills for nurturing good relationships, especially those related to authority, affection, and self-assertion. In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison underscores this psychological emptiness by stating that a mere thought of fatherhood terrifies Cholly, as "having no idea how to raise children, and having never watched any parent raise himself, he could not even comprehend what such a relationship should be" (*BE* 160). Therefore, his lack of knowledge, along with his traumatic early experiences, leads the man to a failure to understand the moral and emotional obligations of fatherhood.

The act of sexual violence against Pecola is deeply traumatic and inhuman. Nevertheless, it may provoke a sense of ambiguity in the reader, as it seems to represent Cholly's only way of expressing love and affection for the girl. The intricacy of the man's emotions towards Pecola is most effectively illustrated in the following passage, where Cholly persistently contemplates how to gain his daughter's affection and reflects on his own worth:

> What could he do for her—ever? What give her? What say to her? What could a burned-out black man say to the hunched back of his eleven-year-old daughter? If he looked into her face, he would see those haunted, loving eyes. The hauntedness would irritate him—the love would move him to fury. How dare she love him? Hadn't she had any sense at all? What was he supposed to do about that? Return it? How? (*BE* 161)

Due to his inability to provide Pecola with any nurturing or constructive feelings of parental love, as twisted and dysfunctional as it may be, Cholly can only convey his affection for the girl through acts of violence:

> He wanted to fuck her—tenderly. But the tenderness would not hold […] She appeared to have fainted. Cholly stood up and could see only her grayish panties, so

> sad and limp around her ankles. Again the hatred mixed with tenderness. The hatred would not let him pick her up, the tenderness forced him to cover her. (*BE* 162-163)

The language Morrison employs to describe the rape reveals Cholly's complex emotions that the man experiences during the molestation of Pecola. The contradiction in his behavior lies in Cholly's effort to express his parental affection and care through acts of aggression and rage. The man's conflicting emotions may stem from his struggle to move on from a tumultuous past, with the sexual abuse inflicted on Pecola serving as a manifestation of his unresolved traumas projected onto her. Rather than confronting the past, he resorts to violence and aggression as a means of escaping his traumas. Judith Herman claims that in the process of healing, it is crucial to receive support, since "to hold a traumatic reality in consciousness requires a social context that affirms and protects the victim and that joins victim and witness in a common alliance. For the individual victim, this social context is created by relationships with friends, lovers, and family" (2015 [1992]: 9). Cholly's orphanhood, along with his homelessness and the sense of inferiority developed in his early years, lead him to horrific acts of violence. As a consequence of his inability to come into terms with the past, he projects his fears and worries on Pecola who becomes a victim of his past trauma as well.

The Breedloves as the Antithesis of a Perfect White American Family

The Breedlove family contrasts sharply with the idealized family depicted in the Dick and Jane primer, a part of which Toni Morrison incorporates into her narrative. The original text of the primer portrays an impeccable and picture-perfect, white, middle-class family which embodies the realization of the so-called American dream, characterized by a life of happiness and prosperity. The family, unlike the Breedloves, owns a beautiful house and enjoys every moment of their ideal life. On the contrary, the Breedloves represent a dysfunctional and abusive African American family who lives in a shabby and claustrophobic storefront house, equipped with old and damaged furniture. Nothing in their home resembles the beautiful house depicted in the primer. The Breedloves themselves stand in stark contrast to the characters featured in the story about Dick and Jane: Pauline is a neglectful mother who places her white employers and movie outings above her own family; Cholly, unlike a strong and caring father from the Dick and Jane primer, abuses alcohol and creates demonic environment for Pauline, Pecola, and Sammy. His rapes on his daughter, along with

aggression and pain the man inflicts on others, make him a pathological figure who is unable to express his feelings in a healthy way. According to Geneve Cobb Moore, in *Bodily Evidence. Racism, Slavery, and Maternal Power in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (2017), the only resemblance between Cholly and the father figure from the Dick and Jane story, lies in the cultural productions of both characters. As Moore claims,

> the model Father is projected as being gainfully employed, economically viable, politically significant, paternally responsible, and spatially unrestricted. A product of the Jim Crow South, unfathered and unloved, unemployed and unemployable in the Jim Crow North, Cholly is a demonic perversion of the perfect Father. He becomes paternally irresponsible because he is engulfed in a culture that denies his manhood. (2017:10)

Moore posits that the concept of the "model Father" is a social construct and cultural projection of an ideal figure characterized by stability, authority, and responsibility. The notion of fatherhood, as Moore argues, is embedded in prevailing cultural narratives that glorify a hegemonic masculinity which is based on economic output, civic authority, and spatial autonomy. In Cholly's case, the man is a distorted embodiment of the archetypal father and a sad outcome of systemic racial violence and cultural misrecognition. As Moore underscores, cultural expectations concerning fatherhood are intricately rooted in particular historical and racial contexts, frequently excluding or marginalizing African American men, especially those affected by the institutional oppressions of the Jim Crow era in both the South and North. From a patriarchal perspective, Cholly's only marker of power is the man's phallus which symbolizes his masculine violence and hatred towards female bodies (Moore 2017: 10). A similar point of view is expressed by Elizabeth Mermann-Jozwiak in her article "Re-membering the Body: Body Politics in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*" (2001). The scholar highlights "Cholly's disgust for the female body," while underscoring that his abusive and violent actions towards women do not stem from an inherent hatred for the opposite sex (2001: 195). The animosity he displays towards women arise from Cholly's painful history of being orphaned and enduring racial humiliation. The weight of his past drives the man towards self-destructive behaviors and makes him join "the animals; [Cholly] was, indeed, an old dog, a snake, a ratty nigger" (*BE* 18).

The Breedlove children, as well, stand in contradiction to the characters of Dick and Jane. Pecola and Sammy, in contrast to Dick and Jane, experience parental neglect and are

deprived of the love and care that ought to be integral to their development. What is more, Pauline and Cholly serve as a satirical representation of an idealized, white American family, with their roles distorted and diverging greatly from the expected norms established by Eurocentric standards. The abnormality and deviation of the Breedloves is also emphasized by Morrison's strategy of no-space in the primer. The author repeats the text of the primer three times: the first text is spaced and punctuated correctly, whereas the second one lacks punctuation. The third text, which allegedly depicts the Breedloves, is chaotic since it is neither spaced nor punctuated. This strategy, as Geneva Cobb Moore points out, is Morrison's attempt to deconstruct "the primer's mythological construct of space, hegemony, and race" (2017: 7). By doing so, Moore continues, Morrison highlights the use of binarism and the power of white hegemony in creating stereotypes. The white family from the primer occupies a desired and respected place in a society, while the Breedloves, with their poverty, unattractiveness and pathologies, are confined to the lowest space in the community, namely the bottom of the social hierarchy.

Morrison's use of the primer is also explained by Klotman in "Dick-and-Jane and the Shirley Temple Sensibility in *The Bluest Eye*" (1979). Klotman contends that Morrison intentionally integrates the primer to critically contrast the fabricated narrative of the white-centric educational system with the severe and frequently cruel realities encountered by numerous black youngsters in both contemporary and historical contexts (1979: 123). The scholar asserts that the primer serves as a symbolic instrument, illustrating how conventional educational resources consistently uphold an idealized portrayal of American life—focused on a white, middle-class family that contrasts with the realities faced by African American children who endure systemic discrimination, poverty, and social marginalization. These images and messages perpetuate racial hierarchies, quietly suggesting that whiteness is synonymous with beauty, prosperity, and moral virtue, whereas blackness is linked to insufficiency and inadequacy.

Spacial Boundries As the Indicator of Black Inferiority

The social and political atmosphere for African Americans in the 1940s was significantly shaped by the systematic execution of Jim Crow laws, which served as an institutionalized mechanism of racial segregation and discrimination. These laws, originating in the post-Reconstruction period, were intentionally designed to define and impose racial boundaries throughout nearly all facets of American life. The influence of Jim Crow went beyond legal

frameworks, as it fostered and perpetuated persistent beliefs portraying black Americans as intrinsically inferior, both biologically and culturally, to the prevailing white class. Within this framework, African Americans and other ethnic minorities were frequently relegated to subservient status in both social and economic domains. The restrictions established a divided society in which black Americans encountered pervasive discrimination and exclusion. The imposed limits were most prominently seen in the racial segregation of public spaces, including schools, churches, theaters, restaurants, and public transportation. However, the reach of Jim Crow regulations stretched beyond these explicitly segregated public facilities, as it infiltrated the core of residential spaces. The residential restrictions imposed by Jim Crow legislation led to the formation of racially homogeneous communities, popularly known as "colored" or "black" districts, which were frequently marked by inadequate living conditions due to systemic disinvestment and economic neglect. These segregated areas operated as ghettos, restricting African Americans' mobility and access to integrated and economically prosperous neighborhoods.

In *The Bluest Eye*, the Breedloves exemplify a marginalized and dysfunctional African American family residing in a dilapidated and infamous area of Lorain, Ohio, facing exclusion from spaces designated for the town's white residents. As a result of racist regulations introduced by the Jim Crow policy, spacious barriers among blacks and whites were formed, since African Americans were not allowed to enter all-white residential areas. As C. Vann Woodward reports in *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (1966), the everyday life of black people was dictated by a doctrine of "white supremacy and Negro inferiority" (18). Morrison's debut novel highlights this doctrine, emphasizing spacious boundaries between black and white residents of Loraine. The Breedlove family, as it has already been mentioned, occupies a shabby storefront house where "the only living thing" is the coal stove (*BE* 37). The only Breedlove who is allowed to enter an all-white Lorain residential area is Pauline. Working as a housemaid and a nanny for a white family, the woman visits Lake Shore neighborhood on a daily basis. The neighborhood is located by Lake Shore Park which is an unwelcoming and hostile space for African Americans:

> We [Pecola, Frieda, Claudia] reached Lake Shore Park, a city park laid out with rosebuds, fountains, bowling greens, picnic tables. It was empty now, but sweetly expectant of clean, white, well-behaved children and parents who would play there above the lake in summer […] Black people were not allowed in the park, and so it filled our dreams. (*BE* 105)

For Mrs. Breedlove (Pauline), the big white residence of the Fishers constitutes a shelter and a haven where the woman finds appreciation and forgets about the burden of her unhappy existence. The woman regards the house as an enclave of whiteness and does not allow anyone from her family to share her experience of cleanliness. Pauline identifies herself more closely with the Fishers than with the Breedloves, as she increasingly feels a sense of separation from her own family: "[m]ore and more she neglected her house, her children, her man—they were like the afterthoughts one has just before sleep, the early-morning and late-evening edges of her day, the dark edges that made the daily life with the Fishers lighter, more delicate, more lovely" (*BE* 127). The woman herself creates spacious and social barriers between blackness and whiteness and is easily influenced by the doctrine of "white supremacy and Negro inferiority" (Woodward 1966: 18). Her worship of white culture and her strong obsession with images of white actresses make Pauline a blind victim of white hegemony. She becomes a black parody of whiteness and a loveless parent who transmits self-loathing and a false conviction on black inferiority on Pecola.

The examination of the rape performed by Cholly highlights a disturbing parallel between a traumatic act of sexual violence against a child and the dynamics of power which are inherent in the master-slave relationship. In colonial reality, the weak colonized are voiceless and taken the right to speak. Likewise, in most part of Morrison's novel, Pecola's voice is silenced and unheard. Through the narrative, her passivity underscores the girl's marginalized and objectified status, highlighting her multiple layers of victimization. The experiences of objectification, in line with Spivak's theory of subalternity, stem from Pecola's race, gender, and her status of being a child. It is only at the end of the novel when Pecola's voice is finally heard. The girl, firmly believing that her greatest wish of possessing blue eyes has finally come true, engages in a fervent conversation with herself. Nonetheless, her doubt about the color of her eyes leads the girl into a state of hysteria, prompting her to question their shade: "nobody "around here" probably has bluest eyes. What about someplace else? … If there is somebody with bluer eyes than mine, then maybe there is somebody with the bluest eyes. The bluest eyes in the whole world" (*BE* 202-203).

According to Freud, in his 1896-publication, *The Aetiology of Hysteria*, hysterical symptoms arise from sexual trauma experienced during childhood. As he puts it, the trauma is rooted in "premature sexual occurrences […] which belong to the earliest years of childhood" and concerns an incestuous act of sexual violence or rape on a minor (1981 [1896]: 103). Pecola's sexual abuse at the age of eleven, along with rejection she receives from her mother

and the rest of the Lorain community, influence the girl's self-perception and mental state. The girl strongly believes that her drama originates from her alleged ugliness and the lack of blue eyes. She attributes her marginal status and social exclusion to her physical appearance, believing that "if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she would herself be different […] If she looked different, beautiful, maybe they'd say, 'Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes'" (*BE* 46). For the girl, violence and humiliation become a part of her everyday routine, as on a regular basis she is abused physically and verbally by others. As a result of her marginalization, Pecola perceives herself through the eyes of other people. Her self-loathing derives primarily from transgenerational trauma of the African American community as a whole. The trauma is transmitted from one generation to another and manifests itself through internalized racism among the blacks, their inferiority complex and their strong belief in African American worthlessness.

The concept of Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome is discussed by Dr. Joy DeGruy in *Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* (2005). DeGruy asserts that PTSS is a psychological condition arising from multigenerational trauma caused by centuries of slavery, persistent systematic oppression, racial discrimination, and institutionalized racism. The scholar claims that the syndrome endures beyond the abolition of slavery, ingraining itself inside the collective consciousness of African Americans who still struggle with its repercussions in modern society. In other words, PTSS is defined by a spectrum of symptoms and behaviors stemming from historical and persistent trauma, which are conveyed across generations via cultural, social, and psychological mechanisms. As a consequence, cycles of marginalization, mental health inequities, and social dislocation are sustained (2005: n.pag. Web). One notable symptom that DeGruy examines within this framework is what she refers to as vacant esteem. As she defines it, vacant esteem is "the state of believing oneself to have little or no worth," which is fundamentally intensified by the widespread societal and cultural reinforcement of racial inferiority. DeGruy emphasizes that vacant esteem is not just a shallow absence of confidence but a profound and entrenched feeling of worthlessness that stems from the ongoing and systemic declarations of inferiority directed at marginalized groups. She explains that this phenomenon arises from the interplay of three interconnected spheres of influence—society, community, and family—that together shape individual's self-perception (2005: n.pag. Web).

Prolonged experiences of systemic oppression, racial exclusion, and humiliation contribute to various detrimental behaviors within the African American community. They

may emerge in the form of domestic violence and internalized racism, thus, establishing a continuous cycle of persistent trauma. In *The Bluest Eye*, this is exemplified by the Breedloves who are convinced of their own ugliness and peripheral position. The traumas Pauline and Cholly endure in their youth significantly influence their identities as adults and shape them as parents. Pauline's experiences of social rejection and loneliness, coupled with Cholly's abandonment as a baby and the humiliation the man faces during his first sexual encounter, contribute to their distorted perception of reality. Their family life is deprived of any positive feelings, as the Breedloves fail to convey any affectionate emotions towards Pecola or Sammy. On the contrary, the children are neglected and burdened with the belief on their worthlessness and inferiority. While Cholly mistakes violence for love and care, Pauline shows more affection to her white employers. Instead of concentrating on her family life, Pauline indulges in a fictional world of movies and devotes her energy to fulfilling her job as a perfect nanny. Like her mother, Pecola desires to escape from her harsh reality of rejection and invisibility. Her escapism manifests in admiration for white culture and a wish of possessing the bluest eyes possible. In both cases, though, the women end up tragically, living "in that little brown house […] on the edge of town" (*BE* 205).

Internalized Racism As a Form of Violence

The conviction in white supremacy and its asserted dominance over other races constitutes a foundational postulate of a racist ideology. The concept of racially superior whiteness and a hostile perspective towards people of color greatly shaped the common perception of African Americans and other racial minorities as unclean and lesser beings. Blackness emerged as a symbol of shame and an indicator of poverty inside a white American society. The aversion and disgust towards blackness also infiltrated the self-image of African Americans who accepted racially constructed stereotypes on their demonization and worthlessness. The resulting effect was the rise of self-loathing within communities of color, with their self-image defined through the perspective of a prevailing white observer. Sander Gilman, in *Inscribing the Other* (1991), analyzes the process of self-hatred and a negative construction of one's own race or community as exemplified by the Jews. As he points out, the Jews measure their identity and worth by internalizing anti-Semitic images which are responsible for shaping one's own definition and representation of the self (1991: 173-174). As a result of the internalization, Gilman continues, an individual not only internalizes negative images of themselves but also projects them on others inside or outside the group (1991: 174). The

projection of socially-constructed stereotypes is rooted in a bipolar understanding of the world which makes divisions between the right and wrong, the good and bad, the superior and inferior. The dominant group creates pejorative images of minorities who later internalize these stereotypes and project them on others.

Mechanisms of stereotyping and projecting negative labels individually or collectively lead to the formation of racially-prejudiced beliefs on one's otherness and difference. The reaction to negative images and stereotypes aimed at a person or a group may take two forms, i.e., the form of internalization and projection of these stereotypes or the form of a complete denial and refusal. In the first case, one falls victim to a racist ideology and develops in themselves the sense of inferiority and worthlessness. What is more, by projecting negative images on other members of the same group, one becomes an oppressor who is responsible for the formation and perpetuation of internalized racism. Stuart Hall, in "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity" (1986), provides a definition of the term, explaining it as "the 'subjection' of the victims of racism to the mystifications of the very racist ideology which imprison and define them" (26). In other words, the subjugated other sees themselves through the gaze of a white dominant culture and inculcates in themselves pernicious racist stereotypes and images about their own group. As a result of such internalization, an individual develops a false picture of their own race, regarding it as inferior and less civilized when compared to the white, dominant culture. Therefore, the effects of internalized racism can be detrimental, as they mirror the impacts of colonialism on oppressed groups. This can lead to a process of mimicry, which is characteristic of the colonial experience. Through mimicry, a vicious circle of violence and the continuation of racist and harmful acts within a given minority are developed. Consequently, by following standards and norms that are dictated by a dominant culture, an individual internalizes a damaging belief on their worthlessness and projects it on other representatives of the same race. Paraphrazing Hall's definition of the term, internalized racism entraps its victims in a false belief on their inhumanity and animal-like nature, causing deep psychological wounds in the form of depression, a desire of one's disappearance or a strong conviction in the inferiority of a particular race.

A denial is a contrary reaction to internalization of prejudices and stereotypes and stands in opposition to a dominant and Eurocentric ideology which prioritizes whiteness over peoples of color. Strong opposition to stereotyping and awareness of one's own worth are the steps to prevent internalized racism and its damaging influence. One of the instances which highlighted an increasing tendency of African Americans towards self-acceptance was the

"Black is beautiful" movement popularized in the 1960s and the 1970s. The purpose of the action was to draw public attention to a serious issue of racism and discrimination against black Americans, women in particular. Such characteristics as skin tone or hair structure were one of the many arguments confirming the superiority of one race over another. Since Eurocentric standards of beauty indicated what was considered aesthetically attractive and desired, it was crucial for black American communities to change the *status quo* as regards beauty norms. The movement, as Maxine Leeds Craig reports, was not associated with any political organization or party since "no one stood behind the slogan in any formal way" (2002: 23). Nevertheless, it became an important phrase for African American communities, as its emergence contributed to the rise of awareness and racial consciousness among black Americans. Moreover, the "Black is beautiful" movement was a significant step in the celebration of African American identity and heritage, as for ages blackness had been disparaged and neglected. The slogan was supposed to create and appreciate new standards of attractiveness, namely facial and hair characteristics of African Americans. Maxine Leeds Craig, in *Ain't I a Beauty Queen? Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race* (2002), provides the context for the emergence of the movement and explains in detail the factors for its formation.

According to Leeds Craig, the first reason for the popularization of the slogan is a historically rooted belief in ugliness and worthlessness of typically African features, i.e., dark skin, full lips, wide nostrils or tightly curled hair (2002: 23). The second context for the emergence of the movement originated from "an African American culture of presentation-of-self that viewed good grooming as an avenue for the achievement of respect" (2002: 23). Young African Americans, unlike elder generations, wanted to emphasize their African ethnicity and show pride for their race-attributed features. The elderly, on the other hand, regarded unstraightened hair as a signifier of scruffiness and, therefore, could not comply with the new trends of the "Black is beautiful" movement. The third reason, as Maxine Leeds Craig notices, lies in sociological and psychological theories of black self-loathing (2002: 23). The advocates of the movement stood in opposition to a stereotypical belief on self-hatred within black communities and demonstrated their support for the slogan appreciating blackness and African roots. As regards the last explanation for the emergence of the movement, it lies in unfair privileges within African American communities which favored light skin tones and more Eurocentric characteristics. The lighter the skin of a black person, the more privilege they received.

Internalized racism, as it has already been discussed, encompasses all sorts of hostile behaviors of an individual towards the members of the same racial group. It involves prejudiced and racist beliefs on a minority one belongs to and, therefore, forms a distorted and pejorative vision of one's group and themselves. Victims of internalized racism tend to prioritize the dominant culture of whiteness over their own colored ethnicity and associate themselves more with the values promoted by the standards of the oppressor. Analogically to the colonized who were affected by internalization and projection of racist and pernicious beliefs on themselves, as well as on other colonized, a victim of internalized racism in a non-colonial reality accepts the *status quo* of the world in which whiteness is the embodiment of superiority, while blackness stands for inferiority and shame. In Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, the author illustrates the phenomenon of internalized racism and provides an array of characters who are influenced not only by the feeling of self-hatred but also express disgust towards their own race. Pauline Breedlove, among other characters of Morrison's narrative, exemplifies what self-loathing and blind obsession with white hegemony lead to. In her case, Pauline's preference for whiteness and cleanliness destroys the woman's vision of herself and has a disastrous impact on the mother-daughter bond between Pauline and Pecola. However, Pauline Breedlove is not the only character of the novel who is greatly influenced by destructive power of white hegemony. Geraldine is another female character of *The Bluest Eye* whose life approach and mindset are shaped by internalized racism.

Geraldine, with her lighter complexion and middle-class upbringing, represents the so-called girls coming from "Mobile. Aiken. From Newport News. From Marietta. From Meridian. And the sound of these places in their mouths make you think of love" (*BE* 81). Apart from their lighter skin tone, what distinguishes them from most African American women is their manners, good education and righteousness and purity as regards women-men relationships. Their aspiration for perfectionism is seen on a daily basis, with their hair impeccably done, the clothes thoroughly ironed. Their most significant desire appears to be a wish to distance themselves from any association with blackness or its "dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of the wide range of human emotions" (*BE* 83). Instead, they struggle to develop in themselves high morals, as they want to be recognized as respectable light-skinned women. Such is the case with Geraldine who embodies black women's obsession with whiteness and cleanliness. The woman also represents upper-class African Americans with their hatred for "funky" blackness. Geraldine, together with her husband and son, lives in a beautiful house and leads a virtuous life of a religious woman. Her purity and sexual abstinence are to highlight Geraldine's superiority over stereotypical

constructions of black womanhood, i.e., Jezebel stereotype, with her strong appetite for sex and lasciviousness. During the intercourse with her husband, Geraldine does not show any sexual interest in her spouse. On the contrary, the woman treats any kind of intimacy as a form of obligation:

> She hopes he will not sweat—the damp may get into her hair; and that she will remain dry between her legs—she hates the glucking sound they make when she is moist … When he withdraws, she pulls her nightgown down, slips out of the bed and into the bathroom with relief. (*BE* 84-85)

Geraldine's restrictive and cautious sexual attitude stems from her strong opposition to the prevailing, socially constructed stereotypes that portray African American women as promiscuous, lustful, and morally deficient. These oppressive stereotypes, rooted in cultural narratives and reinforced by media and institutional ideologies, undermine black womanhood by portraying it as hypersexualized and morally wrong. In reaction to this widespread and dehumanizing discourse, Geraldine intentionally suppresses any sexual desire or engagement in intimate acts to protect her dignity and evade the stigmatization associated with racialized sexual stereotypes.

Colorism

Geraldine's perception of black people is characterized with dehumanization of African Americans as a group. The woman makes interracial distinctions between different classes of black Americans and internalizes biased and prejudiced opinions on her own race. Her grouping is based on a degree of one's blackness, with strong preference for light tones and revulsion for darkness of one's skin. Geraldine, referring to herself as a colored person, shows contemptuous attitude to African Americans with very dark complexion. While she believes colored people are "neat and quiet," "niggers" belong to a different category of humans, being loud and dirty (*BE* 87). Living in a society where whiteness is valued as a marker of beauty and a signifier of high moral standards, the woman internalizes colorism as an attempt to be included in a desired category of the light-skinned. Colorism stands for biased and harm-generating attitude and treatment of members of the same racial group or ethnicity. The stereotypes and prejudices are formed on the basis of one's skin color and originate from the conviction in the inferiority of the non-whites. The notion was coined by Alice Walker in her

"Embracing the dark and the light" (1982). Walker asserts that the theme of color, though often overlooked, remains a significant concern within the society, as the influence of color on thoughts, attitudes, and perceptions regarding beauty, intelligence, worth, and self-esteem still remains crucial (67). According to Marita Golden, in *Don't play in the sun: One woman's journey through the color complex* (2004), discrimination stemming from the darkness of one's complexion bears, to some extent, a resemblance to a form of genocide. As Golden points out, colorism imposes emotional toll and demoralization on both a person who internalizes it, as well as its victim (2004: 47). Within the same racial group, colorism leads to the development of hostility and lack of trust and acceptance towards the dark-skinned, as the tone of one's complexion is a factor which labels an individual either as attractive or ugly. What may follow is psychological and emotional damage done to the victim of colorism, as colorism in its nature causes trauma and disrupts a positive image of oneself.

The phenomenon of colorism has a strong impact on the character of Geraldine and the way she perceives herself and the surrounding reality. For Geraldine, a skin color is a significant factor in the process of social inclusion and exclusion. Her preference for whiteness is evident in her relationship with Louis Junior, Geraldine's son. The woman does not let the boy play with black children whom she refers to as "niggers." What is more, she is obsessed with keeping Louis Junior's skin "from becoming ashen" out of fear one could mistake him for a black person (*BE* 87). As she claims, "the line between colored and nigger was not always clear; subtle and telltale signs threatened to erode it, and the watch had to be constant" (*BE* 87). Therefore, Geraldine resorts to anything to prevent herself or her son from being identified as a black. To this end, the woman has Junior's hair cut "as close to his scalp as possible to avoid any suggestion of wool" (*BE* 87).

Geraldine's contempt and disregard for blackness is also illustrated in the scene in which Louis Junior falsely accuses Pecola of having killed Geraldine's lovely cat. Although it is the boy who cruelly hurts the cat, the blame is put on Pecola. When Geraldine gets back home, in Pecola she sees all pejorative attributes of blackness: "the dirty torn dress, the plaits sticking out on her head, hair matted where the plaits had come undone, the muddy shoes with the wad of gum peeping out from between the cheap soles, the soiled socks, one of which had been walked down into the heel of the shoe" (*BE* 91). For Geraldine, the girl embodies a typical black child, with "her hair uncombed, dresses falling apart, shoes untied and caked with dirt" (*TBE* 92). Having seen what happened to her pet and having believed Junior's words, Geraldine reacts violently to Pecola, as she throws her out of the house and calls the girl a "nasty little black bitch" (*BE* 92). What seems to be hypocritical in Geraldine's behavior

towards the child, as well as towards dark-skinned African Americans in general, is her alleged religiousness and devotion. Geraldine's house is full of religious references, with "a big red-and-gold Bible on the dining-room table […] a color picture of Jesus Christ hung on a wall with the prettiest paper flowers fastened on the frame" (*BE* 89). Although the woman perceives herself as morally superior to others, her actions contradict her Christian devotion, as she falls victim to colorism, with its discriminatory and racist views of the world.

Colorism, as a form of internalized oppression, evaluates one's worth on the basis of their complexion tone and, therefore, contradicts theological teachings which state all people are equal and created in the image of God. Geraldine's classifications and categorizations concerning skin color reveal the woman's insincerity and deceit, which are unrelated to the gospel and the teachings of God. On the contrary, her disgust and revulsion towards blackness of her own race confirm Geraldine's double nature, namely her false piety. The passage below best illustrates her limited and stereotypical thinking on blackness, at the same time confirming Geraldine's self-hatred and lack of acceptance towards her racial background:

> They [the blacks] were everywhere. They slept six in bed, all their pee mixing together in the night as they wet their beds each in his own candy-and-potato-chip dream. In the long, hot days, they idled away, picking plaster from the walls and digging into the earth with sticks. They sat in little rows on street curbs, crowded into pews at church, taking space from the nice, neat, colored children; they clowned on the playgrounds, broke things in dime stores, ran in front of you on the street, made ice slides on the sloped sidewalks in winter. (*BE* 92)

The interaction between Pecola and Geraldine underscores the intraracial and biased distinctions that individuals within the same racial group impose upon one another. Geraldine positions herself higher in a class hierarchy and looks at the child through racist gaze of stereotypes dictated by a dominant antiblack discourse. The woman projects on Pecola racist and harmful assumptions on the child's inferiority and, despite being a member of the same race, sees herself as belonging to a dominant group of those in power. According to J. Brooks Bouson, in *Quiet as It's Kept: Shame, Trauma, and Race in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (2000), "the middle-class Geraldine, who has internalized the cultural construction of white superiority/purity, views Pecola through the lens of antiblack racist stereotypes" and "projects the image of Otherness projected onto her by the dominant white culture onto an extension of herself," namely Pecola (38). The woman falls victim to the mechanism of racial

internalization and, instead of opposing and denying harmful projections on her own race, she stigmatized the blacks as dirty and subhuman.

Hope for the Future

In *The Bluest Eye*, the dynamics of colorism and internalized racism within the black community of Lorain, Ohio, are reflected in the response to Maureen Peal, "a new girl in school […] a high-yellow dream child with long brown hair braided into two lynch ropes that hung down her back" (*BE* 62). Because of the fairness of her skin, the girl raises interest of the entire school, teachers and students alike. Contrary to Pecola, who is mocked, humiliated, and laughed at by other schoolmates, Maureen is never bullied or disrespected by her peers. On the contrary,

> [s]he enchanted the entire school. When teachers called on her, they smiled encouragingly. Black boys didn't trip her in the halls; white boys didn't stone her, white girls didn't suck their teeth when she was assigned to be their work partners; black girls stepped aside when she wanted to use the sink in the girl's toilet, and their eyes genuflected under sliding lids. She never had to search for anybody to eat with in the cafeteria. (*BE* 62)

In the community of Lorain, where dominant standards of white beauty are internalized and one's attractiveness is evaluated on the basis of their skin, Maureen, similarly to a child starlet Shirley Temple, symbolizes desired features of appearance. The girl herself projects racial stereotypes on other children, believing in the cuteness of her fair complexion. During a discussion with Pecola, Frieda, and Claudia, Maureen addresses them as "black and ugly emos," proving her disrespectful and racist attitude towards the girls. The only protagonist in *The Bluest Eye* who appears not to be influenced by omnipresent admiration for whiteness and its norms is Claudia MacTeer. The girl, unlike other female characters of the novel, openly shows her contempt and irritation as regards people's fascination with Shirley Temple, Maureen Peal or white dolls. Claudia is the youngest character in the novel; yet, her stubborn attitude and consistency in expressing her opinion make the girl dexterous and mature for her age. Although she is just nine years old, she refuses to accept imposed role models dictated by white culture. Unlike Frieda or Pecola, Claudia does not show any fascination with white popular culture. Other people's admiration for "a big, blue-eyed Baby

Doll" seems to be completely incomprehensible for the girl (*BE* 20). When she receives one as a Christmas gift, Claudia shows her irritation and disappointment with a plastic object everyone else adores: "[a]dults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs—all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured […] this is beautiful, and if you are on this day 'worthy' you may have it" (*BE* 20-21).

The girl's reaction differs from what she is expected, since her only desire is to dismember the doll and destroy it. She wishes to "break off the tiny fingers, bend the flat feet, loosen the hair, twist the head around […] remove the cold and stupid eyeball" (*BE* 21). What surprises the girl is the outrage of her parents, once they see the broken doll. Their reaction, as well as their general fascination with white dolls, incites the girl's fury. Claudia decides to get rid of a plastic thing which allegedly brings joy, happiness, and pleasure. On the contrary, the thing she wishes to get for Christmas is intangible, as it is the experience of feeling something, "the security and warmth of Big Mama's kitchen, the smell of the lilacs, the sound of the music […] the taste of peach" (*BE* 22). Instead of possessing a material object, Claudia wants to feel loved and protected. She wants to feel emotions rather than possess a revolting object with "round moronic eyes, the pancake face, and orangeworms hair" (*BE* 21). By destroying the doll, Claudia resists to accept socially constructed vision of beauty. Despite her very young age, the girl is aware of her own worth and strength. The act of dismembering her Christmas gift symbolizes the girl's fight against white cultural oppression and shows Claudia's resistance against racist norms that favor the image of a white girl and condemn blackness. As Trinna S. Frever notices in "'Oh! You Beautiful Doll!': Icon, Image, and Culture in Works by Alvarez, Cisneros, and Morrison" (2009), Claudia's internal struggle illustrates a significant and continuous endeavor to reclaim and define a racial, cultural, and gendered identity that stands apart from the dominant and frequently simplistic portrayals conveyed through mass media and popular culture. Frever highlights that Claudia's challenge against stereotypes and media-influenced representations illustrates her defiance against cultural narratives that attempt to dictate her value, identity, and self-perception. Claudia's deliberate dismissal of externally imposed images serves as a powerful act of reclamation, aimed at preserving the integrity of her own subjectivity and affirming the inherent right of marginalized groups to define their identities beyond the limitations of stereotypical cultural frameworks (Frever 2009: 124).

Claudia's reluctance and stubbornness to fall for mainstream norms and standards is also evident in the girl's disdain for Shirley Temple. Although Frieda and Pecola are both

intimidated by the child actress, Claudia declines to adore her. To some extent, Claudia is jealous of the fascination and attention Shirley receives from the public. The reason for Claudia's dislike does not lie in Shirley's cuteness or beauty, though. What makes the girl hate the starlet is Shirley's dance with "Bojangles, who was *my* friend, *my* uncle, *my* daddy, and who ought to have been soft-shoeing it and chuckling with me. Instead he was enjoying, sharing, giving a lovely dance thing with one of those little girls whose socks never slid down under their heels" (*BE* 19). Bojangles was an African American icon and a tap dancer of the 1930s whose popularity resulted from starring in films with Shirley Temple. In the abovementioned passage, though, Bojangles is a symbolic figure and stands for any black man Claudia is closely related to. By emphasizing the fact that Bojangles is her friend, dad or uncle, Claudia makes it clear that Shirley is somehow a threat to her, as the starlet evokes love and positive emotions in everyone, regardless of their race. Taking all the arguments discussed above into consideration, Claudia proves to be the only female character of *The Bluest Eye* who is not affected by the phenomenon of internalized racism or colorism. Her reaction to both phenomena is characterized with refusal of and hostility towards omnipresent norms promoted by those in power, namely white Americans. The girl does not want to internalize distorted visions of her own race, nor does she fall victim to colorism, with its preference for light-skinned complexion. In contrast, the girl embraces her identity, appreciates her imperfections, nurtures her experiences, and rejects the notion of being perceived as inferior (*BE* 74). Despite her young age, she values her African American heritage and prefers not to align herself with white figures of American popular culture. Rather, she aims to forge her own perception of beauty and actively rejects the internalization of racial self-hatred and disdain. In this context, the girl serves as Pecola's opposite, as she recognizes her own value and beauty.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Violence of Slavery and Its Impact on Black Motherhood As Exemplified by Morrison's *Beloved*

Beloved—Introductory Framework

Published in 1987 as the first part of a trilogy, followed by *Jazz* (1992) and *Paradise* (1997), *Beloved* is Morrison's highly acclaimed novel for which the writer was honored with the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1988. The plot is inspired by an authentic story of a female slave, Margaret Garner, who turned to infanticide to save her own child from the horrors of slavery. The writer came across Garner's story while editing *The Black Book*—an anthology illustrating the history of African Americans in the United States. In the foreword to *Beloved*, Morrison provides more details on Garner, describing her as "a young mother who, having escaped slavery, was arrested for killing one of her children (and trying to kill the others) rather than let them be returned to the owner's plantation" (*Beloved* henceforth abbr. to *B* xi). As Morrison continues, Garner became a main figure in the fight against the Fugitive Slave laws which supported the return of escapees to their slaveholders. What the novelist found striking in the story of Margaret was the woman's sanity and single-mindedness, as "she had the intellect, the ferocity and the willingness to risk everything for what was to her the necessity of freedom" (*B* xi).

Despite its historical inspiration, Morrison's motivation in creating the novel was to dedicate it to the trauma of slavery and to illustrate its impact on the black community, both individually and collectively. By exploring traumatic consequences of slavery, Morrison exposes deep wounds the system of enslavement inflicts on the victims. Not only does slavery affect the physicality of its subjects, with their backs ripped, bodies bruised and wounded, but the most horrific consequence of life under enslavement has been a devastating act of being robbed of one's own humanity, dignity and the right to freedom. Such is the case with *Beloved*'s protagonist, Sethe, along with other characters of the narrative, as well as with "sixty million and more" to whom Morrison dedicates the novel. The number stands for the kidnapped Africans who experienced terrible conditions of the Middle Passage of 1617. Taken by force from their African homeland and delivered to America as workforce, they were victimized on many levels. Their victimization was not gender- or age-limited, as it

involved African men, women and children, contributing to the crisis of their identity, family, and social bonds between them. This chapter, however, focuses mainly on violence which the institution of slavery inflicted on black motherhood and childhood, depriving them of mutual presence and care. The degree to which slavery affected and challenged black mothers and their offspring can be described in multiple ways, including the horrors of separation, physical or mental abuse, as well as loss or death.

The case of Margaret Garner, alongside many other instances that have been overlooked or left unrecorded in history, stands as a significant reminder of the sacrifices, deep suffering, and trauma experienced by black mothers during the period of slavery. Garner's act of infanticide—motivated by a profound urge to shield her child from the harsh realities of enslavement—serves as a powerful testament to the severe emotional and physical burdens faced by black motherhood in the most oppressive circumstances. These instances of sacrifice illustrate the challenges faced by enslaved women, who were often forced to navigate harrowing choices at the crossroads of life and death. In the face of unimaginable hardships, a black mother endured daily suffering imposed on her by both black and white oppressors. Her resilience and motivation to protect and preserve her children often led to actions that were marked by tremendous brutality and cruelty, including the infliction of violence upon their own infants. These actions, especially infanticide, were morally condemned by societal and cultural standards which viewed violent motherhood as sinful and unthinkable. Nonetheless, this violence may as well be seen justifiable, since in times of slavery individuals were often compelled to do whatever was necessary to protect their family when faced with a danger of unspeakable terror. In this context, their violence may be considered a desperate attempt to reclaim their agency and profound acts of defiance against the complete obliteration of their humanity, dignity, and identity.

Since slaves in general, as a property of plantation owners or other slaveholders, were forbidden to own anything, the ability to form a family and fulfill parental roles appeared to be one of the few avenues for experiencing a semblance of normalcy amidst harsh and intolerable circumstances. As the basic need to provide care and protection to the loved ones was not satisfied, black mothers would resort to extreme measures to assert their rights to motherhood. The overall impact of slavery on black motherhood was characterized by their marginalization from the conventional portrayal of a nurturing and devoted mother. As Emily West asserts in "The Double-Edged Sword of Motherhood Under American Slavery" (2019), enslaved women were systematically deprived of their rights to private, intimate, and

domestic motherhood. Instead, they were regarded solely as reproductive vessels intended to sustain the enslaved labor force. Their maternal duties were diminished to fulfilling the role of involuntary agents supporting the economic goals of their masters (West 2019: n. pag. Web). In contrast to white mothers, they were stripped of their inherent parental instincts through separation from their children and compelled to endure tedious physical labor in the fields. What is more, they were frequently used as surrogate mothers for both white and black children whose enslaved mothers were dispatched to plantations shortly after giving birth.

Sethe Suggs, the central figure of the novel, is a tragic example of what slavery had done to an individual, affecting both physical and emotional aspects. Through her desperate actions and seemingly irrational decisions, one can witness the burden of slavery and its painful consequences on the woman. As mentioned before, the story of Sethe found its inspiration in real-life events of a runaway slave from Cincinnati, Margaret Garner. To save her child from the horrors and misery of slavery, Margaret resorted to infanticide and, consequently, was trialed for the crime, garnering significant public attention. During the process of collecting information and seeking sources for an anthology focused on black history and culture, *The Black Book* (1974), Morrison came across an article from 1856 regarding Garner. In a 1987-TV interview conducted by Charlayne Hunter-Gault, Morrison gives a detailed explanation on why the article influenced her so profoundly as to create a novel about a fugitive slave:

> That was an article which stayed with me for a long, long time and seemed to have in it an extraordinary idea that was worthy of a novel, which was this compulsion to nature, this ferocity the woman has to be responsible for her children. […] They [slave mothers] were denied humanity in a number of ways. Margaret Garner claimed something she had no right to claim, which was the property of her children. (Web)

Further in her interview, Morrison emphasizes that *Beloved* is not mainly an explicit critique of the institution of slavery itself, nor is its primary focus exclusively on the atrocities and violence inflicted by slavery as a social and political practice. Morrison highlights that the narrative is essentially an in-depth, personal, and psychological investigation into an individual's traumatic experience with that harsh history. By emphasizing the significance of the inner experiences, emotional challenges, and existential dilemmas faced by slaves,

Morrison's intention was to recognize the impacts of such horrors which extended beyond visible scars, deeply influencing memory, identity, and the potential for healing.

Although *Beloved* finds its inspiration in Garner's real-life events, Morrison intentionally incorporates various changes into the narrative, highlighting that the novel serves mainly as a fictional work, rather than a precise biographical representation. This distinction holds significant importance, as Morrison's main objective is to delve into and shed light on the shared traumatic history of African Americans, rather than to narrate individual stories in a documentary style. The novel centers on the psychological, emotional, and cultural challenges encountered by enslaved and post-slavery black communities, highlighting the lasting impacts of trauma, loss, and resilience. In the narrative structure, the main character, Sethe, is tormented by a history which is so burdensome and distressing that the woman persistently attempts to bury it. Nonetheless, it is powerfully brought to light with the appearance of Beloved who serves as both a symbolic representation of Sethe's deceased daughter and an embodiment of the shared trauma stemming from slavery. With her return, the unavoidable nature of the past is highlighted, demonstrating how trauma remains hidden within the present, necessitating recognition and incorporation. In the novel, Morrison employs a narrative technique that weaves together flashbacks and a non-linear, fragmented storyline. It can be argued that this method is employed intentionally to reflect the fragmented manner in which memory, trauma, and history are experienced and processed by those impacted by slavery. Moreover, one can conclude that the decision to abandon a linear narrative structure adds depth to the storytelling, rendering *Beloved* a text that is both challenging to interpret and a profoundly layered examination of the enduring nature of trauma.

Silenced and Suppressed—the Reality of Black Motherhood in *Beloved*

As previously discussed, *Beloved* serves as a literary testament to the unspeakable and frequently silenced traumas experienced by African Americans due to the harsh realities of slavery. Morrison's narrative, by delving into Sethe and a range of other characters, provides an intense and personal depiction of the psychological, emotional, and physical wounds inflicted by systemic violence and dehumanization. By focusing on the experiences of individuals who have directly faced the atrocities of enslavement, Morrison creates a story that opposes dominant historical accounts which frequently overlook or silence black voices.

Within this literary framework, the characters possess agency—in order to assert their own subjectivity, they move beyond being mere objects or symbols in a broader oppressive system. Pal contends that the novel intentionally portrays African American characters as "subjects rather than objects," highlighting their ability to articulate, contemplate, and reshape their histories and identities in their own voices (1994: 2441). This transition is essential as it validates their entitlement to be recognized and acknowledged as independent individuals who are able to express their lived experiences instead of having their narratives taken, misrepresented, or muted by prevailing historical narratives. By means of this narrative reclamation, *Beloved* creates a platform for black women to express their anguish and strength. It emphasizes the crucial necessity of amplifying the voices of underprivileged individuals whose experiences have frequently been overlooked or disregarded in conventional historical and cultural records. Therefore, it can be claimed that the act of storytelling in the novel serves as a form of resistance against the epistemic violence of silence and omission. It insists that the legacies of slavery, especially the trauma inflicted on women's bodies and psyches, must be recognized and incorporated into the collective understanding of American history.

Historically, the position of the black self was predominantly characterized by silence (Mikrut 2014: 67). The voices of black individuals were frequently disregarded and suppressed in order to demonstrate the supremacy of the whites. In *Beloved*, Morrison challenges this historical silencing, allowing her protagonists to articulate their experiences and reclaim the voices that were previously denied to them. Sethe's voice, for example, expresses the profound harm that slavery has inflicted upon her identity, as both a mother and a daughter. Paraphrasing Stephanie Demetrakopoulos from her article "Maternal Bonds As Devourers of Women's Individuation in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" (1992), slavery strips Sethe of the gift of being a mother and destroys maternal bonding between the woman and her children (52). In times of slavery in the US, both mothers and children were deprived of their natural right to love and be loved, to protect and be protected. Slavery objectified its victims and denied them the right to such basic needs as parenting. The main reason why women slaves were expected to bear children was to increase a number of workforce for plantation owners and slaveholders. The entire breeding process was frequently carried out forcefully, stemming from acts of violation. Enslaved black women faced sexual exploitation at the hands of their white masters who viewed them as mere property. Additionally, they were compelled to engage in sexual relations with other slaves or white men.

The worth of female slaves during the 18th and 19th centuries in the United States was fundamentally predicated upon their reproductive capacities, reflecting a dehumanizing commodification wherein a woman's worth was directly proportional to her ability to bear children. This harsh calculation diminished black women to reproductive entities, essential for the continuation and growth of the enslaved labor force. According to bell hooks, it was a common practice to describe enslaved women using reproductive vocabulary, including terms like "breeding slaves," "child-bearing women," "breeding period," or characterizations of women as "too old to breed" (2015 [1981]: 62) These expressions vividly highlight the degradation of black women, with their bodies portrayed as commodities to be exploited for financial profit. Furthermore, within the racial hierarchy established by slavery, mulattoes, i.e., individuals of mixed black and white lineage, were often regarded as more desirable and valuable by slaveholders due to their lighter complexion and assumed physical or temperamental advantages. hooks observes that mulattoes "often commanded a higher market price or were more readily sold," emphasizing the racial segregation within the enslaved population that was exploited to enhance economic gain (61-62). The preference for mulattoes was influenced not only by their economic worth but also by the prevailing intertwining notions of racial hierarchy and aesthetic appeal, which prioritized lighter skin, hence intensifying the decreasing value of darker-skinned enslaved men and women.

The systematic breeding of enslaved women for reproductive purposes was a harsh aspect of slavery, widely accepted within the social and economic frameworks of antebellum America. This acceptability was supported by the lack of substantial legal protections for slaves. Therefore, unrestrained exploitation of their bodies and reproductive capabilities was a common practice unregulated by any legislation. As a consequence of the absence of legal regulation, enslaved women were susceptible to reproductive pressure, as well as physical exploitation and psychological abuse, without access to justice or protection. This systemic exploitation served as a mechanism of institutionalized dehumanization, wherein the humanity of enslaved women was wholly disregarded by the legal and social structures that classified them as commodities whose reproductive capabilities were closely linked to economic profit. By depriving enslaved women of their bodily autonomy, the slavery system violated their essential human rights.

On the whole, the position of female slaves was much more complex than that of male slaves, as not only were the women forced to perform hard, physical work on the plantations or in the households of their masters, but they were given the same tasks as their male

counterparts. In this context, the line between masculinity and femininity became blurred, since enslaved women engaged in physically demanding labor, traditionally designated for men. The aim of this practice was to eliminate disparities based on biological sex, ultimately diminishing women's particular abilities and turning them to interchangeable labor units. Moreover, women of African descent experienced a multifaceted form of oppression that intersected across racial, gender, and economic dimensions. They were subjected to exploitation not only as laborers engaged in grueling physical tasks but also as reproductive and sexual objects, marked and regarded as commodities within the plantation economy. While the system of slavery dehumanized and humiliated all its victims, it appears that it was the women who experienced its effects in more profound ways. As Giulia Grillo Mikrut claims in '"You your best thing, Sethe. You are": African American Maternal Experience in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" (2014), female slaves were subject to oppression as a result of their gender which was deeply intertwined with their exploitation in both reproductive and sexual contexts (74). This systemic form of oppression affected their bodies, minds, and identities, removing their personal agency and subjectivity.

Although life in slavery was harsh for every woman, regardless of their age, the situation of very young female slaves was particularly terrifying. As bell hooks argues, teenage girls were sexually victimized and assaulted by both white and black men who treated them as pure sex objects and, from the perspective of slaveholders and plantation owners, potential breeders:

> The slave girl is reared in an atmosphere of licentiousness and fear. The lash and the foul talk of her masters and his sons are her teachers. When she is fourteen or fifteen, her owner or his sons, or the overseer, or perhaps all of them, begin to bribe her with presents. If these failed to accomplish their purpose, she is whipped or starved into submission to their will. (2015: 42)

The atmosphere of abuse was not incidental, as it was foundational in shaping the young girl's understanding of her relationship to power, authority, and her own body. The ages of fourteen and fifteen represented a pivotal moment, highlighting the susceptibility and risk faced by enslaved girls to sexual exploitation. Nonetheless, acts of active resistance were documented among the enslaved, as they endeavored to escape the system and attain their own autonomy. In the context of *Beloved*, Sethe's mother, whom the woman addresses as

ma'am, represents the embodiment of resistance. Captured from her African land and shipped to America, she was raped repeatedly by the crew. Sexually abused and impregnated, the woman resorted to infanticide by throwing her newborns overboard:

> She threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away. Without names, she threw them. You she gave the name of the black man. She put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around. Never, Never. Telling you. I'm telling you, small girl Sethe. (*B* 75)

Sethe is the only child ma'am decides to keep, as she is born out of love between the woman and her slave lover. The young girl learns about the struggles her mother faced from Nan, a caregiver who tends to little Sethe when her mother returns to work just two weeks after giving birth. The character of Sethe's mother, while not extensively detailed in the novel, serves as a poignant illustration of the severe impact of slavery on female slaves who were subjected to violent exploitation for sexual purposes. Raped and impregnated, Sethe's mother goes through unimaginable traumas, bearing within her the children of her oppressors. The ongoing cycle of violence inflicted upon her reaches a devastating climax, as she commits infanticide. By doing so, she challenges the constraints of slavery and asserts her autonomy in determining the course of her own existence. Her act of violence constitutes a significant rejection of the maternal role imposed upon her—a role that was not only biologically but also socially and culturally appropriated without her consent. Thus, it appears that her decision to kill her newborns signifies a final act of resistance against the devaluation and exploitation of her maternal capacity within a system that persistently attempts to undermine her autonomy over her body and her life.

Sethe Suggs and the Importance of Breastfeeding

The institution of slavery, as previously noted, stripped enslaved mothers of their fundamental right to nurture their children. The children, as well, faced considerable consequences, as they were deprived of the chance to receive care and support from their biological parent. In *Beloved*, for instance, little Sethe is abandoned by her mother who returns to hard physical work on the plantation soon after giving birth to her daughter. The outcome of this situation is

detrimental to Sethe, as she is unable to develop a healthy bond with her mother whom she barely knows: "I didn't see her but a few times in the fields and once when she was working indigo. […] She must of nursed me two or three weeks—that's the way others did. Then she went back to rice and I sucked from another woman whose job it was" (B 72). Within the framework of *Beloved*, it is also essential to address the issue of breastfeeding. For Sethe Suggs, the ability to breastfeed her children symbolizes the woman's devotion and unconditional love for them. Through the act of breastfeeding, she fulfills her maternal need to provide for her offspring and defines herself as a mother. As an infant, Sethe was not breastfed by her mother due to harsh work conditions under enslavement. Becoming a mother herself, the woman wishes to give her babies what she perceives as an expression of unconditional love and dedication—her milk. In a conversation with Paul D, the woman goes back to the times of her pregnancy under enslavement, saying:

> "I had milk," she said. "I was pregnant with Denver but had milk for my baby girl. I hadn't stopped nursing her when I sent her on ahead with Howard and Buglar." […] "All I knew was I had to get my milk to my baby girl. Nobody was going to nurse her like me. Nobody was going to get it to her fast enough, or take it away when she had enough and didn't know it. Nobody knew she couldn't pass her air if you held her up on your shoulder, only if she was lying on my knees. Nobody knew that but me and nobody had her milk but me." (*B* 19)

For Sethe, breastfeeding serves as a crucial act of both biological nourishment and symbolic empowerment. It also constitutes a key method through which she attempts to establish an emotional and maternal bond with her children in the face of the dehumanizing atrocities of slavery. In the context of systemic oppression, enslaved women experienced a profound loss of autonomy, humanity, and ownership over their bodies, as their reproductive capacities were exploited exclusively for economic benefit. Thus, breastfeeding stands out as an immensely important act, representing one of the rare opportunities for a black mother to exert a degree of control and reaffirm her identity as a maternal figure (Mikrut 2014: 80). In *Beloved*, the importance of breastfeeding is heightened in moments of violence and trauma. In the context of the brutal assault and abuse by Schoolteacher's nephews, Sethe's main struggle is not centered on the physical harm done to her. Instead, the woman is more concerned with the perceived loss of her maternal agency, namely her milk. The milk, from Sethe's perspective, transcends basic nourishment, as it embodies her maternal care, love, and her

entitlement to nurture her child. The assault results in scars that mimic the shape of a chokeberry tree, serving as a visible reminder of her pain. However, her emotional and psychological anguish centers around the loss of her milk, as the woman continuously repeats the same sentence, "And they took my milk" (*B* 20).

This symbolic analysis of maternal power illustrates that, amid the harsh realities of slavery, maternal care emerges as a space of both resistance and fragility. The ability to nurture and produce milk represents a significant act of rebellion, i.e., an expression of independence and affection in an environment that aims to dehumanize and exploit. On the other hand, the absence of this capability indicates a deliberate destruction of Sethe's moral agency and maternal integrity, as the woman is diminished to a mere victim of systemic violence which silences her voice as a mother. Consequently, the motif of milk in *Beloved* highlights a significant contradiction: while it represents a source of life and affection, within the context of slavery, it simultaneously serves as a place where the lines of power and vulnerability are distinctly marked and violently disrupted.

In the view of Mary Jane Suero Elliott, the author of "Postcolonial Experience in a Domestic Context: Commodified Subjectivity in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" (2000), the exploitation of Sethe by Schoolteacher not only exemplifies racial and sexual violence, as it also plays a crucial role in undermining her sense of personhood and moral agency. Elliott argues that this systemic abuse goes beyond mere individual acts of cruelty, operating as an institutional mechanism that deprives enslaved women like Sethe of their fundamental human rights and diminishes them to subhuman status. The phenomenon of dehumanization is so intense that it transforms her into a being characterized by more primal and savage traits than human (Elliott 2000: 185). In Sethe's recollection of the harrowing encounter with Schoolteacher's nephews, the woman uses animalistic language to articulate her mistreatment: they "handled me [Sethe] like I was the cow, no, the goat, back behind the stable because it was too nasty to stay in with the horses" (*B* 237). This comparison reduces her to the level of mere livestock and distorts her self-image, positioning her among the most marginalized and dehumanized creatures.

Dehumanization of Black Selves As Exemplified by Schoolteacher

On the whole, Schoolteacher's attitude and behavior towards the Sweet Home slaves confirm the man's racist nature and his perceived sense of superiority over colored people. The man

stands for white dominance and embodies a harsh system of enslavement that strips individuals of their humanity, reducing them to a status akin to that of animals. As Arlene R. Keizer claims in "*Beloved*: Ideologies in Conflict, Improvised Subjects" (1999), the character of Schoolteacher symbolizes social, political, and ideological system of white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy that characterized the period of slavery (107). Keizer also highlights that the role of Schoolteacher transcends simple acts of individual cruelty, as he represents the institutional and systemic forces that aim to dehumanize and dominate enslaved populations through a complex interplay of racial, gendered, and economic violence. Keizer further argues that the methods employed by Schoolteacher exhibit a merging of scientific investigation with violent experimentation. The scholar illustrates Schoolteacher's methodical approach, based on dismantling both the bodies and minds of the slaves, as the intention to assess, classify, and ultimately diminish their humanity (Keizer 1999: 107-108). This dehumanization—crafted to legitimize and sustain slavery—was to present slaves as experimental subjects rather than active agents.

A passage from the novel which illustrates Schoolteacher's cold-bloodedness and disgust towards the non-whites is depicted in the following statement: "Unlike a snake or a bear, a dead nigger could not be skinned for profit and was not worth his own dead weight in coin" (*B* 174-175). To paraphraze, from the man's perspective, a dead slave is worthless since his skin can no longer generate profit for the owner. Therefore, he is deemed lesser than an animal and, consequently, should be treated in a similar manner. On the whole, Schoolteacher's behaviors demonstrate the man's conviction that white people are inherently superior to the blacks whom he considers subhuman. The man actively profits from the oppressive system of slavery and views it from a scientific perspective. He objectifies the slaves and, rather than treating them as individuals with feelings and emotions, he sees them as things to be observed and controlled. With the use of a measuring string, he checks the characteristics of the blacks and later writes the results down in his notebook for a further scientific analysis. On one occasion, Sethe overhears a disturbing moment in which Schoolteacher asks his pupils to conduct a "research" on Sethe's physical and racial features. This moment highlights the establishment of racialized objectification and dehumanization and demonstrates how the oppressive framework of slavery aims to classify black bodies through misleading and simplistic scientific methods. Schoolteacher directs his students to categorize Sethe's traits into two distinct groups: "her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right. And don't forget to line them up" (*B* 228). His order to "line them

up" highlights the man's methodical effort to undermine her dignity, agency, and moral worth. By diminishing Sethe's entire existence to a collection of characteristics that are assessed and ranked based on racially driven, he aims to reinforce her black inferiority.

Schoolteacher's actions towards Sweet Home slaves go beyond simple observation or note-taking. His behavior mirrors institutional violence and ideological cruelty that form the foundation of the systemic dehumanization present in slavery. The use of physical violence and aggression highlights how the oppressive system of slavery depends on coercion, intimidation, and the assertion of absolute dominance to sustain control over those who are enslaved. Morrison emphasizes that Schoolteacher's philosophy is grounded in the notion that "definitions belonged to the definers—not the defined" (*B* 225). The statement perfectly captures the epistemic violence of slavery which is manifested physically through harsh punishments which represent ideological supremacy of whiteness. Sethe, in particular, falls prey to the merciless cruelty of Schoolteacher. During her pregnancy, she experiences lashes so intense that, over time, the scars on her back resemble a chokecherry tree, with its trunk, branches, and leaves etched into her skin. Morrison powerfully conveys that this brutality transcends physical punishment, as it represents a deep psychological violence intended to undermine her human dignity. The act of whipping a pregnant woman highlights Schoolteacher's ruthless character and sinister nature. It also encapsulates the cruelty of the entire slave system, which dehumanizes individuals and subjects their bodies to punishment and control. Unlike the former owner of the Sweet Home plantation, Mr. Garner, Schoolteacher is ruthless and never refers to his slaves as men. He represents a darker and more merciless framework of racial dominance and authority. Garner's language, although firmly situated within the context of slavery, recognizes the humanity of his slaves, depicting them as individuals within a familial structure, a viewpoint that Morrison indicates was crucial in upholding their dignity. On the other hand, the Schoolteacher's dehumanizing attitude represents a more insidious form of racial violence, characterized by the exercise of power through brutality and the complete absence of empathy. His refusal to acknowledge his slaves as men or fully human subjects highlights how the ideology of racial superiority, when exercised as absolute authority, may distort moral judgment and result in extreme cruelty.

From an economic perspective, the institution of slavery played a crucial role for both slave sellers and owners. However, as Rolf Lundén and Michael Srigley claim in *Ideas and Identities* (1992), the argument for keeping slavery alive was not only centered on making profit. According to the scholars, "the Negro […] was intellectually and morally inferior;

therefore, he needed the care and the guidance made available by the institution of slavery—in fact, without such a system of control, society would disintegrate" (165). Paraphrasing the quotation, the argument for maintaining the institution of slavery had moral and social justifications. In this logic, society would fall apart without a system of control since black people—perceived as morally and intellectually inferior—required the protection and guidance provided by the institution of slavery. Their objectification and victimization were justified by the slaves' inability to stand up for themselves or rebel the oppressors. According to Peter Kolchin in *American Slavery* (1995 [1993]), the slave system was supposed to represent order and a civilized way of life for slave owners (111). With the collapse of the system, the differences between "us" and "them" would get blurred, breaking the borders between the master and the slave. This shift would constitute a significant threat to white slave owners, whose entire enterprises relied on the institution of slavery and the labor of its victims.

Baby Suggs and Black Motherhood under Enslavement

Another key figure in the novel who illustrates the challenges of black motherhood during the era of enslavement and serves as a maternal leader within the enslaved community is Sethe's mother-in-law, Baby Suggs. The woman personifies the difficulties and ambiguities of parenting within the framework of slavery and its repercussions. Like many other enslaved mothers, she feels the deep anguish of seeing her family torn apart by enslavement. Because of the brutality of the system, she is separated from her sons and daughters, which causes a long-lasting emotional damage and leaves the woman deeply scarred. Unlike Sethe, though, Baby Suggs tries her best not to get attached to her offspring, as she is aware that the institution of slavery will take them away from her. She chooses to restrain herself from loving them, which the woman considers the only way not to feel pain and agony after their loss. Similar to Sethe's experience, the institution of slavery robs Baby Suggs of the opportunity to fulfill her role as a mother:

> Seven times she had done that: held a little foot; examined the fat fingertips with her own—fingers she never saw become the male or female hands a mother would recognize anywhere. She didn't know to this day what their permanent teeth looked like; or how they held their heads when they walked. Did Patty lose her lisp? What

> color did Famous' skin finally take? Was that a cleft in Johnny's chin or just a dimple that would disappear soon's his jawbone changed? Four girls, and the last time she saw them there was no hair under their arms. Does Ardelia still love the burned bottom of bread? All seven were gone or dead. What would be the point of looking too hard at that youngest one? But for some reason they let her keep him. He was with her—everywhere. (*B* 163-164)

Halle is Baby Suggs' last of eight children whom the woman is allowed to keep by her side. The bond between them is a strong representation of the human spirit's perseverance in the face of hardships of the system. In spite of the tragedies of slavery and the difficulties they encounter on their path, their love for one another continues and proves to be strong enough to endure the most horrendous moments of their lives. To get her mother's freedom, Halle sacrifices five years of his life to work for white slave owners, as he "rented himself out all over the county to buy her away from there (Sweet Home)" (*B* 27). As the only one of all the children to whom Baby Suggs could be a mother, Halle feels guilty and tormented for not being able to shield the woman from the cruelty of slavery. Therefore, feeling a great responsibility for Baby Suggs, the man makes sacrifices out of love and respect for her and decides to remain in slavery for the sake of Baby Suggs' freedom: "a twenty-year-old man so in love with his mother he gave up five years of Sabbaths just to see her sit down …" (*B* 13). This remark emphasizes the profound nature of his connection and the extent of his commitment. It also illustrates how those in bondage frequently participated in quiet acts of resistance and care which was rooted in familial bonds. By prioritizing his mother over himself, Halle affirms the importance of kinship and exemplifies the courage required to confront and refuse the systemic violence of slavery.

The maternal experiences of Sethe and Baby Suggs are significantly shaped by the harsh legacies of slavery, which systematically stigmatize and distort their identities through brutality, dispossession, and emotional anguish. Their lives represent not only individual grief but also the broader institutional violence aimed at eradicating black familial connections and undermining the significance of black motherhood as a whole. In other words, their pain is not unique but is entrenched in a historical continuum that aims to dismantle black families and diminish maternal love. In the novel, Morrison compares their destinies to a game of checkers, as all the people they love are being played like the pawns in the game:

> Anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn't run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized. So Baby's eight children had six fathers. What she called the nastiness of life was the shock she received upon learning that nobody stopped playing checkers just because the pieces included her children. (*B* 27-28)

Morrison's allegory highlights how the institutional violence of slavery fundamentally deprives black women of the ability to exercise maternal autonomy and emotional freedom. It illustrates a landscape where motherhood is perpetually threatened, fragmented, or exploited, eroding the moral and emotional stability that usually underpins familial connections. The institutional cruelty inflicts not only physical injury but also aims to destroy the essence of maternal love and care. Moreover, Morrison's comparison to the game of checkers demonstrates how systemic forces dismantle the moral structure of black families, transforming mother ties into a mere game where the pieces are manipulated without consideration for love, devotion, or emotional fortitude.

Halle Suggs and the Emasculation of Black Manhood

In contrast to Baby Suggs, Sethe experiences a greater degree of stability in her marital life, having been married for six years to Halle, the father of her four children. In this context, her marriage exemplifies an extraordinary degree of agency and stability, rarely permitted within the system of slavery. Their relationship, though, is not merely a private affair, as it is sanctioned by their employer, Mr. Garner, who grants the couple permission to wed. This authorization was uncommon within the context of American slavery, where official acknowledgment of marriage was frequently withheld or ignored, and relationships, when permitted, were often undermined or invalidated by legal and economic systems. To provide additional context for this exception, one can refer to Frederick Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), in which the former slave offers an in-depth reflection on the nature of marriage among the blacks under enslavement:

> The marriage institution cannot exist among slaves, and one sixth of the population of democratic America is denied it's privileges by the law of the land. What is to be thought of a nation boasting of its liberty, boasting of it's humanity, boasting of its

> Christianity, boasting of its love of justice and purity, and yet having within its own borders three millions of persons denied by law the right of marriage? (n.pag. Web)

What is more, Douglass elaborates on the fact that, despite systemic efforts to deny enslaved individuals the right to establish marital bonds, many of them formed unions which functioned as essential sources of moral support and emotional unity. Douglass's account also emphasizes that marriages between slaves—although often undermined or unrecognized legally—served as enduring acts of resistance and affirmations of human dignity, playing a crucial role in maintaining the moral and emotional cohesion of enslaved communities. The aforementioned quote also serves as a vital critique of the paradoxical nature of the alleged morality of white Americans. Although Christianity, at its theological essence, advocates for humanity, compassion, justice, and love, the reality under enslavement starkly contradicted these beliefs. In the passage, Douglass exposes the profound hypocrisy inherent in a white American society that openly advocates for moral goodness, while simultaneously accepting racial discrimination, systematic oppression, and dehumanization.

According to Reginald Watson in "The Power of the 'Milk' and Motherhood: Images of Deconstruction and Reconstruction in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Alice Walker's "The Third Life of Grange Copeland"' (2004), the institution of slavery systematically destroyed the legal and moral rights of black individuals to engage in marriages. Within the dehumanizing framework of slavery, the blacks were essentially diminished to reproductive assets. This emphasis on reproduction was based on the belief that enslaved individuals, especially women, were both incapable and unworthy of forming authentic bonds. Instead, their reproductive capacities were exploited as a method to preserve and increase the enslaved work force. As Watson claims, in the master/slave dialectic, black women were typically expected to play concubine, whore, or brood sow and black men were emasculated by the white master's whip (2004: 158). Despite the challenges they face, Sethe and Halle are granted the opportunity to marry. As observed before, the couple's situation is quite remarkable, as they seem to live a relatively normal life. All changes, however, when Sethe experiences physical abuse at the hands of Schoolteacher's nephews who exploit her vulnerability and take the milk that Sethe relies on to nourish her infant daughter. Halle happens to witness the attack, which consequently leaves him severely traumatized. His powerlessness and remorse regarding his inability to keep his wife and their children safe from the violence of the white men scar him emotionally and do not let him come to terms

with the atrocities aimed at his loved ones. The man is adversely affected by the harshness with which Schoolteacher's nephews treat Sethe. Not being able to protect his wife from the abuse makes the man feel impotent and emasculated. Halle leaves as a result of what he sees and

> [n]obody knows what happened. Except for the churn, that was the last anybody ever saw of Halle. What Paul D knew was that Halle disappeared, never told Sethe anything, and was next seen squatting in butter. Maybe when he got to the gate and asked to see Sethe, schoolteacher heard a tint of anxiety in his voice—the tint that would make him pick up his ever-ready shotgun. Maybe Halle made the mistake of saying "my wife" in some way that would put a light in schoolteacher's eye. Sethe says now that she heard shots, but did not look out the window of Mrs. Garner's bedroom. But Halle was not killed or wounded that day because Paul D saw him later, after she had run off with no one's help; after Sixo laughed and his brother disappeared. Saw him greased and flat-eyed as a fish. Maybe schoolteacher shot after him, shot at his feet, to remind him of the trespass. Maybe Halle got in the barn, hid there and got locked in with the rest of schoolteacher's stock. Maybe anything. He disappeared and everybody was on his own. (*B* 264-65)

The trauma experienced by Halle, as he witnesses the brutal abuse of his pregnant wife, is evident in his choice to leave Sethe and their children right before their intended escape from the Sweet Home plantation. In discussing the psychological consequences of this act, it can be contended that the unrestrained authority and supremacy of white men—represented by Schoolteacher and his nephews—serve as a mechanism of racial and gendered emasculation for Halle. The systemic and structural dominance of white oppressors, who exercise violence without consequence and undermine the authority and masculinity of black males, serves as a mechanism that systematically erodes Halle's own sense of manhood. He is rendered powerless in both a symbolic and literal sense. Despite his desire to protect and support his family, he is unable to intervene effectively or oppose the violence. His feeling of futility and powerlessness intensifies as he views himself as ineffective, disconnected from the familial role typically anticipated of him. The diminishing value of his masculinity undermines his self-assurance and sense of direction, highlighting the belief that his role as a provider has been undermined by the white patriarchy.

Following Daniel P. Black's point of view in *Dismantling Black Manhood: An Historical and Literary Analysis of The Legacy of Slavery* (1997), the whole fate and life of a slave was in the hands of their masters, as "he could now look to none but his master, the one to whom the system had committed his entire being: the man upon whose will depended his food, his shelter, his sexual connections, whatever more 'success' was possible within the system, his very security—in short, everything" (59). In other words, it was the white man who occupied a central position in the system of slavery and who defined the reality for the slaves. The black man, on the other hand, was denied autonomy, respect, and agency, since all the legal regulations, ideologies, and people he encountered on his path served to reinforce his sense of inferiority and worthlessness (63). Furthermore, the portrayal of slave masters as the epitome of masculinity stemmed from a widespread belief in the superiority of the white race, which accounted for the complete dependence of male slaves on their white owners. This further reinforced the notion that the black man was perceived not as a human being, but as something other, lacking independence, self-determination, and the inherent capacity for self-sufficiency.

By definition, the notion of manhood inherently encompasses independence, self-responsibility, and self-sufficiency. Under enslavement, though, colored men were deprived of the right to decide about themselves. Their autonomy was stripped away, resulting in a transfer of authority from the inner self to the external dominant white figure. In spite of possessing the physical attributes and physiological capabilities of a man, male slaves were not allowed to hold the role that represented strong and independent manhood. According to Reginal Watson, the black "maleness" was quickly dismantled and negatively altered, as the black slave was unable to defend his African American wife from the rape and other abuses that came with the condition of being enslaved (2004: 159). With regard to Halle Suggs, the case is analogous, as the man, out of fear for Schoolteacher and his nephews, chooses silence and passivity over action and decides to submit rather than stand up for Sethe. Since he refuses to rebel against his wife's oppressors, Halle behaves in a way that goes against the notion of manhood. He abandons Sethe and their children since he cannot cope with the painful recollection of his wife being violently abused. His insanity, which results from witnessing the violent act on Sethe, can be interpreted as a general representation of the black man's sense of powerlessness in defending his family against tyranny of slavery. Struggling to process the trauma inflicted upon his wife, he descends into madness and covers himself in butter and clabber. Watson's perspective reveals that Morrison's choice of butter and clabber

as a symbol of Halle's insanity is to illustrate how the institution of slavery undermined and destroyed the notion of manhood within the black race (2004: 159). A negative impact of slavery and racism on the mental health of its victims is also discussed by Alexander Thomas and Samuel Sillen in *Racism and Psychiatry* (1972). According to the theorists, "the black man was overwhelmed by the destructive influences of the racist society" (47) which rendered him incapable of functioning as a regular member. Due to the systemic effects of white racism, black men were emasculated and ripped of any sense of dignity.

The importance of milk in the novel deserves deeper investigation. Previous observations indicate that for Sethe, breastfeeding represents the maternal love, care, and protection that she provides to her children. Having encountered a deficiency of maternal care during her early years, Sethe acknowledges the significance of maternal affection. As an infant, Sethe was nursed by Nan alongside white babies, as "Ma'am [Sethe's mother] was in the rice. The little whitebabies got it [milk] first and I got what was left. Or none. There was no nursing milk to call my own. I know what it is to be without the milk that belongs to you; to have to fight and holler for it, and to have so little left" (*B* 236). As an adult, Sethe retains a clear recollection of the event. The woman, having faced the denial of her mother's milk, places great importance on her ability to breastfeed her own children: "[n]obody will ever get my milk no more except my own children. I never had to give it to nobody else—and the one time I did it was took from me—they held me down and took it. Milk that belonged to my baby" (*B* 236). Due to Sethe's memories and experiences from her infant years, she is determined not to deny her children the milk she believes rightfully belongs to them. By breastfeeding, as Michele Mock points out in "Spitting out the Seed: Ownership of Mother, Child, Breasts, Milk, and Voice in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" (1996), Sethe claims ownership of her children and vows to shield them from the agony of hunger (119).

In reflecting on the moment of Sethe's violation and appropriation of her milk by Schoolteacher's nephews, it is clear that for the woman, the infringement of her bodily autonomy through this physical assault represents a deeply traumatic experience. This act of violence transcends a mere physical assault, as it undermines her ability to perform her maternal duties. In this context, the essential biological and emotional bond that ought to exist between Sethe and her child is disrupted. In other words, the act of stealing her milk is not only a violation of her motherhood, as it is also an attack on her children's right to Sethe's milk. The loss of what is supposed to belong to Sethe's children affects her to much a greater extent than the sexual exploitation to which she falls victim. This argument is supported by

Michael Bonnet in "To Take the Sin out of Slicing Trees ...": The Law of the Tree in *Beloved*" (1997). Bonnet argues that the theft of the milk violates the mother-daughter relationship and symbolizes absurdity of the slave system, since "[t]he robbing of Sethe's milk, which is so often evoked in the narrative and referred to as what she owns and as her children's very life, is thus the materialization of the fundamental perversity of the institution which kills the slaves' selves by severing the bonds between mother and child" (49). In Bonnet's line of thinking, the institution of slavery undermines the inherent and nurturing bond that exists between mothers and their children. In essence, slavery deprives individuals of their identities and familial connections, reducing them to mere property and stripping away their humanity. In *Beloved*, the act of stealing milk emerges as a significant emblem of this systemic oppression, illustrating how slavery undermines the fundamental nature of motherhood and humanity.

Sethe's Act of Infanticide As a Form of Resistance to the Institution of Slavery

Sethe Suggs, unable to bear the thought of her children experiencing the horrors of slavery, makes the decision to flee the Sweet Home plantation. She leaves for Cincinnati, where her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs, resides and looks after Sethe and Halle's children. The escape is exceptionally challenging for the woman, as she is expecting a baby. Furthermore, her husband, Halle, abandons her after witnessing Sethe being abused by the white men. Left to herself, she has to cross the Ohio River to get to a slavery-free state. Luckily, on her way to freedom, the woman encounters people who give her a helping hand. With the assistance of a white girl, Amy, Sethe gives birth to Denver. Later on, the woman meets "three coloredpeople fishing—two boys and an older man" (*B* 106). One of them is Stamp Paid, a man who assisted Sethe's children in crossing the Ohio. Now, it is Sethe who finally makes her way to freedom and meets with her loved ones. Nevertheless, Sethe's happiness does not last long:

> Sethe had had twenty-eight days—the travel of one whole moon--of unslaved life. From the pure clear stream of spit that the little girl dribbled into her face to her oily blood was twenty-eight days. Days of healing, ease and real-talk. Days of company: knowing the names of forty, fifty other Negroes, their views, habits; where they had been and what done; of feeling their fun and sorrow along with her own, which made it better. One taught her the alphabet; another a stitch. All taught her how it felt to

> wake up at dawn and decide what to do with the day. That's how she got through the waiting for Halle. (*B* 111)

For Sethe, these twenty-eight days of freedom symbolize a period of reconnection with her children, Baby Suggs, and the black community. Having crossed the Ohio River with her newborn daughter, Denver, Sethe finally reunites with her family. At last, she gets a chance to see her "crawling-already? baby" and her sons, Buglar and Howard. After some time, her happiness comes to an end as "the four horsemen came—schoolteacher, one nephew, one slave catcher and a sheriff" (*B* 165). Unable to bear a thought of her children suffer from the brutal system of slavery, the woman resorts to seemingly incomprehensible act of violence, i.e., infanticide. She cuts a throat of her "crawling-already?" daughter, as a result of which the girl passes away. For Sethe, the act of infanticide appears to be the only option, as she wishes to shield her children from the same brutality and violence she endured from Schoolteacher and his nephews.

Sethe's daughter is the woman's only child whom she kills, as upon arrival of the white men at 124 Bluestone Road, there is no time for Sethe to take the lives of the rest of her offspring. Although the child is dead, Sethe still holds the daughter by her side, making "Denver took her mother's milk right along with the blood of her sister" (*B* 179). Being so occupied with the dead child, Sethe does not pay attention to what is happening to her other children. It is Baby Suggs who takes Howard and Buglar inside the house, washes them and binds their wounds. It is also Sethe's mother-in-law who carries little Denver and hands her over to Sethe who still desperately holds the dead daughter tight to her chest. Sethe's choice to carry out the act of infanticide serves as an intense manifestation of her effort to regain her role as a mother within a brutal system. In her heartbreaking decision to take the life of her "crawling already?" daughter infant daughter, Sethe aims to communicate a profound, albeit ultimately sorrowful, message: that her maternal instinct and moral authority are the last remnants of her humanity that she can maintain in the face of the pervasive violence and harsh exploitation of slavery. For her, the child represents her final tangible link to her own experience of motherhood. In a system built on the commodification and dispossession of black bodies, motherhood transforms into a battlefield where the maternal instinct frequently loses its significance due to the structural violence of slavery. Sethe's action is not simply an impulsive and shocking act; rather, it is a profound gesture driven by a desperate need to shield her child from the unavoidable terrors of enslavement. The act of taking her daughter's

life, driven by the conviction that she is protecting her from future anguish, stands as the most profound declaration of maternal authority in a context marked by pervasive helplessness. This represents the woman's act of moral defiance, which is a heartbreaking and intense struggle to restore her motherhood.

One of the methods slave women employed to maintain a semblance of autonomy and control over their bodies was gynecological resistance. As Caroline Elizabeth Neely asserts in *"Dat's one chile of mine you ain't never gonna sell": Gynecological Resistance within the Plantation Community* (2000), "any action a slave woman takes against her owner's control over her reproductive life or her function as a mother is known as gynecological or reproductive resistance" (5). Not only did it take a form of sexual abstinence, birth control or abortion, but gynecological resistance also involved the act of infanticide. The act of killing one's own child was a clear manifestation of a mother's rage and hatred towards her white master and the slave system as a whole. Enslaved mothers resorted to extreme measures to shield their children from the horrors of slavery, even considering the unthinkable act of ending their lives, believing it to be the sole path to liberation. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, in *Unspeakable Things Unspoken: Ghosts and Memories in the Narratives of African-American Women* (1993), presents infanticide not simply as an act of violence or aggression. On the contrary, the scholar considers it an expression of maternal care and love which reveals itself in the most extreme and tragic form. Fox-Genovese claims that, in the framework of systemic racial oppression, infanticide presents itself as a conscious and ethical decision made by enslaved mothers (1993: 17). Her discussion prompts a reconsideration of the act, as Fox-Genovese regards it as a powerful emblem of resistance, strength, and disapproval of the institution of slavery.

The case of Margaret Garner is not the sole example of a slave mother perpetrating the crime of infanticide. Deborah Gray White, in *Ar'n't I a Woman* (1999), documents another account of infanticide rooted in the brutal realities of slavery and systemic abuse. White recounts a case involving an enslaved mother in Alabama, whose tragic choice to conduct infanticide resulted from the persistent cycle of violence, abuse, and psychological suffering inflicted by a white mistress upon the black child. This act, although legally and socially condemned as criminal, is reinterpreted within White's analysis as a form of moral and maternal resistance. From White's perspective, it was an extreme response which was motivated by the mother's desperate effort to protect her child from the abuse inflicted by the white oppressor (1999: 88). A similar line of thinking is shared by Dorothy Roberts in *Killing*

the Black Body, Race Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty (1997). Roberts outlines a historically documented case of Jane, a Missouri slave, who, in 1831, faced conviction for the murder of her infant daughter, Angeline. For the theorist, the act illustrates how systemic violence, stemming from the dehumanization of black bodies, frequently drove enslaved mothers to view infanticide as a tragic but morally justifiable act of maternal resistance (1997: 48). Furthermore, Roberts emphasizes that the numerous occurrences of infanticide among enslaved women, frequently unreported or suppressed by societal stigma, illustrate the extent to which systemic violence sought to erase black motherhood from collective memory. The absence of thorough documentation and recognition of these actions highlights the racial and patriarchal systems that aimed to exploit black women while simultaneously undermining and silencing their expressions of moral agency.

Jennifer L. Morgan, the author of "*Partus sequitur ventrem*: Law, Race, and Reproduction in Colonial Slavery" (2018), argues that since black female bodies perpetuated "blackness" and its "enslavability," slave owners claimed the right to decide about and control their progeny. The status of children born into slavery was passed down from their mothers, meaning their fate was doomed to life under enslavement. There was a legal justification for that matter, as according to the 1662-act of hereditary slavery law introduced in the state of Virginia and known under the name *Partus Sequitir Ventrem*, a child of a slave mother became a slave for life. In other words, the act promoted the idea of heredity as a way to support a regime of racial slavery:

> [w]hereas some doubts have arisen whether children got by any Englishman upon a negro woman shall be slave or free, Be it therefore enacted and declared by this present grand assembly, that all children borne in this country shall be held bond or free only according to the condition of the mother—*Partus Sequitur Ventrem*. And that if any Christian shall commit fornication with a negro man or woman, hee or shee soe offending shall pay double the fines imposed by the former act.
> (Enactment of Hereditary Slavery Law Virginia 1662-ACT XII qtd in Morgan 2018: 1)

It was a nineteenth-century historian, William Hening, who introduced a Latin term of *Partus Sequitir Ventrem* to the act. The original text in English just stated that a child born to a slave mother would be regarded as enslaved, regardless of the father's status (free or enslaved). To paraphraze, under the *Partus Sequitir Ventrem* concept, the status of a child was

established by the mother's position, not the father's. The idea of hereditary enslavement played a crucial role as regards the system of slavery, since on the basis of one's mother's ancestry, one was considered either a free man or a slave. Additionally, the *Partus Sequitir Ventrem* law strengthened the property rights of slave owners who were entitled to treat the offspring of enslaved women as chattel property, therefore, claiming ownership over them. The introduction of the law contributed to the continuation of slavery, followed by the internal exploitation of the reproductive potential of enslaved women. Some of them, however, exhibited resistance that took the variety of forms by which female slaves sought to confront and oppose their captors.

According to Barbara Christian, in *Black feminist criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers* (1985), "mothers during slavery did not have their natural right to their children and did everything, including giving up their lives to save them" (238). Some of them, Christian continues, committed infanticide with the intention of saving their offspring from the terrors of slavery. The oppressions and atrocities black people had to endure under enslavement, regardless of their age or sex, were so drastic that some of them considered death as the only option. Harriet Jacobs, a former slave, anti-slavery activist and an author of *The Deeper Wrong: Or, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1862), having experienced life under enslavement, stated that "death is better than slavery" (96). The quote, among many others from Jacobs' highly-acclaimed slave narrative, gives testimony to the brutalities and horrors of the institution. As she describes earlier in the narrative, "the degradation, the wrongs, the vices, that grow out of slavery, are more than I can describe. They are greater than you would willingly believe" (1862: 45). Jacobs's statement conveys the immense scale of systemic brutality and moral corruption related to the institution of slavery, highlighting that the widespread violence inflicted upon enslaved individuals surpasses conventional understanding or expression. The ex-slave's reflection highlights the profound and often unimaginable depth of suffering experienced by the enslaved. Those who could not bear the horrors of slavery, took a risk of running away, hoping for the best.

For Sethe, motherhood plays a crucial role and constitutes the essence of her existence: "the best thing she was, was her children. Whites might dirty *her* all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing—the part of her that was clean" (*B* 296). Parenthood provides the woman with the sense of identity, as she views her children as the foundation of her dignity, integrity, and moral virtue. In other words, Sethe elevates her maternal role to the highest level of her self-perception, implying that her sense of identity is

essentially anchored in her ability to nurture and protect her children. Morrison's choice of language in the quotation highlights the strength and ethical importance of Sethe's motherhood. Using a metaphor of cleanliness, the novelist emphasizes that even in the world intent on undermining Sethe's moral integrity, her maternal connection remains sacred. Consequently, to protect her children from the atrocities of slavery, she undertakes the most profound act a parent can commit against their offspring. To some extent, though, Sethe's decision can be justified by the circumstances the woman finds herself in. As Carl D. Malmgren suggests in "Mixed Genres and the Logic of Slavery in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" (2002), it is the institution of slavery that leads Sethe to committing a terrible act of infanticide (70). Because of the system, Sethe, as well as her own mother and Baby Suggs, is deprived of a natural right to motherhood. To fulfill her responsibilities as a loving and protecting mother, she cannot take any other course of action than killing her daughter. Her act, however dramatic and unimaginable, can be interpreted as a sign of maternal love and strength.

Through a critical lens, Doreen Fowler's analysis of infanticide in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and William Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun* interrogates dominant readings that confine these acts to mere violence or moral failing. In "Reading for the "Other Side": *Beloved* and *Requiem for a Nun*" (1997), Fowler highlights the fact that in both literary works, infanticide is deeply intertwined with a significant expression of love and moral desperation. As the scholar articulates, "a mother or mother-surrogate kills an infant, not out of hate, but out of love" (140). In this context, the act of infanticide arises from a profound need to protect the child from danger, even at the cost of their life. In both novels, as Fowler observes, the individual responsible for infanticide is a black woman. This detail carries symbolic weight, illustrating the complex interplay of racial and gender dynamics involved. What is more, the act of murder is depicted not as a spontaneous or intrinsically malevolent action, but rather as a crisis that embodies the moral and emotional drama caused by systemic violence and dehumanization. Through their narrative structures and characterizations, both authors aim to explore the intricate moral landscape surrounding tragic acts, uncovering the internal conflicts that drive these women to such extremes.

Sethe's maternal love, as Paul D names it, is "too thick" (*B* 193). In the conversation with the man, Sethe tries to justify her act by admitting that "I couldn't let her nor any of em live under schoolteacher" (*B* 192). As she continues, it was her maternal responsibility "to keep them away from" what she considered threatening (194). Nonetheless, Paul D cannot

comprehend Sethe's decision, as he considers what the woman did morally wrong. One can conclude that his reaction illustrates a type of moral judgment influenced by race and is typical of a discourse that frequently uses animalistic comparisons and dehumanizing language to express the perceived moral inferiority of black individuals. Similar to how Schoolteacher reduces Sethe to the status of an animal, employing comparisons to emphasize her lack of humanity, Paul D reflects this dehumanization by condemning her behavior with comparable animalistic imagery: "You got two feet, Sethe, not four" (194). This assertion highlights a symbolic parallel, indicating that her act of infanticide reflects a state of being that renders her less than fully human. What is more, Paul D's condemnation reveals a broader ideological framework in which black morality is evaluated from a perspective fundamentally influenced by racial hierarchies that devalue blackness and justify systemic violence inflicted on colored people.

Although it is challenging to understand and rationalize Sethe's act of infanticide, some literary critics endeavor to further clarify the woman's decision. Among them are, as previously discussed, Carl D. Malmgren, Doreen Fowler, and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, for whom the act committed by Sethe constitutes a form of resistance to the slave system and the sole means for the woman to assert her right to her child. A similar perspective is shared by Jeanne Fuston-White, according to whom it is the slave system that bears full responsibility for Sethe's crime. As Fuston-White highlights in "From the Seen to the Told": The Construction of Subjectivity in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" (2002), "it was not madness, but the reality of slavery, that drove Sethe to kill her child, fully aware of the act and its brutality, as well as its compassion" (461). The same perspective is shared by Jennifer Fitzgerald, the author of "Selfhood and Community: Psychoanalysis and Discourse in *Beloved*" (1993). According to Fitzgerald, slavery, as a violent system, is primarily accountable for molding Sethe's development as a maternal figure. The theorist contends that the institution of slavery inherently and systematically objectified black women, stripping them of their agency, dignity, and the ability to establish authentic and autonomous relationships with their own mothers and children. This objectification, as Fitzgerald asserts, fundamentally impeded the formation of a strong sense of self among subjugated women, which the theorist considers a crucial element for the development of a healthy maternal identity and practice. As a consequence, Sethe is unable to "arrive at a separate subjectivity […] Not recognizing the separateness of her children, Sethe makes life-and-death decisions for them" (Fitzgerald 1993: 679). In the framework of systemic oppression, the ongoing erasure of black women's

personhood, manifested through violence, objectification, and dehumanization, stops the development of a unique moral and psychological identity, essential for what Fitzgerald describes as "good motherhood."

Sethe's decision to terminate her daughter's life can be seen as an attempt to alter the narrative of possession between the enslaver and the woman. By taking her child's life, she resists the oppressive narrative of ownership and domination inflicted on the woman by the institution of slavery. Her decision signifies a conscious break from established authority and redefines the boundaries of ownership. By resorting to infanticide, the woman asserts her moral obligation and agency to determine her children's fate rather than yielding to the systemic violence that aims to erase her moral autonomy and voice. To paraphrase, the woman realizes her own concept of motherhood and chooses death as a better alternative to life under enslavement. This way, she challenges the authority of Schoolteacher and his discourse of possession. Furthermore, in a broader context, the act of infanticide functions as a method for a marginalized black mother to express herself and break her silence (Harvey 2007: 12). Within the framework of slavery and its aftermath, black women faced systematic silencing, devaluation, and a denial of their moral and emotional voice by the oppressive systems that aimed to reduce their identities. In these circumstances, acts of infanticide go beyond their immediate tragic implications, evolving into expressions of moral defiance and means of conveying deep sorrow and a rejection of systemic dehumanization.

Moreover, the act of infanticide served as a means of therapeutic self-expression, allowing marginalized black mothers to challenge the silence enforced by systemic violence. What is more, it also functioned as a means to express their moral agency and to claim their authority over their bodies, their lives, and their children's futures. Morrison's novel embodies this intricate symbolism and prompts a reevaluation of actions deemed unacceptable by society. In the interview conducted by Gloria Naylor, Toni Morrison shares her perspective on Sethe's choice and explains it as a pure act of maternal love:

> A woman loved something other than herself so much. She had placed all of the value of her life in something outside herself. That the woman who killed her children loved her children so much; they were the best part of her and she would not see them sullied. She would not see them hurt. (Morrison qtd in Naylor 207)

Morrison's justification illustrates the intricate and deep nature of maternal love and emphasizes how Sethe's affection for her children shapes the core moral and emotional foundation of her identity. It also indicates that the character's self-worth and moral integrity are profoundly tied to her role as a mother. The woman elevates her children to symbols of moral goodness and entitlements that surpass her own physical and psychological pain. This explanation emphasizes that love, within the framework of systemic oppression, appears in ways that contest traditional moral binaries. It also demonstrates how systemic violence can alter and reshape the perception of what is considered morally wrong, since the victims of slavery resort to violence not because of their immorality but rather out of love and maternal devotion.

The consequences of Sethe's decision, though, bring the woman a great deal of suffering, as her past, in the form of the ghost of her dead daughter, keeps haunting her and makes her life unbearable. On the one hand, through the act of infanticide, she manages to protect her daughter from the atrocities of slavery. On the other hand, however, Sethe's life is intolerable since the woman is plagued by the guilt of killing her own child. The past prevents the woman from living her life to the fullest and keeps her suspended in the drama of yesterday. The various atrocities that Sethe experienced as a slave underscore the brutal realities of the system and illustrate how slavery compels its victims to take desperate measures to protect themselves and their loved ones from the violence imposed by the dominant society. The scars on Sethe's back, which resemble a chokecherry tree, are a physical manifestation of the pain inflicted on the woman by the white oppressor. Although the scars have healed and no longer inflict physical pain, they serve as a haunting reminder of Sethe's traumatic past during her time in enslavement. Eighteen years after the crime, the appearance of Beloved, a ghost of Sethe's killed daughter, triggers memories of the tragic events that took place in Sweet Plantation and in the shed at 124 Bluestone Road. From that day on, Sethe's history keeps haunting the woman in the guise of her deceased daughter who embodies the spirit of slavery.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Importance of Memory and the Manifestation of Trauma in African American Gothic Literature

Memory and Memory Studies

The academic investigation of memory has been a complex field of study, drawing interest from social theorists, psychologists, historians, and cultural scholars. However, their views regarding the nature, origin, and function of memory vary significantly, resulting in a nuanced, yet, intricate discussion that encompasses multiple frameworks of comprehension. While sociologists emphasize the social and cultural factors responsible for shaping collective memories, from a psychological viewpoint, memory is studied from an individual perspective. The scholarly interest in the field resulted in the emergence and development of memory studies which occurred during the twentieth century, as it was a prolific period for the publication of influential works in the discipline. The scholars who contributed to its growth include Maurice Halbwasch, the author of *On Collective Memory* (1950), or Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, known for *The Invention of Tradition* (1983). Among others investigating the discipline are Henri Bergson and his publication *Matter and Memory* (1896), Pierre Nora, the author of *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* (1996), or Jacques Le Goff with his *History and Memory* (1992). Another seminal work contributing to the development of the field is Paul Ricoeur's "Memory, Forgetfulness, and History" (1996). Despite the existence of various academic definitions of the term, this paper narrows its focus to a selected number of explanations of what memory is.

With regard to Paul Ricoeur, the French philosopher views memory as the presence of the past and connects it with one's consciousness (1996: 15). According to him, memory is distinguished by its dynamic component, which involves constant interactions between remembrance and forgetting. In his opinion, it is a continuous process of interpretation and reconstruction rather than an inactive storage of past events. Ricouer distinguishes two types of memory, i.e., individual and collective. The former refers to the unique experiences and memories of a single person, whereas collective memory involves shared recollections and communal narratives. Ricoeur emphasizes the importance of collective memory with reference to an individual, since a single person is unable to remember the past events on their own, but rather relies on the recollections of others. As he claims,"[e]very individual memory

is a point of view on the collective memory" (Halbwachs qtd in Ricoeur 1996: 15). From his perspective, memories and recollections are not autonomous but rather intrinsically linked to the larger context of collective memory. In his discussion, the philosopher highlights how the broader narratives and traditions that permeate a culture or a group have an impact on individual memories and how they are shaped by them.

In his "Memory, Forgetfulness, and History" (1996), Ricoeur refers to a significant figure in the field of memory studies, namely Maurice Halbwachs. Maurice Halbwachs was a French sociologist whose research contributed greatly to the beginnings and development of the discipline. For memory studies, defined as an interdisciplinary field that combines several academic disciplines, including anthropology, education, literature, history, philosophy, psychology, and sociology, Halbwach's research served as a crucial point of reference with regard to the understanding of collective memory. As Olick and Robbins report, the term was initially introduced by Hugo Van Hofmannsthal in 1902 (1998: 106). According to Hofmannsthal, collective memory refers to "the dammed up force of our mysterious ancestors within us […] and piled up layers of accumulated collective memory" (Schieder 1978: 2). His conception implies a complex comprehension of how collective history and cultural heritage are ingrained in both individuals and communities. According to Hofmannsthal, collective memory symbolically represents a substantial store of ancestral information, experiences, and traditions that remain under human consciousness. It is not a static but rather an active force which is capable of influencing individual thought, identity, and social conduct. It is Maurice Halbwachs, though, who is widely acknowledged as the pioneer of research on collective memory. According to Halbwachs, who refuted the idea of an individual-psychological perspective on memory, people are unable to recall information independently of their group settings, as memory is influenced by social factors. The sociologist, in his prominent work, *Social Frameworks of Memory* (1925), introduces the concept of memory with its collectively-structured nature and intergenerational transmission. According to Halbwachs, individual memory is subordinate to collective memory as, in his reasoning, memory is inherently socially conditioned. As he states in another work of his, *On Collective Memory* (1992 [1950]), "no memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections" (43). In order to understand it, the attention should be paid to its social and cultural context without which memory cannot be determined. The term "frameworks" used by Halbwachs implies social, cultural, and historical norms and practices that shape people's perceptions and memories of what they have experienced. They include language, group narratives, cultural symbols,

traditions, and celebrations which are shared by community members. Therefore, the process of remembering and recalling memories cannot be an individual act but rather a collective one, taking into consideration social, cultural and historical aspects, as "it is in society that [people] recall, recognize and localize their memories" (1992: 38).

Upon birth, one is instantly immersed in a tremendous reservoir of shared experiences that exist within the structure of society. Each identity is shaped by multiple circumstances, namely one's family, nationality, language, gender or socioeconomic status, all of which an individual is unable to control. With the acquisition of language, the formation of memories within a social group commences. Prior to this, there is a widespread increase in representations of the past through various forms of art. One of such forms is literature, with its crucial part in the process of collective memory preservation in a written form. Birgit Neumann, the author of "The Literary Representation of Memory" (2010), defines the connection between literature and memory as having two separate facets: in the development of fictional worlds, literary works often draw upon culturally prevalent concepts of memory and, at the same time, skillfully depict them in a concise and aesthetically pleasing manner using various literary approaches (2010: 335). The link between literature and memory is also highlighted by Jeffrey K. Olick in "Collective Memory: The Two Cultures" (1999). In the article, Olick argues that literature has the ability to portray the shared memory of a society, which is influenced by social factors and individual experiences. Additionally, literature itself serves as a means of preserving and transmitting collective memory, therefore, being its medium (1999: 338).

The connection between literature and memory is also discussed by Marianne Hirsch in *The Generation of Postmemory. Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (2012). The scholar defines the term as the connection of the second generation to significant, frequently traumatic experiences that occurred prior to their birth. Although these traumas occurred in the past and have not been experienced by them personally, their repercussions persist in the present. In other words, the term refers to transgenerational memory reconstruction that encompasses more than just exposure to a painful past. Postmemory pertains to one's intentional pursuit of understanding the past events experienced by their ancestors and encompasses both the aspects of inheritance and research (Hirsch 2012: 33). Marianne Hirsch in her study on postmemory makes several references to another significant research on the topic, i.e., Eva Hoffman's *After Such Knowledge. Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (2003). In her work, Hoffman examines the intricate themes of memory, trauma, and the enduring impact of the Holocaust on the formation of personal

identities, as well as collective memory and cultural narratives. Hoffman also refers to the paradoxes of indirect knowledge which tend to haunt second-generation members. As she argues,

> The paradoxes of indirect knowledge haunt many of us who came after. The formative events of the twentieth century have crucially informed our biographies, threatening sometimes to overshadow and overwhelm our own lives. But we did not see them, suffer through them, experience their impact directly. Our relationship to them has been defined by our very 'post-ness' and by the powerful but mediated forms of knowledge that have followed from it. (2003: 25)

As a further means of shedding light on the significance of memory, Eva Hoffman draws attention to the fact that we are currently living in an era that is distinguished by memory (2003: 203). What the scholar struggles to emphasize is the fact that modern society is marked by an increased consciousness of and involvement with memory—both personal and communal—and its effects on identity, culture, and history. To paraphrase, memory of the past, even if it is not experienced firsthand, frequently shapes cultural narratives and render the act of remembrance vital for both individuals and groups.

Prior to the release of Hirsch's and Hoffman's studies on the significance of memory, numerous scholars had already examined the idea in transgenerational terms. Among them are Nicolas Abraham with his concept of phantom (1991), Haydée Faimberg's idea of telescoping of generations (2005), Ellen Fine's absent memory (1988), Alison Landsberg's prosthetic memory (2004), James Young's received history (1997), and Gabriele Schwab's haunting legacy (2010) (Milevski 2022: 205). What differentiates Hirsch's point of view, though, is her reflection on the power of vision. In her belief, literary texts do not use language to convey trauma and transmission, but instead rely on visual representations in the form of markings, wounds, and tattoos (2012: 80). Such is the case with Toni Morrison's *Beloved* where trauma of slavery is presented in the form of visual marks, namely scars. Hirsch's discussion on Toni Morrison's novel, though, is introduced in the further part of the paper.

Among other researchers in the discipline of memory studies is Barry Schwartz, an American psychologist and scholar, the author of *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* (2000). Schwartz's definition of collective memory encompasses the idea of the past as the embodiment of historical evidence and commemorative symbolism (2000: 9). To paraphrase, it refers to shared memories that are transmitted through continuous

commemorative processes, officially approved ceremonies that honor a group by referencing a shared history. As regards his definition of individual memory, it derives from its collective counterpart, as it is the latter that unifies the group through narratives that are passed down from generation to generation.

According to Roy Eyerman, another researcher in the field, collective memory plays a significant part in the process of collective identity formation, since it shapes the self of a group. In his belief, slavery is a cultural marker responsible for the formation of African American identity and a source of cultural trauma experienced by many generations of black people (2002: 163). Eyerman's research resulted in his *Cultural Trauma. Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (2002), in which the scholar shares his point of view on trauma and slavery not as an institution or experience, but rather as collective memory. In his study, the author makes distinctions between individual trauma and the collective one, explaining the latter as a process contemplated through multiple kinds of representation and linked to the construction of collective identity (2002: 1). As he highlights, it was not until the post-Civil-War period, which resulted in the abolition of slavery, that African American identity started to emerge. According to Eyerman, the experience of slavery was a bonding particle for the black nation who got united in their attempt to remember the horrific past of life under enslavement. Although slavery came to an end, the burden of dramatic recollections and memories continued to exist among African Americans for decades, regardless of the fact whether slavery was experienced by them directly or not. In essence, according to Eyerman, slavery played a fundamental role in shaping a developing sense of shared identity by means of a continually increasing collective memory. This memory served as a sign and marker of a certain race, people, or group (2002: 1).

As Eyerman states, despite its violent and traumatic nature, slavery had a role in fostering solidarity and unity among black individuals, as they collectively remembered the sufferings of the past: "[s]lavery formed the root of an emergent collective identity through an equally emergent collective memory, one that signified and distinguished a race, a people, or a community" (2002: 1). In other words, slavery served as the foundation for a developing shared sense of self through a growing shared recollection, which symbolized and set apart a certain race, a group, or a society. As Roy Eyerman continues further in *Cultural Trauma. Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (2002), the concept of African American identity was expressed in the latter years of the 19th century and early decades of the 20th century by a cohort of black intellectuals who considered slavery to be a historical event rather than a current reality. One of the most leading African American intellectuals was

W.E.B. Du Bois who advocated for the idea of a "double consciousness." According to Du Bois, it is possible to identify oneself as both African and American, showing allegiance to a country while rejecting its discriminatory customs. Moreover, he advocated for acknowledging and investigating the truth of slavery, regardless of the distress it caused to those affected by it, as well as their offspring. Arnold Rampersad, in his discussion of Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, argues that history must be recovered on both national and personal levels since in his view,

> [a]dmitting and exploring the reality of slavery is necessarily painful for a black American, but only by doing so can he or she begin to understand himself or herself and African and Afro-American culture in general. The normal price of the evasion of the fact of slavery is intellectual and spiritual death. Only by grappling with the meaning and legacy of slavery can the imagination, recognizing finally the temporality of the institution, begin to transcend it. (1989: 123)

Rampersad highlights that confrontation with the truth of slavery enables African Americans to embrace their own identity and culture. By doing so, they stop repressing the painful past of enslavement and come to terms with their history. Moreover, accepting the reality of slavery enables a sincere engagement with history, which is crucial for personal healing, as well as for the development of a collective identity grounded in authenticity and historical accuracy. Rampersad also observes that the suppression or denial of traumatic historical events can lead to harmful effects similar to those experienced in individual psychological trauma. He claims that when communities deny or suppress the difficult realities of their past, they are likely to internalize and continue cycles of psychological damage. This kind of repression can obstruct the development of cultural resilience and sustain a shared feeling of alienation, disempowerment, and cultural dislocation.

Slavery and the Manifestations of Memory in African American Culture

The memory of slavery and its portrayal via speech and artwork served as the foundation for African American identity. It allowed for its establishment in organizations, such as the National Association for the Advancement for Colored People, which was set up in 1909 (Eyerman 2002: 2). Moreover, long before the abolition of slavery, there was a notable tendency among the blacks to share their experiences of life under enslavement with the

public. The stories were frequently passed down orally due to the illiteracy of the majority of African Americans. Some individuals, though, documented their experiences by writing, crafting narratives that depicted the dreadful aspects of the institution. The early black narratives, also referred to as slave narratives, were autobiographical accounts penned by formerly enslaved African Americans. Their stories provided essential firsthand testimonials of the difficulties, obstacles, and resilience of enslaved individuals. They were the first literary expressions of African Americans which gained popularity initially as a means of supporting the anti-slavery abolitionist cause, and then as commercially successful adventure fiction.

One of the earliest and most impactful slave narratives was written as early as in 1798 by Venture Smith, the author of his autobiographical account, *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, a Native of Africa*. In his memoir, Smith recounts his abduction in Africa, his enslavement in New England, and his eventual emancipation through self-purchase. His story, among many others, demonstrates Smith's ability to bounce back from adversity and his unwavering determination to secure the freedom of his family. Another slave narrative which gained popularity among readership was a 1845-memoir written by Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. Douglass's autobiography is widely recognized as one of the most significant and influential narratives of slavery, in which the author narrates his formative years, the severe mistreatment he suffered, and his path towards acquiring the ability to read and write, culminating in his successful evasion of slavery. Douglass emerged as a famous advocate against slavery, celebrated for his compelling oratory and literary works. His narrative played a crucial role in mobilizing public backing for the abolitionist movement.

Slave narratives were also written by African American women who decided to share their agonizing stories of sexual abuse and struggles of life under enslavement. One of them was Harriet Jacobs, the author of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1862). As William Andrews states in *Classical African American Women's Narratives* (2003), Jacobs's memoir is regarded the first slave narrative written by an African American woman and one of the longest and most detailed records of slavery at the time it was published (2003: xxv). Her autobiography, along with other slave narratives, plays an important role in the process of commemorating the atrocity of slavery, since it offers a firsthand account and provides a testimony for future generations of African Americans. However, following the eradication of slavery and a decline in the population of former slaves resulting from their deaths, the production of slave narratives came to a halt. Literature, though, continued to serve as the

platform for their stories. For instance, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Octavia Butler, in their *oeuvre*, revitalized the slave tradition with the intention to expose its sinister aspects and its enduring impact on individuals.

The memory of slavery manifested its place in other artistic forms of expression, including music. The genre that proved to have strong connections to the African American culture, as well as the experience of slavery and its consequences, is the blues, with its emotional, cultural, and societal characteristics. The beginnings of the blues, along with other genres of African American music, may be traced back to the era of the transatlantic slave trade, which began in 1619 and ended in 1809 (Weissman 2005: 6). In that period, a substantial number of people from West Africa were forcibly carried across the Atlantic Ocean, notably on a voyage known as the Middle Passage, and thereafter subjected to the institution of slavery. Historical records suggest that slave ship captains would encourage enslaved folks to participate in singing and dancing, with the aim of maintaining their physical health during the journey to their destination (Rublowsky 1971: 140). The passage of slaves on ships facilitated the introduction of numerous African musical qualities to the Americas. Despite the hardships of slavery, they managed to maintain a connection and preserve a link to their African heritage through music, as slaves' voices effortlessly traversed the boundaries of the conventional European musical scale, resulting in the creation of a unique and distinctive sound. These musical traits eventually became the foundational elements for various African American music genres, including the widely loved genre of the blues.

According to Ron Eyerman, the emergence of the blues contributed to the public expression of black subjectivity, since "the blues was the singular form which could express both the collective in the individual and the individual in the collective, the 'I' as well as 'We'" (2002: 164). As a transmitter of the memory of slavery, the blues emerged as a crucial music genre and a powerful form of cultural expression that enabled African Americans to convey their agony, joy, perseverance, and hope for a better tomorrow. Apart from its inextricable link to the holocaust of slavery, the history of the blues is also embedded in African Americans' fight for emancipation and equality. Thanks to its cultural richness, historical relevance, and expressive depth, the blues was able to convey emotions, such as pain, anger, and refusal to accept the *status quo* of racism in the US. It manifested the spirit of black Americans to fight for freedom, justice, and equality in an artistic way. The genre of the blues gave way to other musical forms typical of African American culture, such as jazz or rhythm and blues, colloquially known under the abbreviated name R'n'B.

With the abolition of slavery, though, the traumatic memories of life under enslavement were still present in the minds of former slaves. Theoretically speaking, they were given freedom. In practice, however, the burden of the past was continuously carried by them. Widely acknowledged, the institution of slavery signified enduring trauma that had profound and long-lasting effects not only on its victims but also on successive generations of African Americans. The long-term psychological and emotional damage it caused was passed down through generations, significantly affecting the descendants of former slaves. The notion of transgenerational trauma which applies to the enduring psychological and emotional harm transmitted from parents to children initially appeared in the field of psychiatry in the 1970s, with the publication of literature aiming to describe and explain the behavioral and clinical challenges that were noticed among the descendants of Holocaust survivors. Rachel Yehuda and Amy Lehrner, in their article "Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma Effects: Putative Role of Epigenetic Mechanisms" (2018), report that the studies documented a diverse array of abnormalities in the behavior of the survivors' offspring and their grandchildren, including persistent anxiety and concern as regards the recurrence of trauma, nightmares and catastrophic thinking (244). One of the first and most significant works in the field of transgenerational trauma is Rakoff's "A long term effect of the concentration camp experience," published in 1966. In the study, Rakoff posits that although the immediate parents—those who directly experienced the horrors of concentration camps—may not exhibit overt or conspicuous signs of psychological breakdown or trauma, their children, who were born after the Holocaust, often display severe and pervasive psychiatric symptoms (qtd in Yehuda and Lehrner). Rakoff's insights question conventional understandings of trauma as solely an individual and immediate experience, proposing that it can be passed down through generations via intricate psychological, social, and biological processes. His claim that subsequent generations, who might not have firsthand knowledge of the atrocities, can still display significant symptoms highlights the persistent and unavoidable impact of systemic violence and collective trauma.

More contemporary discussion on transgenerational trauma of Holocaust is Gabriele Schwab's *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (2010). Schwab's interpretation of haunting legacies encompasses circumstances and situations that are challenging to tell or recall, since they stem from violence that strongly grips memory and is considered unspeakable (2010: 1). Unwillingness and refusal to remember traumatic past events affect those individuals who personally experienced them. Their refusal to recall and mentally process the traumatic experience renders them incapable of mourning, thereby

causing the distressing situation to be profoundly concealed in their subconscious and withheld from others. When referring to the haunting legacies of the past, Schwab uses a metaphor of the tomb:

> It is the children or descendants […] who will be haunted by what is buried in this tomb, even if they do not know of its existence or contents and even if the history that produced the ghost is shrouded in silence. Often the tomb is a familial one, organized around family secrets shared by parents and perhaps grandparents but fearfully guarded from the children. It is through the unconscious transmission of disavowed familial dynamics that one generation affects another generation's unconscious. This unconscious transmission is […] the dynamics of transgenerational hunting. (2010: 4-5)

In essence, the metaphor of the tomb highlights the persistent and unavoidable presence of hidden family histories and secrets, which continue to impact next generations, regardless of whether they are consciously aware of the tomb's existence or its contents. This conceptualization indicates that familial trauma and unresolved histories are not eliminated merely through silence or the passage of time. Instead, they endure as invisible, yet powerful influences that affect familial and individual psyches in subtle, often unconscious, manners. In this context, the act of concealing or repressing family secrets establishes an unconscious reservoir of unresolved trauma which influences family relationships across generations. The term 'unconscious transmission' used in the passage pertains to the underlying processes involved in the intergenerational continuation of haunting practices. This transmission is essential in the continuation of familial hauntings, whether manifested as spectral apparitions, feelings of remorse, or recurring dysfunctional patterns that persist despite attempts to suppress or deny them. The unconscious spectral manifestation of familial secrets functions as a symbolic ghost and serves as a reminder that families are not simply discrete, isolated entities but intricate, living networks haunted by the spectral remnants of their collective pasts. Therefore, recognizing the mechanism of unconscious transmission is essential for understanding the enduring nature of familial hauntings, as it constitutes a means of healing the traumas that persist in influencing both the family and individual psyche.

Another research on transgenerational trauma of Holocaust is done by M. Gerard Fromm in *Lost in Transmission: Studies of Trauma Across Generations* (2018). In his collection of essays, the author comes to the conclusion that individuals who have

experienced trauma, not being able to express themselves effectively through spoken language, resort to conveying their emotions and concerns through projected worries and anxieties, which subsequently impact the growth and development of their offspring (2018: xvi). The trauma, stemming from their harrowing experiences, typically manifests itself in the second generation of trauma survivors, rendering them susceptible to sadness, feelings of estrangement, and irrational anxieties. What needs to be highlighted is the fact that the academic focus on transgenerational studies extended beyond the victims of the Holocaust and their descendants. Other historical events that became a subject of interest and discussion for the academia include colonization, slavery or genocide, all experienced globally by various cultures. For instance, Maurice Apprey, in his "Reinventing the Self in the Face of Received Transgenerational Hatred in the African American Community" (1999), discusses the phenomenon of transgenerational trauma among African Americans, stating that one generation of people who were exposed to trauma may refrain from sharing their traumatic experience with their offspring. As he argues, the attempt to keep the past forgotten and silent "does not mean that the next generation will not experience in uncanny ways, the experience of the previous one" (1999: 138). Apprey posits that the transmission of trauma across generations extends beyond simple memories or inherited narratives, as it entails the transfer of emotional states and harmful impulses, particularly aggression, which can lead to destructive behaviors. This transmission is often manifested through violence directed inward, resulting in suicide, or outward, taking the form of violence against others.

A similar point of view is shared by J.P. Gump who believes that trauma can be manifested in several ways, including psychological distress, internalization of the fears or socioeconomic challenges. In his article, "Reality Matters: The Shadow of Trauma on African American Subjectivity" (2010), the scholar explores the psychological significance of slavery, which encompassed the abduction of Africans, the total upheaval from their territory, population, traditions, and their subsequent transportation to America. As Gump asserts, "there is little in slavery that is not traumatic: the loss of culture, home, kin, … sense of self, the destruction of families through sale of fathers, mothers and offspring, physical abuse, or even witnessing the castration of a fellow slave" (2010: 48). Through his observation, Gump emphasizes that the anguish of slavery extends beyond isolated or physical assault, since it infiltrates every facet of the slave's existence and completely undermines their sense of identity, community, and humanity.

Haunting and the Uncanny

Although slavery encompasses numerous traumatic experiences, the most atrocious element of enslavement is the subordination and the internalization of worthlessness, leading to the destruction of one's identity (Gump 2010: 48). The psychological impact of the institution may have a profound effect on an individual's mental state, as it may manifest itself as an unpleasant haunting experience. According to Avery Gordon, the author of *Ghostly matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997), the experience of haunting refers to a social phenomenon which indicates the system of oppression and characterizes those occurrences that are both unique and recurring. Gordon uses the term to

> describe those singular yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction, when the over-and-done-with comes alive, when what's been in your blind spot comes into view. Haunting raises specters, and it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future. (1997: xvi)

Gordon's definition of haunting encompasses more than just supernatural apparitions or unsettling occurrences. Conversely, she views it as a metaphorical concept that signifies the ongoing existence of unresolved issues or traumatic events that each individual wishes to conceal. Furthermore, the phenomenon of haunting is strictly related to the concept of the uncanny which was introduced by a German psychiatrist, Ernst Jentsch, in his 1906-essay, "On the Psychology of the Uncanny" (German: "Zur Psychologie Des Unheimlichen"). According to Jentsch, the word *unheimlich* refers to a specific situation in which "someone to whom something 'uncanny' happens is not quite 'at home' or 'at ease' (2008 [1906]: 217). In this context, the uncanny is a sensation of unease or distress that is simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar to an individual and, therefore, elicits a sense of ambiguity or confusion in the observer. It can be evoked by objects, situations or events which induce feelings of anxiety, fear, and discomfort. In his essay, the psychiatrist provides instances of situations which elicit the abovementioned reactions. He posits that the strong resemblance between human beings and objects, such as wax figures or machines, is the reason why they are perceived as animate. However, their capacity to resemble human beings induces a sense of disquiet, unease, and danger in individuals, as they perceive the inanimate objects as a threat due to their humanlike characteristics (Jentsch 2008: 222-223).

A literary example that Jentsch discusses concerns E.T.A. Hoffmann's short Gothic narrative written in 1816, "The Sandman" ("Der Sandmann"). The narrative recounts the story of a young student who becomes obsessed with the concept of the Sandman—a mythical figure who either spits sand into the eyes of children to induce slumber or tears out the eyes of those children who refuse to go to bed. The reason for Jentsch's discussion of "The Sandman" lies in his willingness to illustrate how powerful human imagination is and how individuals, in general, have a natural inclination to perceive objects as living entities. In his view, all individuals, irrespective of their age, are perpetually subjected to their own imaginations, as they frequently observe unusual circumstances or peculiar objects that are difficult to understand (2008: 225). General tendency of people to fantasize and envision the impossible is a useful tool for writers who introduce the concept of the uncanny in their literary works with the aim to make the readers wonder whether a given object is animate or inanimate in nature. As Jentsch asserts, the fantasy has a profound influence on the imagination of readers, resulting in the transformation of "a lonely lake" into "the gigantic eye of a monster and the outline of a cloud […] becomes a threatening Satanic face" (2008: 224). All in all, Jentsch's essay concludes that the sensation of the uncanny emerges from situations or items that reside on the threshold between reality and the supernatural or the unknown. What the psychiatrist highlights in his work is the fact that the uncanny is a multifaceted psychological phenomenon characterized by a feeling of uneasiness when one is confronted with anything that cannot be easily comprehended or classified.

In 1919, the concept was investigated again by a German psychiatrist, Sigmund Freud, whose interest in the phenomenon of the uncanny resulted in his fundamental essay, "The Uncanny" ("Das Unheimliche"). At the beginning of his study, the psychiatrist provides a concise definition of the notion, stating that "the uncanny is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (2001 [1919]: 220). Further in his work, Freud states that "the uncanny (*unheimlich*) is secretly familiar (*heimlich-heimisch*), which has undergone repression and then returned from it and that everything that is uncanny fulfils this condition" (2001: 245). In his use of the term, Freud refers to the concept of "the return of the repressed" which encompasses suppressed thoughts, desires, memories, and emotions that have been relegated to the unconscious mind. All of what is considered repressed might manifest itself in different forms and frequently lead to psychological disruptions or challenges. Repressed emotions can be activated by certain stimuli, resulting in the emergence of worry and discomfort in an individual. In every case, the suppressed feeling is related to a sexual fantasy or need that is typical of the early stages of libidinal development

in infants, i.e., the phallic stage which appears between the age of three to six. Freud, following Jentsch's strategy, refers to E.T.A. Hoffmann's short story, "The Sandman" ("Der Sandmann") and interprets it as an instance of the return of the repressed. Using the example of Hoffmann's hero, Nathanael, Freud demonstrates how terrible it is for a child to damage or lose their eyes. As he highlights in the essay, "a study of dreams, phantasies and myths has taught us that a morbid anxiety connected with the eyes and with going blind is often enough a substitute for the dread of castration" (2001: 231). However, this anxiety is disguised by a concern of losing another body part, namely the eyes.

According to Freud, the act of removing the eyes symbolizes a deep-seated dread of castration that stems from early childhood. The theme in question is also examined in the tragedy of Oedipus. Following Freud's way of thinking, when Oedipus blinds himself, he is essentially enacting a less severe version of the punishment of castration, which is the only penalty that is deemed appropriate for him according to the principle of *the lex talionis* ("an eye for an eye") (2001: 231). The Oedipus complex, which became a central point of psychoanalytical discussion for Freud, refers to a subconscious sexual desire typical of young boys whose dream is to be sexually intimate with their mothers. As Mark Windsor, the author of "Freud on The Uncanny: A Tale of Two Theories" (2020), highlights in his publication, this desire is considered taboo, as it can be faced with a punishment of castration carried out by one's father. Therefore, it is repressed and exists in the subconscious, manifesting itself in other conscious forms, albeit in a disguised manner. Due to its disguised manifestation, some level of satisfaction is fulfilled and, thus, the ego's defense against what is forbidden is maintained (Windsor 2020: 38).

With reference to the notion of uncanny, Freud argues that an individual is already familiar with the sensation, however, struggles to keep it in concealment. As the psychiatrist points out, "the uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression […] the uncanny as something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light" (2001: 241). Freud asserts that the uncanny induces dread and discomfort in an individual and can be articulated in a variety of ways. One of such forms pertains to "death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts" (2001: 241). In this regard, mortality is the foundation of the uncanny—a sensation that is frightening, uncertain, and unfamiliar. In other words, the feeling of the uncanny can be strictly related to the phenomenon of haunting, since both concepts represent the repressed and its return. Avery Gordon, in her *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Social Imagination*

(1997), notices the correlation between Freud's psychoanalysis and the phenomenon of haunting, claiming that a traumatic past event can be subconsciously concealed and resurfaces occasionally in the form of a haunting specter. Gordon views haunting as a social phenomenon that signifies oppression. According to the scholar, it refers to those unique but recurring moments when one's home becomes strange, when one loses their sense of direction in the world, when past events resurface, and when previously unnoticed things become visible. In other words, haunting evokes apparitions and fundamentally transforms the perception of temporal existence, affecting how one understands the past, present, and future (1997: xvi).

As Freud argues, another source of the uncanny lies in one's encounter with their double. His examination of the concept leads him to the conclusion that the double frequently represents two distinct facets of one's identity and reveals repressed impulses, phobias, and desires that stem from the unconscious mind which is governed by primitive instincts. In "The Uncanny," Freud exemplifies the idea of the double upon Otto Rank's discussion on the subject. According to Rank, an Austrian psychoanalyst and Freud's colleague, the concept of the double emerges once an individual sees their own reflection in a mirror (Freud 2001: 234-235). Upon observing a figure in the mirror, one experiences a certain level of unease and discomfort and concludes that the reflection they see is a representation of themselves. To paraphraze, the uncanny sensation is caused by the encounter with one's double, also known as the doppelgänger. The doppelgänger symbolizes a distorted or mirrored image of the self which represents the obscure aspects of the mind that are usually concealed from one's conscious perception. These aspects may involve mixed emotions and fractured parts of one's self that are responsible for eliciting the feeling of strangeness or uncanniness. Furthermore, Freud states that the objective of the double is to serve as a safeguard against the annihilation of the ego, providing protection against its complete extinction (2001: 235). Freud also associates the recurring theme of the double with the concept of narcissism, the conflict between the ego and the id, and the complexities of human identity.

The conclusions drawn by Freud and Jentsch with reference to the origins of the uncanny differ. Whereas they both perceive the uncanny as a combination of familiarity and unfamiliarity, their assessments of its source are markedly dissimilar. Ernst Jentsch posits that Olympia, one of the characters in Hofmann's narrative, is the cause of unease and disquiet in the main character of the story, Nathanael. Olympia is a womanlike automaton which elicits uncertainty regarding the dichotomy of the animate/inanimate opposition. Conversely, Freud maintains that the Sandman is the root of the bizarre, as he represents Nathaniel's childhood

fears the man tries to repress. Nevertheless, the genesis of both discussions on the matter of the uncanny is rooted in the European Gothic literary tradition, emerging in the late eighteenth century. The uncanny, which constitutes a major and fundamental notion in Gothic theory and aesthetics, is achieved by transforming something familiar into something unsettlingly strange inside the concept of home. It often explores the private and intimate realm of family relationships and frequently delves into one's personal domain.

Gothic Literature—Introduction

To initiate the discussion on American Gothic as a literary genre, it is essential to start by examining its European predecessor, its origins and characteristics, as American Gothic literature is classified as a subgenre of the European Gothic literary tradition, particularly the English Gothic. The prevailing neoclassical principles in British society during the eighteenth century involved the reapplication of concepts derived from Greek and Roman writers. The classical tradition was linked to refined and courteous culture, asserting its moral and aesthetic principles as the foundation for virtuous conduct, social interactions, and sophisticated artistic methods. In this context, the term 'Gothic' acquired a pejorative connotation, as it encompassed a range of historical aspects and qualities that were in opposition to the established norms of the eighteenth-century Britain. As Thomas Bjerre puts it, the Gothic literary tradition provided an opposing perspective to the "Enlightenment principles by giving voice to irrational, horrific, and transgressive thoughts, desires, and impulses" (2017: 2). The characteristics included the absence of rationality, ethics, and aesthetics in feudal ideologies, traditions, and labor (Punter 2014: 14). Furthermore, Gothic literature explored themes of violent history, mystical entities, and darkness, therefore, evoking concern and apprehension not only about the future but about the past as well.

With regard to the characteristics of Gothic as a genre, it primarily denotes a cohort of authors and literary works created during the period spanning from the 1760s to the 1820s. As a literary form, Gothic literature is distinguished by its antique settings, the use of the supernatural, and the endeavor to employ and refine techniques of literary suspense. Originating from a straightforward definition and description, the term has developed over the last two centuries to include various additional connotations, some of which are tangentially related to the original Gothic style. Hence, it has become a term employed in both scholarly discussions and mainstream, popular literature. In contemporary times, the term "Gothic" has gained greater use in comparison to its occasional usage in characterizing works of literature.

Extensive scholarly attention has been devoted to the Gothic genre for a considerable duration, with numerous scholars debating its distinctive features. Among them is Allan Lloyd-Smith, the author of *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction* (2004), who highlights that the genre is characterized by exceedingly severe situations of dread, panic, and horror, frequently involving the enigmatic presence of supernatural entities that evoke sensations of unease, dread, and the uncanny (3). Moreover, the scholar asserts that the Gothic is "about the return of the past, of the repressed and denied, the buried secret that subverts and corrodes the present, whatever the culture does not want to know or admit, will not or dare not tell itself" (2004: 1). The emotional dimension of the genre is easily noticed in the fear and anxiety which frequently emerge from individual's efforts to repress their prior traumas and the guilt that follows from participating in morally wrong activities.

According to Philip Cole, another critic on the subject, "Gothic literature has a tradition of bringing fear into people's minds and has been closely studied by academics seeking insights into our predilection for terrifying or horrific experiences" (2006: 96). In other words, it instills fear in individuals and has been extensively examined by scholars aiming to understand human inclination towards frightening or horrifying encounters. A similar point of view is represented by Donna Heiland, the author of *Gothic & Gender* (2004), according to whom Gothic novels primarily attempt to evoke terror, both in the portrayed characters, as well as in the reader. They do so by active exploration of the aesthetics of the sublime or certain interpretations of it (2004: 5). From the 18th century onwards, as Jerrold E. Hogle observes in the Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to the Modern Gothic* (2002), Gothic literature has allowed readers to confront and conceal significant desires, dilemmas, and causes of worry, ranging from the most personal and psychological to the broader societal and cultural aspects, since it has provided the readership with the opportunity to "address and disguise some of the most important desires, quandaries, and sources of anxiety, from the most internal and mental to the widely social and cultural" (4). In a broad sense, Gothic literary tradition aims to evoke emotional distress in readers by using macabre environments like graveyards or ancient haunted castles, as well as a deviant and unhealthy sexuality, so immersing them in a realm charged with violence and mortality.

The first piece of literature specifically identified as Gothic is Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, published in 1764. Contextualised in a mediaeval castle, the narrative intertwines elements of horror, romance, and otherworldly phenomena, therefore, being considered as the first narrative of a Gothic type presenting numerous aspects that would later become fundamental components of the genre. Further notable narratives that were created

after Walpole's publication include *The Old English Baron* (1777) by Clara Reeves, Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796). Each of these literary works gained prominence in the second half of the eighteenth century, substantiating the growing appeal of Gothic fiction during that era. Common to all the aforementioned literary works are the defining features of the Gothic genre, such as enigmatic and medieval settings located in isolated landscapes, supernatural phenomena like ghostly apparitions or demons, the pervasive sense of fear, and the emphasis on emotions rather than rationality. The environment of each location is unsettling, evoking a feeling of mystery and impending doom. What is more, each castle assumes a distinct character, representing both confinement, the unfamiliar, and the uncanny. Internal conflicts, moral dilemmas, the examination of the human condition in the presence of the uncanny, and the vulnerability of female characters are the crucial characteristics of the Gothic literary tradition.

The Gothic movement, in spite of its distinct characteristics, was influenced by Romanticism, with its emphasis on nature, emotions, the supernatural, and the individual. Nevertheless, although both movements place importance on emotional experiences and the internal processes of the mind, Gothic literature frequently highlights more sinister feelings of fear, uncertainty, and despair. Likewise, in terms of nature as a topic of fascination, the fundamental emphasis varies greatly between these two artistic styles, with Romantic contemplation of nature as a reservoir of aesthetic appeal and Gothic interpretation of nature as a reservoir of intense fear. As regards the presence of the supernatural, for both genres it constitutes a crucial characteristic. Nevertheless, they address it with the usage of different methodologies. By contrast to Gothic literature, which explicitly emphasizes fear and horror, Romanticism often focuses on the enigmatic and the sublime. Moreover, the journey of the individual and the complexity of the self are subjects of celebration in both movements. On the other hand, though, Gothic literature frequently depicts characters who are experiencing psychological upheaval, whereas Romanticism encourages the concept of the heroic individual.

Within the framework of North America, the Romantic movement took more of a transcendental form which held a belief that every individual had the spiritual potential and capacity to perceive God, and that every person was both pure and equal. As Kevin MacDonald argues, Transcendentalism "adopted a utopian vision of human as able to transcend all that by means of the God-given spiritual powers of the human mind" (2008: 92-93). In other words, individuals have a special ability to surpass all limitations through the divinely endowed spiritual faculties of the human intellect. The concepts of

Transcendentalism and Romanticism, in general, placed an emphasis on the significance of feelings and the natural world in the lives of each and every individual. Nevertheless, the Romantic movement put a larger focus on artistic expression and human experience in relation to society than the transcendentalist movement did. As Romanticism frequently investigated topics related to beauty and the supernatural, Transcendentalism, as a distinct American philosophical movement that arose in the 1830s and 1840s, advocated for self-reliance and a greater connection with nature, with an emphasis on intuition, spirituality, and the innate goodness that exists within humans.

The most significant representatives of Transcendentalism were Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry Thoreau, with their appreciation for nature as a source of essential existence. Emerson, who is often credited as the founder of the transcendentalist movement, shows his admiration for nature in the statement that when one is surrounded by its beauty, "all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball. I am nothing. I see all" (Emerson 2009 [1836]: n.pag.). In other words, Emerson explains the idea that immersing oneself in nature might lead to a more profound comprehension of the world, which is fundamental to the transcendentalist conception of nature as a transformational agent. What is more, the transcendentalist thought prioritizes personal methods of thinking and living as crucial elements of the philosophy. With regard to Henry Thoreau, another important transcendentalist writer, he is credited with writing one of the most famous passages in American literature, asserting that "the mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation," as they perceive no alternative but to lead conventional lifestyles (2008 [1854]: n.pag.). In contrast to this way of living, transcendentalists frequently urged individuals to dedicate their lives to pursuits beyond mere survival, since they advocated for an emphasis on self-exploration alongside personal and intellectual growth. What is more, the majority of transcendentalists did not prioritize material prosperity and found genuine significance in the core of one's own being.

American Gothic Literary Tradition

Another subgenre of Romanticism which originated in the US at about the same time as the transcendentalist movement was Dark Romanticism, also known as the American Gothic. It emphasized more negative characteristics of human existence and the emotional and psychological challenges, including the motives of insanity, sin, guilt, and the presence of supernatural forces. In contrast to Transcendentalism, its perspective on humanity, nature, and

divinity is significantly more negative, presenting readers with a daunting new realm where malevolence is markedly more evident. Such a perspective on American Gothic fiction is supported by Howard who claims that the genre "transports readers to a terrifying new world where evil is much more apparent" (2015: 2). What is typical of American Gothic literature is the fact that it incorporates the elements of its European equivalent with the distinct American themes, locations, and character archetypes. American Gothic tradition possesses its own distinct cultural and historical background which encompasses the challenging and dark aspects of American history. This includes slavery and racism, as well as the presence of traditionally American rural or small-town settings, with dilapidated farmhouses or dense woodlands, evoking an atmosphere of apprehension and ominous anticipation. Nature, rather than exemplifying the divine, is portrayed as obscure, degenerate, and enigmatic, with the earth characterized as a realm where disillusionment and immorality prevail. Allan Lloyd-Smith, in the article "Nineteenth-Century American Gothic," identifies "four indigenous features" that distinguish American Gothic from the European perspective, i.e., "the frontier, the Puritan legacy, race, and political utopianism" (2012: 163). All these characteristics are interrelated and exemplify the intricacy of the American experience, shaping the nation's identity and ethical evolution. The notion of the frontier, for instance, refers to the western boundary of the United States which was expanding in the 19th century, as settlers moved westward in search of land, goods, and prospects. The frontier is often portrayed as a romanticized and idealized domain of individualism, advancement, and adventure. As a region where white settlers encountered indigenous peoples, wildlife, and the unfamiliar, the frontier became a symbol of both opportunity and conflict.

The Puritan legacy, which Lloyd-Smith distinguishes as one of the four indigenous characteristics of the American Gothic, is defined by its focus on religious ethics, diligence, communal values, and a bond with God. Its effect on literature encompasses the examination of such themes as the fight between the good and the bad, as well as the motifs of sin and redemption, exemplified by Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). As regards the motif of race, throughout American history, it has been an essential and controversial issue that has affected social norms, politics, and narratives within culture. The legacy of slavery and the struggle for civil rights underscore the importance of the experiences and contributions of African Americans in shaping American identity and literature.

Within the context of political utopianism, the concept fundamentally encompasses a philosophical and ideological conviction in the potential to create a society that embodies the highest ideals of justice, equality, peace, and communal harmony through intentional political

and social reform. This conviction assumes that human society can surpass current systemic deficiencies, including oppression, inequality, and violence, and attain a state of perfection or utopia. In the specific context of American history, this utopian impulse has been expressed through a variety of social movements and experimental communities, each striving to establish ideal social arrangements that reflect aspirational values of justice, peace, and communal welfare. These communities harbored a shared, romanticized, and idealized conception of society, grounded in principles that oppose the dominant norms of individualism, materialism, and systemic inequality. Among them were such groups as Shaker Communities, Brook Farm, Oneida Community, the Amana Colonies, the Farm, Twin Oaks Community, the Bruderhof, and the Hippie movement. They all embodied a romanticized and idealized conception of a society founded on the principles of pacifism, simplicity, equal rights, and communal tolerance and respect.

The features discussed above are interconnected and illustrate the complexity of the American experience, influencing the nation's identity and moral development. With regard to the concept of the frontier and race, the expansion of the territory frequently entailed the forced migration and violence directed at people of indigenous origin, highlighting the variety of issues and conflicts intrinsic to the idea of American progress. As regards Puritan ideals of morality and covenantal destiny, both of them influenced the perceptions of indigenous peoples and enslaved individuals as racially inferior. As a consequence, the belief in the superiority of the white race was a justification for colonization and slavery. Allan Lloyd-Smith also underscores the interconnection between the Puritan legacy and political utopianism, which has resulted in the incorporation of Puritan ideals of moral responsibility and community into a variety of utopian movements in the United States which were discussed in the previous paragraph of this dissertation.

Some literary experts and researchers do not uniformly recognize the American Gothic as a distinct genre or encounter difficulties in situating it within a national American framework. One of them is Teresa Goddu, the author of *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation* (1997), who posits that defining the genre in national terms is a problematic matter, as it refers to a difficult history of the Unites States (3). Leslie Fielder, on the other hand, struggles to define it as a genre and refutes its classification as a legitimate literary trend, referring to it as "a pathological symptom" (1997: 135). What is more, certain researchers and scholars observe the irony of the genre's success within the American literary tradition, as it seemingly contests the narratives of the American Dream, which are rooted in rationalism and national development. For instance, Eric Savoy, in "The Rise of American

Gothic" (2002), highlights the peculiar prominence of Gothic cultural production in the United States, where the past continually influences the present, where progress creates an almost overwhelming anxiety regarding its consequences, and where a relentless craving for spectacles of grotesque violence is woven into the fabric of everyday life (174). Considering all the aforementioned perspectives, they serve to illustrate the ambiguous nature of the genre and the debate surrounding its classification as a literary movement.

In relation to the key figures of the American Gothic literary tradition, Edgar Allan Poe is acknowledged for his portrayal of nature as enigmatic and somber, along with his intrigue in the intricacies of the human psyche, marking him as a significant representative of the genre. His literary style is firmly grounded in the Gothic tradition, characterized by its unsettling atmosphere, vibrant and frightening visuals, the paranormal, and the fascination with the themes of mortality, insanity, and the dead. Poe's most known literary works are "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843), "The Black Cat" (1844), "The Raven" (1845), and "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1849). All of his short stories are characterized with the Gothic features that became typical of Poe's literary *oeuvre*. His talent for establishing an ambiance of terror and apprehension, the choice of the dilapidated residences, secluded environments, and ominous fortresses as the settings function as metaphorical manifestations of the protagonists' internal conflict and the universal human experience. Moreover, what contributes to the unsettling atmosphere of Poe's stories is the presence of ghostly apparitions, supernatural elements, and the uncanny, all of which evoke a sense of unfamiliarity and fear in the character. The theme of the uncanny becomes recurring in Poe's stories, as his characters frequently experience peculiar and unexplainable events, which enhance the general atmosphere of enigma and fear.

One of the most distinguished features of Poe's short stories that classify his literary body as Gothic is the pervasive sense of terror and dread. It is achieved due to the somber, deteriorating, and secluded settings of his stories, well-exemplified in "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1849), where the dilapidated mansion of the Usher family assumes a terrifying emblem of deterioration and imminent catastrophe. Another motif in Poe's literary *oeuvre*, frequently resulting in insanity or psychological decline, is the isolation of the characters. Poe's protagonists often experience isolation from the outside world and restrict themselves to their own thoughts, as happens in his 1842-short story, "The Pit and the Pendulum." A recurring theme in Poe's narratives is the haunting presence of the past that affects the characters in his stories. Poe's protagonists are tormented by their previous experiences, gripped by feelings of guilt or remorse for their past deeds. The narrator in "The Tell-Tale

Heart" (1843), for instance, is plagued by the intense remorse of having committed a murder on a blameless individual, which later results in the protagonist's own demise. These, among many other features of Poe's narratives that are considered Gothic, are a testimony to Poe's greatness as an American Gothic writer. Nevertheless, in addition to Poe's *oeuvre*, the genre of American Gothic literature has given rise to a wide range of authors whose literary creations have delved into subjects of terror, solitude, psychological strain, and paranormal phenomena. Other notable contributions to the American Gothic literary heritage include Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter" (1850), Emily Dickinson's poetry, Shirley Jackson and her "The Haunting of Hill House" (1959), and Flannery O'Connor with her "A Good Man is Hard to Find" (1955). Through their examination of intricate themes and complex issues, such as death, sin, the presence of the supernatural, guilt, and human emotional and psychological depth, these writers, along with many other representatives of the genre, have greatly influenced American Gothic tradition.

Southern American Gothic

As discussed before, the Gothic literary legacy in the United States is deeply rooted in the Southern region, rendering it "a repository of national repressions […] the benighted area 'down there' whose exposure to the light is unfailingly horrifying and thrilling" (Graham 2007: 349). The South emerged as the primary locus of American Gothic literature, revealing how the idealized image of the pastoral and rural South rests on such repressions as the institution of slavery, racism, and patriarchy. The growing fascination with the South as a backdrop for American Gothic narratives led to the emergence of a new subgenre within this literary tradition, i.e., the Southern Gothic. The Southern Gothic derives from Dark Romanticism a bleak perspective on humanity and existence, and while it incorporates supernatural and enigmatic themes, it does not aim to generate suspense through them. Instead, they serve as a medium to illustrate the social and cultural concerns impacting the southern parts of the United States, utilizing the dilapidated estates of former planters rather than ominous castles, and depicting living individuals instead of specters to convey a terror that is more tangible and relatable to the reader. Southern Gothic narratives illuminate the darker aspects of society, evoking a sense of uncontrollable and incomprehensible forces. The individual finds themselves confined within environments and circumstances from which they cannot break free. Furthermore, a recurring theme characteristic of Southern Gothic narratives is a Freudian concept of the 'return of the repressed.' The concept pertains to the region's

historical realities of slavery, racism and guilt which are being manifested in the form of ghosts that underscore the unspoken and silenced elements of the official discourse on southern history.

The distinctive feature of the Southern Gothic as a literary genre is its emphasis on the local character, since it focuses on the southern regions of the United States. As Tennessee Williams, a prominent representative of the genre, articulates, "there is something in the region, something in the blood and culture, of the Southern states that has somehow made them the center of this Gothic school of writers who share a sense, an intuition, of an underlying dreadfulness in modern experience" (1978: 42). To put it differently, it is the southern region of the United States that elicits feelings of fear, anxiety, and a certain sense of horror in both the writers and readers who find Gothic narratives a source of bloody history of the American South and a reminder of the traumatic past. A discourse on the American South, in general, was characterized by its contradictory dimension, since the colonial and antebellum South was portrayed as a pastoral utopia and an agrarian paradise. On the other hand, though, it was perceived as a region symbolizing America's deficiencies and sins of the past that many sought to forget.

The Southern Gothic, apart from its European influence, found its inspiration in the movement of Literary Naturalism. The movement portrays the social and economic issues affecting the most disadvantaged segments of society. As Donna Campbell argues in her article "American Literary Naturalism: Critical Perspectives" (2011), the typical feature of the Literary Naturalism as regards the characters of the novels representing the movement is that their fates are "the product of their heredity, their environment, and chance circumstances that rarely worked in their favor" (499). In other words, Literary Naturalism emphasizes the grim facets of life, concentrating on the suffering inherent in human nature. In this regard, the Southern Gothic originates from Naturalism, characterized by its capacity to depict profound human suffering and the harshest aspects of society through an emphasis on the most marginalized and alienated social groups, pathologies within a family, and the moral fall of the Southerners. As regards features that are typical of the genre, it portrays the South in a manner that is starkly unidealized, exposing the concealed realities of American Southern towns. The towns are presented as a part of a deteriorating region that fosters a similarly troubled society of privilege, rooted in slavery and oppression. The Southern Gothic eschews any romanticized portrayal of the region, concentrating instead on the challenging reality that characterizes it.

In the realm of foundational literary figures within the Southern American Gothic, William Faulkner stands out as a significant contributor whose impact on the evolution of the genre is undeniable. Throughout his literary *oeuvre*, the novelist examines the unsettling reality of living in the post-Civil-War American South. His writings frequently depict familial legacies of white Americans and their moral and social degradation. Faulkner's imaginary Yoknapatawpha County provides a poignant setting for numerous narratives which are marked by deteriorating plantations, rural scenery, and disintegrating social frameworks. His short stories and novels are classified within the Southern Gothic genre, examining themes of haunted houses, mystery, violence, oppression, and the hidden burdens of the past. Although William Faulkner is not exclusively classified as a Gothic novelist, his writings incorporate notable Gothic themes that enrich their examination of identity, history, and the human condition. Therefore, by some scholars and literary critics, Faulkner is regarded the "greatest and most seamlessly Gothic narrative" and his 1936-novel *Absalom, Absalom!* "one of the great Southern Gothic novels," remaining impactful for both readers and scholars (Gray 2000: 21).

With the emergence of the new genre, however, discussions on the Southern Gothic as a literary movement appeared to be disputable and controversial. The difficulty with the genre's recognition among literary critics and scholars was their disregard of its significance. As Frederick S. Frank states in *Through the Pale Door: A guide to and through the American Gothic* (1990), "Gothic was an inferior genre incapable of high seriousness and appealing only of readers of questionable tastes" (x). Consequently, it was marginalized and regarded as "other" with its representatives called "the merchants of death, hell and the grave […] the horror-mongers in chief" (Johnson 1935: 44). Moreover, there was a notable irony in the fusion of the terms American and Gothic. Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet, in her Introduction to *The Poetics and Politics of the American Gothic: Gender and Slavery in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2010), proves the point providing an artistic illustration of the ironic application of the term, giving an example of Grant Wood's painting from 1930, "American Gothic." The artwork portrays a solemn farmer and a woman, frequently regarded as his daughter, positioned before an expansive Gothic-style residence. The man wields a pitchfork, indicating his connections to agriculture and rural life, while the woman is dressed in a patterned garment that harmonizes with the architectural design. Although the painting stands as a quintessential representation in American art and has evolved into a hallmark of American culture, it evokes some irony in its reception. As Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet observes, the visual disparity between the ostentatious window, reminiscent of European

ecclesiastical architecture and ancient castles, and the unassuming two-story house surrounding it created an ironic effect (2010: 1). The researcher also highlights the fact that an additional layer of irony was produced by the overarching concept of medieval European building relocated to the agricultural heartland of Iowa.

In contemporary discourse, though, the term American Gothic no longer incites significant provocation. It is widely esteemed within academic circles and has garnered the attention of numerous scholars and thinkers. One of the first critics of the genre is Leslie Fielder, an American scholar who highlights the Gothic nature of American fiction by stating that "[…] from Charles Brocken Brown to William Faulkner or Eudora Welty, Paul Bowles or John Hawkes, it is, bewilderingly and embarrassingly, a gothic fiction, nonrealistic and negative, sadist and melodramatic—a literature of darkness and the grotesque in a land of light and affirmation" (Fielder 1997: 29). Fielder posits that the Gothic literary tradition stands out as a highly effective and adaptable narrative tool for American writers, particularly those aiming to explore and critique the intricate socio-cultural dynamics of the American South. Fielder argues that, in this context, the Gothic form serves as a crucial vehicle for conveying the pervasive sense of fear and threat that defines the Southern experience—a terrain intricately linked to the legacy of racial oppression, violence, and systemic racial terror (1997: 28). In essence, the Gothic serves not just as a stylistic or aesthetic choice but as a symbolic framework for delving into the darker, unspoken, and frequently repressed elements of Southern history and identity.

Among other critics and scholars discussing the genre of the Southern Gothic are Louis Gross with his *Redefining the American Gothic: from Wieland to the Day of the Dead* (1989), David Punter, the author of *Gothic Pathologies: the Text, the Body and the Law* (1998), and Joyce Carol Oats with his *American Gothic Tales* (1996). More contemporary twenty-first-century research on the genre has been conducted by Charles L. Crow, the author of *History of the Gothic. American Gothic* (2009) and Maisha L. Wester in *African American Gothic. Screams from Shadowed Places* (2012). The latter study represents an important examination in which Wester illustrates how African American writers have adopted the Gothic genre to convey the intricacies of the black experience in America (2012: 257). The genre also gained appeal among postcolonial scholars and authors who analyzed it through the lens of postcolonial studies, illuminating previously unnoticed, repressed, and neglected themes of the other. Among them are David Punter and his *Postcolonial Imaginings: Fictions of a New World Order* (2000), as well as Andrew Smith and William Hughes, the authors of *Empire and the Gothic: the Politics of Genre* (2003).

Another noteworthy aspect of the genre is its significant and enduring influence on popular culture, impacting diverse forms of expression, including film, television series, music, and visual arts. The themes of solitude, psychological intricacy, and the supernatural, so typical of the genre, persist in their relevance, mirroring the continuous examination of human fear, societal conventions, and cultural identity in modern society. In American cinematography, for instance, Gothic motifs are employed in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980), a film adaptation of Stephen King's 1977-novel or Mike Flanangan's more recent Netflix series, *The Fall of the House of Usher* (2023), inspired by Edgar Allan Poe's 1839-story. As regards American literature, Stephen King's novels illustrate the allure of the Gothic genre through the author's incorporation of the aspects of isolation, lunacy, painful past, and haunting landscapes, exemplified in *The Shining* (1977), *It* (1986), *The Dark Half* (1989), *Gerard's Game* (1992) or more recent, *The Institute* (2019). What is more, the genre's position in an African American context is also worth discussing since African Americans possess a distinctive viewpoint on Southern Gothic and the underlying racial conflicts intrinsic to the genre. Toni Morrison, in *Playing in the Dark. Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), presents a deep and critical examination of the complex ways in which race—especially the concept of "whiteness"—has shaped and affected the evolution of American literature and the wider rhetorical and symbolic frameworks that support the American literary imagination. Morrison examines how the idea of whiteness operates not just as a racial label but as an essential narrative tool. Her analysis highlights that the widespread occurrence of racial motifs, stereotypes, and constructs in American literature is not coincidental but rather intricately woven into the cultural and racial subconscious of the nation, shaping the representation, perception, and understanding of racial difference and blackness. In her non-fiction piece of writing, Morrison examines a range of literary works, including those by Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain, and Ernest Hemingway. Through a meticulous examination of their texts, she underscores how these authors frequently depended on oversimplified, stereotypical, and reductive representations of black characters, which contributed to the distorted perceptions of race, identity, and cultural diversity. This, in turn, perpetuates a range of myths, misconceptions, and racial stereotypes that obscure the true nature of African American life and history. As a result of this racial dynamic, Morrison recognizes the emergence of what she designates as "American Africanism." The concept refers to a constructed and frequently distorted collection of representations, symbols, and themes that link blackness with darkness and otherness. As Toni Morrison puts it, American Africanism is "a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire that is uniquely

American" (1992: 38). This construct delineates how portrayals of African Americans are frequently mythologized, exoticized, or demonized, functioning as allegories for the collective anxieties, aspirations, and shortcomings of the white American consciousness.

The Gothic and African American Literature

African American writers of the twentieth century struggled to challenge monstrous representations of blackness in literature by incorporating Gothic themes into their narratives. This tactic was devised with the intention of addressing the heinous acts of racism and cruelty committed by white people towards African Americans. By integrating the genre of white authors, African American writers sought to subvert the prevailing literary narratives that marginalized blacks as othered, excluded, and invisible. Blackness, long overlooked and inadequately represented by white American novelists, was ultimately articulated in the works of African American writers seeking to challenge the dominant norms of mainstream literature, predominantly composed from a white perspective. Among the black authors who incorporated Gothic aspects into their literary works, Zora Neale Hurston and Richard Wright are one of the most notable. Wright, in his 1937-essay "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow," reflects on his personal experiences growing up in the Jim Crow South, where profound racial segregation and discrimination were integral to the African American experience. In the essay, Wright recounts his interactions with white Americans who exhibited racist attitudes towards the man, referring to him as a "black bastard," "a lazy black son-of-a-bitch," and asserting the superiority of white individuals over African Americans: "Nigger, you think you're white, don't you?" (1937: 3). The harsh realities of African American lives during the Jim Crow period are encapsulated in the quotations within the essay, illustrating the oppression and violence directed at black Americans. With respect to another prominent representative of African American literature and the Harlem Renaissance era, Zora Neale Hurston, the writer, in her 1937-novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, also incorporates Gothic elements into her narrative. Although the novel is not strictly Gothic in nature, some elements used by Hurston prove its dark and sinister character. For instance, the element that enhances the gloomy atmosphere is Hurston's portrayal of the landscape, especially the environment surrounding Lake Okeechobee. The depiction of the lake as a "monster" emphasizes its symbolic function as a representation of the unconscious fears and primordial forces lurking beneath the surface of human awareness. What is more, the dread is also induced by the weather conditions that result from a hurricane.

In further discussions on African American Gothic, Ralph Ellison, the author of *Invisible Man* (1995 [1952]), is another significant literary figure that arises. Despite the fact it is not a conventionally Gothic piece of narrative, *Invisible Man* integrates some characteristics typical of the genre. For instance, the protagonist of the novel is subjected to severe isolation and marginalization, being the result of his ethnicity. His experience of loneliness and despair is attributed to his invisibility within society. In the novel, the motif of invisibility serves as a metaphor for the social and cultural marginalization of African Americans over the years. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator states: "I am not an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe […] When people approach me, they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me" (1995: 3). The narrator's statement on his invisibility powerfully articulates his struggle to identify himself as a black man. His invisibility denotes the feeling of being unnoticed and ignored by society which is racially biased towards the man. Nonetheless, his experience is atypical of the Gothic tradition characterized by supernatural components and a pervasive sense of dread. Conversely, the man's invisibility is more pragmatic, arising from racially biased attitudes and perceptions he experiences in American society. The man's desire is to be regarded as genuinely human rather than a spectral being characteristic of Gothic literature. On the other hand, though, the Gothic themes that occur in the novel include the oppressive and violent atmosphere of the narrator's day-to-day experience. The terror of his everyday existence is highlighted by the narrator's encounters with racism and dehumanization, revealing a darker and sinister facade of life for African Americans. The monsters and horrors the man encounters on his path take more a human and down-to-earth form than the Gothic, supernatural one. Nevertheless, the burden of isolation and alienation the man experiences from the society is rooted in the Gothic literary tradition.

In the discussion of Gothic elements within African American literature, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (2016 [1987]) constitutes a significant piece of writing which bridges the Gothic with the black literary canon. The novel is classified as a postmodern slave narrative filled with Gothic elements and evocative of a conventional ghost story. It exemplifies Gothic elements through the portrayal of a haunted home, the tragic murder of a child, and the resurrection of the deceased, which together evoke a pervasive atmosphere of fear, horror, and the supernatural. Their role is to externalize and intensify the psychological and emotional wounds of slavery, converting memories of trauma into spectral entities that haunt both individual and collective consciousness. Given the significance of these themes, the analysis

and in-depth exploration of the Gothic and spectral in Morrison's *Beloved* forms a vital and essential component of this dissertation. Consequently, the discussion is reserved for the concluding chapter of this thesis, wherein the spectral motifs and their connection to the enduring trauma of slavery are examined comprehensively. This structural decision emphasizes the significance of haunting as a means of comprehending the transmission of personal and collective trauma across generations, and how Gothic elements enable the expression of these traumatic remnants. Furthermore, an additional aspect of significance in *Beloved* is its examination of the interplay between Gothic and postcolonial frameworks. Both genres address thematic issues of subversion, transgression, and resistance to dominant narratives—particularly those that suppress, marginalize, or eradicate alternative histories and experiences. Morrison utilizes these intersecting genres to reinterpret and reshape the canonical narratives of slavery. By doing so, the novelist highlights the silenced histories of African Americans and emphasizes the destructive legacies of colonialism, racism, and systemic violence. This interplay is also a crucial part of the thesis and constitutes an integral discussion of Chapter Six.

CHAPTER SIX

The Haunting Past of Slavery: Transgenerational Trauma, Repression, and Healing

Throughout the thesis, it has been demonstrated that the institution of slavery was a cruel and oppressive system of social degradation that dehumanized and mistreated its victims, as slaves were stripped of their dignity and viewed as mere property in the eyes of their masters. The brutality of slave oppressors left a bloody stain on the history of mankind and proved that the man is capable of anything in order to gain power, control and wealth. In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison combines the narration with facts and creates a story about those who experienced and survived the dramas of slavery. Because of the terrible conditions and cruelty faced by those enslaved, many sought to suppress the trauma and push it into the background, both on a personal level and as a group. Morrison, through the story of Sethe, Baby Suggs, Paul D, and other characters of *Beloved*, deliberately reopens the wounds of the past with the intention to illustrate what was for so long repressed by the black community. Morrison's purpose in devoting the novel to "sixty million and more" of Africans who were abducted from their land and transported in inhuman conditions during the Middle Passage is to shatter the silence of the past, investigate it, and process it, as for the novelist the significance of storytelling lies in addressing the suffering and trauma endured by the black nation. In *Beloved*, though, the writer focuses on the characters and their haunted memories of life under enslavement rather than the mere institution of slavery. Morrison's protagonists are so burdened with their past that they remain unable to address it and continue to be tormented by horrific memories of life under oppression. In this context, the past of slavery becomes unbearable and takes a haunting form. Within the framework of *Beloved*, the character of Sethe Suggs is victimized by her haunting past, as she cannot come to terms with the committed crime and is constantly reminded of her guilt of infanticide. In Chapter Six, this haunting character of the past is discussed with reference to the novel, along with the analysis of interaction between Gothic and postcolonial elements within the narrative. Furthermore, Chapter Six examines the notion of the uncanny in relation to Morrison's 1987-novel and illustrates how the process of repressing the past contributes to the formation of transgenerational trauma. The final chapter of the dissertation also highlights the importance of memory in the process of individual and collective healing.

The Ghost of Slavery and the Repressed Past

As it has already been discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis, the character of Seth's dead daughter, Beloved, embodies the spirit of slavery which holds Sethe captive to her own agonizing memories and prevents the woman from liberating herself from the horrors of her past. On the one hand, Beloved is Sethe's baby daughter whom the woman killed in order to protect the child from life under enslavement. On the other hand, though, Beloved symbolizes the repressed and tragic past of slavery which keeps haunting Sethe and prevents the woman from putting her past behind. In this context, the character of Beloved plays a double role, as she stands for "both the child killed by her mother to spare her from a life of slavery and the haunting memory of all blacks who suffered and died from slavery" (Morey 1988: 140). In other words, not only is Beloved the incarnation of Sethe's dead child, but she is also a reminder of the repressed memories from the times of slavery. The past, though, is repressed not only by Sethe but also by African Americans collectively. On the social level, the ghost of Beloved personifies the collective and traumatic past of the blacks whose lives were dramatically affected by the institution of slavery. This conclusion is drawn from Morrison's dedication of the novel to "sixty million and more" individuals who endured physical and emotional suffering during their transatlantic journey to America, known as the Middle Passage.

The double role of Beloved is also highlighted by Jean Wyatt in "Giving Body to the Word: The Maternal Symbolic in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" (1993). In Wyatt's opinion, "on the personal level, she [Beloved] is the nursing baby that Sethe killed. But in the social dimension that always doubles the personal in *Beloved*, the ghost represents—as the generic name Beloved suggests—all the loved ones lost through slavery, beginning with the Africans who died on the slave ships" (1993: 479). Wyatt also focuses on the novel's fragmented language and absence of structural boundaries, which may evoke the feelings of disorientation and dislocation among the readers. The scholar considers Morrison's strategy intentional, as it "imitates the disorientation of the Africans who were thrown into the slave ships without explanation, suspended without boundaries in time and space" (1993: 480). Deborah Horovitz offers a comparable perspective, contending that Beloved ought not to be perceived merely as a character representing Sethe's resurrected daughter. In "Nameless Ghosts: Possession and Dispossession in Beloved" (1989), Horovitz notes that while Beloved is anchored in the Suggs family, her importance is more universal, since she "stands for every African woman whose story will never be told" (1989: 157). To paraphraze, Beloved embodies the essence of

all women forcibly transported on slave ships from Africa, as well as all black women seeking to reconnect with their ancestral lineage linked to the maternal figure who suffered the horrors of the Middle Passage.

The narrative structure in *Beloved* serves as a powerful tool for expressing the deep trauma of slavery, intentionally avoiding a linear progression and opting for fragmentation instead. Toni Morrison, in her seminal essay, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken" (2019 [1989]), clearly outlines the purpose of this strategy, indicating that it aims to envelop the reader in a condition of cognitive and emotional disorientation. As Morrison explains, "the reader is snatched, yanked, thrown into an environment completely foreign […] Snatched just as the slaves were from one place to another without preparation and without defense" (2019: 195). This intentional fragmentation of the narrative serves not just as a stylistic decision but as a significant political and ethical statement. Morrison challenges traditional narrative coherence, urging readers to deeply engage with the intense psychological disruption caused by the forced removal from one's homeland, the violent break of family and community connections, and the harsh relocation into an unfriendly, foreign setting where human dignity and respect are consistently undermined. This stylistic choice goes beyond simple plot development, serving as a symbolic representation of the epistemological and ontological violence imposed by the institution of slavery.

Although the experience of slavery belongs to the past, it is essential to revive the traumatic memories, as confronting the past can facilitate transformation in the present. In the context of *Beloved*, Sethe Suggs's seemingly buried past is brought back to life with the arrival of Beloved, materialized in the form of a ghost. Later, the ghost takes a physical form of a woman with a new-born baby skin, "lineless and smooth […] flawless except for three vertical scratches on her forehead so fine and thin they seemed at first like hair, baby hair before it bloomed and roped into the masses of black yarn under the hat" (*B* 61-62). Her appearance elicits an inexplicable sensation of both familiarity and unfamiliarity in Sethe. Upon Beloved's arrival, Sethe's bladder is filled to capacity, resembling the moment of breaking waters in her pregnancy: "[a]nd for some reason she could not immediately account for, the moment she [Beloved] got close enough to see the face, Sethe's bladder filled to capacity […] Right in front of its door she had to lift her skirts, and the water she voided was endless" (*B* 61). The memory Beloved's arrival evokes in Sethe is the moment of Denver's birth when "there was no stopping water breaking from a breaking womb and there was no stopping now" (*B* 61). The initial encounter between Sethe and Beloved is depicted through

the imagery of water, suggesting that Sethe is giving rebirth to her deceased daughter, as water symbolizes amniotic fluid and the process of childbirth.

As highlighted above, the motif of water is also connected to Sethe giving birth to Denver, her youngest child. Sethe, as she crosses the Ohio River in her escape from the Sweet Home plantation, brings her child into the world with the assistance of a white girl, "Miss Amy Denver. Of Boston" (*B* 100). As Denver shares the story of her own birth with Beloved, it seems that the girl starts to grasp the struggles her mother faced:

> there is this nineteen-year-old slavegirl—a year older than herself [Denver]—walking through the dark woods to get to her children who are far away. She is tired, scared maybe, and maybe even lost. Most of all she is by herself and inside her is another baby she has to think about too. Behind her dogs, perhaps; guns probably; and certainly mossy teeth. She is not afraid at night because she is the color of it, but in the day every sound is a shot or a tracker's quiet step. (*B* 91)

Denver's awareness on how dramatic her mother's situation must have been is brought to life through Beloved, as she demands from her younger sister a very detailed account of how "Sethe made you in the boat" (*B* 90). In this context, Beloved helps Denver comprehend, to a certain extent, the magnitude of the challenges and sufferings that Sethe endured as a slave. Denver's narration of her own birth seems self-centered, though, as her main focus in sharing the story with Beloved is on herself. Denver's egocentrism is evident in the girl's response to Beloved's explanation regarding her return to 124 Bluestone Road:

> "What did you come back for?"
> Beloved smiled. "To see her face."
> "Ma'am's? Sethe's?"
> "Yes, Sethe."
> Denver felt a little hurt, slighted that she was not the main reason for Beloved's return." (*B* 88-89)

Denver's sense of rejection is further emphasized by Beloved's declaration that the only reason for her return is Sethe, as "she is the one I need. You can go but she is the one I have to have" (*B* 89). The girl's isolation and loneliness intensify when Sethe and Beloved spend more and more time together, excluding Denver from their activities (*B* 282). The reason for Denver's exclusion lies in Sethe's need to compensate Beloved for what the

woman did to her in the past. Initially, Sethe is unaware that the stranger is the apparition of her deceased daughter, whom she murdered 18 years before. As Beloved alludes to past events and poses questions to Sethe that suggest she may be Sethe's daughter, Sethe becomes increasingly convinced that Beloved is her infant daughter whom she killed to safeguard her from the horrors of slavery. One of the questions Beloved asks Sethe concerns diamonds the woman was wearing while taking care of her baby daughter. For Sethe, Beloved's inquiry, along with other references to the past (i.e., Beloved's humming a lullaby only Sethe and her children are familiar with), signifies that the girl is her deceased daughter, returned to life for Sethe to justify the reasons which led to killing her own child.

For Sethe, the past is a traumatic chapter characterized by both physical and psychological violence endured during her enslavement. Not only does she struggle to "keep the past at bay" but she also seeks to shield her youngest daughter, Denver, from it (*B* 51). Consequently, Sethe is reluctant to disclose to Denver the events that happened prior to the girl's birth. Nor does she want to return to dramatic choices she was forced to make in order to protect her children. For Sethe, the past is a closed chapter the woman struggles not to open again. In this regard, the act of "keeping the past at bay" is a daily coping mechanism that Sethe employs to maintain a relatively normal life. Despite the woman's efforts to forget her traumas, though, the past continues to haunt her. A scar on Sethe's back is one of the physical manifestations of her haunting history. The scar, which resembles a chokeberry tree with a trunk, branches, and leaves, serves as a tangible reminder and representation of the anguish which the woman endured during her time in slavery. In spite of the passage of time, Sethe is constantly reminded of unthinkable traumas she went through. The most significant manifestation of the woman's past, though, is the arrival of Beloved, the ghost of her killed daughter. Beloved's resurrection reopens the wounds of Sethe's past and stands for her hidden memories and traumas which the woman struggles to keep concealed. Sethe's initial reaction to Beloved's return, though, is positive, as the woman considers Beloved's arrival as an opportunity to justify her own actions and explain to her the reasons why she resorted to killing her own daughter. Such a viewpoint is presented by Gurleen Grewal in *Circles of Sorrow, Lines of Struggle: the Novels of Toni Morrison* (1998). Grewal suggests that Sethe's desire to believe Beloved is her deceased daughter stems from the chance it gives her to articulate her past and demonstrate her love for Beloved (1998: 111). Sethe considers the arrival of Beloved as a chance she has been waiting for for the last eighteen years—a chance to be finally forgiven and understood for the monstrous act of infanticide.

In the beginning, both Sethe and Denver enjoy the presence of Beloved—the newcomer, as "at first they played together" (*B* 282). However, the situation changes once Sethe sees Beloved's scar under her chin:

> once Sethe saw it, fingered it and closed her eyes for a long time, the two of them cut Denver out. The cooking games, the sewing games, the hair and dressing-up games. Games her mother loved so well she took to going to work later and later each day until the predictable happened: Sawyer told her not to come back. And instead of looking for another job, Sethe played all the harder with Beloved, who never got enough of anything: lullabies, new stitches, the bottom of the cake bowl, the top of the milk […] it was as though her mother had lost her mind, like Grandma Baby calling for pink and not doing the things she used to, but different because, unlike Baby Suggs, she cut Denver out completely. Even the song that she used to sing to Denver she sang for Beloved alone: "High Johnny, wide Johnny, don't you leave my side, Johhny." (*B* 281-282)

For Sethe, the scar serves as a reminder of the agonizing act she performed to protect baby Beloved from being taken to the plantation and enduring a life of enslavement. The sight of it elicits all the traumatic memories that Sethe has been suppressing for the past eighteen years. Therefore, Sethe is wholly committed to helping Beloved understand the reasons behind her act of infanticide, hoping to earn her forgiveness. However, in the process, Sethe completely loses herself in the effort to justify her past. The woman becomes increasingly preoccupied with Beloved, simultaneously denying her younger daughter, Denver. Sethe and Beloved become so focused on each other that they begin to exclude Denver from the games they used to play together: "she (Sethe) played with Beloved's hair, braiding, puffing, tying, oiling it until it made Denver nervous to watch her. […] When it became clear that they were only interested in each other, Denver began to drift from the play, but she watched it, alert for any sign that Beloved was in danger" (*B* 282-283). With time, though, Denver gradually comprehends that it is not Beloved who is in danger but it is rather her mother, Sethe. Initially, Denver is convinced that Beloved requires protection from their mother, as the girl worries that Sethe might resort to infanticide again:

> 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 […] All the time, I'm afraid the thing that happened that made it all right for my mother to kill my sister could happen again. I

> need to know what that thing might be, but I don't want to. Whatever it is, it comes from outside this house, outside the yard, and it can come right on in the yard if it wants to. (*B* 242)

However, as Denver witnesses the increasingly detrimental relationship between Sethe and Beloved, and the disrespectful behavior Beloved exhibits towards Sethe, she comes to the realization that it is her deceased sister who poses a threat to their mother: "[t]he job she [Denver] started out with, protecting Beloved from Sethe, changed to protecting her mother from Beloved […] This time I have to keep my mother from her. That's hard but I have to. It's all on me" (*B* 286, 243). As time progresses, Beloved becomes more demanding and continually accuses Sethe of abandoning her:

> [she] took the best of everything—first. The best chair, the biggest piece, the prettiest plate, the brightest ribbon for her hair, and the more she took, the more Sethe began to talk, explain, describe how much she had suffered, been through, for her children (…) none of which made the impression it was supposed to. Beloved accused her of leaving her behind. Of not being nice to her, not smiling at her. (…) and Sethe cried, saying she never did, or meant to—that she had to get them out, away, that she had the milk all the time and had the money too for the stone but not enough. That her plan was always that they would all be together on the other side, forever. Beloved wasn't interested (…) Sethe pleaded for forgiveness, counting, listing again and again her reasons: that Beloved was more important, meant more to her than her own life. That she would trade places any day. Give up her life, every minute and hour of it, to take back one of Beloved's tears. (*B* 284)

Although killing one's own child is an unforgivable crime, Sethe's case demonstrates that it can be committed in the name of love and protection. The woman's act of infanticide exemplifies the brutality of the slavery system and highlights the lengths to which female slaves would go to maintain control over their sole possession, i.e., their children. Sethe's story may be considered representative of numerous African American women who faced comparable circumstances during their enslavement. Such a perspective is presented by Marianne Hirsch in *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (1989). According to Hirsch, Sethe symbolizes generations of women who were deprived of the right to raise their own children. As Hirsch puts it, "when Sethe tries to explain to Beloved why she cut her throat, she is explaining an anger handed down through generations of mothers who

could have no control over their children's lives, no voices in their upbringing" (1989: 197). The profound anger and deep-seated rage inherited through generations of enslaved women compelled them to make unimaginable choices concerning their children's life. The unthinkable decisions they were forced to take illustrate the historical context of slavery, during which mothers often faced the dread of their children being kidnapped or subjected to brutality. What is more, the phrase "no voices in their upbringing" underscores the suppression and silencing of mothers within the institution of slavery. Frequently, their choices or acts of brutality towards their offspring were denounced and deemed barbaric in the eyes of the community. Sethe's act of infanticide, for instance, is condemned by Paul D who compares the woman to an animal, stating: "You got two feet, Sethe, not four" (*B* 194). The man fails to understand Sethe's choice, as he is convinced there must have been other way to save her daughter from slavery. Beloved as well does not understand how Sethe could abandon her and continues putting the blame on her mother. As time passes, the ghost of Beloved becomes more and more unbearable, incessantly demanding from Sethe whatever she desires. Primarily, these are tangible objects. Subsequently, after spending "the thirty-eight dollars of life savings to feed themselves with fancy food and decorate themselves with ribbon and dress goods," Sethe is incapable of providing Beloved with material sustenance (*B* 282). As a result, the ghost becomes aggressive in her demands and expects Sethe's constant presence. Sethe's efforts to elucidate the past to Beloved culminate with the ghost's aggression and irritation, as "Beloved slammed things, wiped the table clean of plates, threw salt on the floor, broke a windowpane" (*B* 285). The situation becomes more severe as Sethe and Denver have no food:

> [l]istless and sleepy with hunger Denver saw the flesh between her mother's forefinger and thumb fade. Saw Sethe's eyes bright but dead, alert but vacant, paying attention to everything about Beloved—her lineless palms, her forehead, the smile under the jaw, crooked and much too long—everything except her basket-fat stomach. She also saw the sleeves of her own carnival shirtwaist cover her fingers; hems that once showed her ankles now swept the floor. She saw themselves beribboned, decked-out, limp and starving but locked in a love that wore everybody out. (*B* 285-286)

The relationship between Sethe and Beloved becomes increasingly toxic and debilitating. Sethe's extensive explanations are futile, as the specter blames the woman for leaving her behind. Consequently, Sethe's physical and mental condition is deteriorating, as

her appearance starts to resemble that of a specter rather than a human. In this context, the mother-daughter role is inverted, as "Beloved bending over Sethe looked the mother, Sethe the teething child" (*B* 294). Even Denver finds herself confused and is unable to point who the mother and who the daughter is, since "[s]he imitated Sethe, talked the way she did, laughed her laugh and used her body the same way down to the walk, the way Sethe moved her hands, sighed through her nose, held her head" (*B* 283). Upon observing the reversal of maternal roles between Sethe and Beloved, Denver recognizes that it is not Beloved who requires protection, but Sethe. The girl realizes that the specter of her deceased sister is a real threat to both Denver and Sethe.

Beloved consumes her mother emotionally and physically, as a result of which Sethe looks ill, exhausted, as though her life was drained away. The ghost seems to thrive on her mother's deteriorating state, growing stronger, as Sethe becomes weaker:

> [t]he bigger Beloved got, the smaller Sethe became; the brighter Beloved's eyes, the more those eyes that used never to look away became slits of sleeplessness. Sethe no longer combed her hair or splashed her face with water. She sat in the chair licking her lips like a chastised child while Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it. (B 294-295)

It appears that Beloved exhibits a greedy desire for Sethe's affection and cultivates a cannibalistic hunger for her mother, as Beloved's gaze symbolically consumes Sethe: "Sethe was licked, tasted, eaten by Beloved's eyes" (*B* 68). When Beloved comes back to 124 Bluestone Road in a physical form, she lacks the ability to articulate her distressing memories. Therefore, the ghost's desire for treats and her mother's affection serves as the means of expressing her emotions. Beloved's obsession with Sethe is apparent in the following passage of the novel: "I AM BELOVED and she is mine […] I am not separate from her there is no place where I stop her face is my own and I want to be there in the place where her face is and to be looking at it too" (*B* 248). By asserting "she is mine," Beloved communicates her deep affection for Sethe. Nonetheless, Sethe's past crime of infanticide prompts Beloved to regard her with disdain. While Sethe seeks to make amends for what she did, Beloved rejects all of her mother's justifications and persists in her unpredictable and illogical behavior. What Beloved sees in her mother is "the woman who took her face away, leaving her crouching in a dark, dark place, forgetting to smile" (*B* 296). As Barbara Christian asserts in her essay, "Somebody Forgot to Tell Somebody Something: African-American Women's Historical

Novels" (1989), the metaphor of the face in the novel represents both Sethe's and Beloved's identities, as "for Beloved, her mother's face is her face and without her mother's face 'she has no face'" (18). To paraphrase, for Beloved to identify herself, it is necessary to familiarize with her mother's past and understand what forced the woman to kill her own child. However, the ghost fails to recognize the sacrifice Sethe made and instead concentrates on her mother's responsibility for her early death.

Sethe's attitudes to the past, the present and the future constitute a significant element in the study of the novel. Before Beloved's arrival, Sethe's focus was limited to the present day, since, as argued before, the past had to be kept at bay. The situation changes, though, when Beloved appears at 124 Bluestone Rode, bringing back the overwhelming past. As a result of her arrival, Sethe becomes entrenched in the past, having no interest in either the present or the future. For Beloved, the past is the subject the ghost is most intrigued by since the apparition persistently expects her mother to recount everything Sethe struggles to keep repressed. The novel's general tendency to strongly rely on narration enables the characters to revisit the past, irrespective of the pain it evokes. Maurice Halbwachs, the author of *On Collective Memory* (1992 [1950]), points out that it is through stories and storytelling that memory is brought back to life and is able to function in the minds of its listeners (38). With reference to Sethe, her stories are exclusively intended for Beloved, as the ghost's yearning for the past is so compelling and intense that Sethe feels obliged to share it with the girl. In essence, for Sethe, discussing the past is challenging and evokes sorrowful recollections. Therefore, she is hesitant to discuss it with her daughter Denver or Paul D, her Sweet Plantation friend. Her perspective on reminiscing about the past shifts, though, with the arrival of Beloved, to whom she reveals her hidden memories. In doing so, Sethe does not experience any pain or traumatic emotions. Conversely, her sharing the stories with Beloved brings the woman unexpected pleasure and relief. The reason why Sethe reveals her past is also her profound yearning to be acknowledged and understood by Beloved. In this context, Sethe's desire for Beloved's forgiveness might be interpreted as a catalyst that uncovers the woman's difficult history. The act of disclosing her so-far-hidden memories, though, ultimately proves detrimental to Sethe, as the lack of forgiveness and demanding nature of Beloved make her physically and emotionally weak.

As the narrative progresses, it becomes evident that Sethe's youngest daughter, Denver, possesses the ability to liberate Sethe from her burdensome past and is her mother's only hope to look forward to a better future. The girl represents what Marianne Hirsch refers to as the generation of postmemory, already discussed in Chapter Five of this thesis. Despite

the fact Denver did not endure the hardships of slavery firsthand, she is intentionally seeking to comprehend the circumstances of her own birth and piece together the past that Sethe withheld from her for so long. Denver's intense desire to uncover the past may arise from the girl's readiness to define her own identity. To attain this objective, she must acknowledge her and her mother's history, since "memories are central to a person's identity—to one's sense of who one is and who one might become" (Landsberg 2004: 42). Alison Landsberg, in her *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (2004), characterizes these recollections as prosthetic, defining them as those not exclusively originating from an individual's lived experience. According to Landsberg, prosthetic memories are disseminated publicly and integrate into an individual's own repository of experiences, shaping their subjectivity and influencing their interaction with both the current and future contexts (2004: 25-26). In Denver's case, her identity is established through the recollections of other community members. Prior to this, though, the girl's everyday existence is confined to the house located at 124 Bluestone Rode. The reason for her isolation is a consequence of her mother's fear of the outside world and the woman's protection of her only daughter. Therefore, Sethe deliberately keeps Denver in isolation, "[as] for Denver, the job Sethe had of keeping her from the past that was still waiting for her was all that mattered" (*B* 51). Since Denver is constantly denied the truth about Sethe's past, she feels excluded and alienated.

Denver's intense emotions erupt when Paul D visits 124 Bluestone Road. Upon his arrival, the girl becomes so overwhelmed that she begins to tremble and weep, exclaiming "I can't live here. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I can't live here. Nobody speaks to us. Nobody comes by, boys don't like me. Girls don't either" (*B* 17). With the appearance of Beloved, however, Denver's condition gradually improves, as the girl derives immense satisfaction and pleasure from caring for Beloved. For Denver, she embodies both a sisterly presence and a connection to the familial legacy and the past, so far denied to her. As Marianne Hirsch points out in "Maternity and Rememory: Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" (1994), Denver's devotion to Beloved provides the girl with the most precious thing she knows, which is the narrative of her own origin (101). It can be claimed that beyond the role of a sister, Denver assumes the maternal responsibility of nurturing the child with stories. Through her act of giving, the stories are enriched and expanded, uniting the sisters and maintaining their mutual interest.

As previously discussed, the reason for Beloved's return is not Denver, but Sethe for whom the specter exhibits a profound sense of possession: "I AM BELOVED and she is

mine" (*B* 253). Consequently, Denver becomes envious of the bond Sethe shares with Beloved and again experiences feelings of exclusion. It can be assumed that Sethe's traumatic past is what creates a rift between her and Denver. To protect Denver from the external world and out of concern that the past may resurface, Sethe refrains from disclosing the truth. It may be inferred that although Denver did not directly endure the hardships of slavery, her existence is profoundly influenced by her mother's turbulent history, as she appears to live in the shadow of Sethe's suppressed past. In this regard, Denver is likewise a victim of the violent history of slavery.

In her discussion of trauma in Morrison's *Beloved* and *Paradise*, Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber argues that Denver can be identified as a second-generation survivor of deep, systemic trauma. Schreiber outlines the widespread impact of this trauma on Denver's life, highlighting its complex origins: "trauma pervades Denver's being: her traumatic birth during Sethe's escape; the traumatic return of schoolteacher and her sister's murder" (2010: 48). This statement reflects not only Sethe's traumatic past but also the way fear and disruption are passed down through generations, making Denver a powerful representation of slavery's lasting impact on future generations. The scholar also focuses on a generational character of trauma and its transmission which consequently "produces a cultural history that cannot be forgotten despite the will to repress it or dissociate from it" (2010: 32). This viewpoint highlights how the unresolved legacy of historical atrocities, especially the trauma associated with slavery, becomes ingrained in the cultural subconscious, exerting a continuous, often subtle, impact. In *Beloved*, Sethe's intentional choice to withhold the past from Denver arises from the woman's protective maternal instinct. Nonetheless, as indicated by Schreiber, this act of suppression unintentionally sustains the trauma's intensity, as the inability to confront and express the traumatic past does not lessen its effects. Instead, it solidifies its presence, depriving those affected of the essential chance for healing and understanding. This avoidance, rather than protecting individuals or communities, leaves cultures marked by slavery or other atrocities unable to achieve genuine healing.

Building upon the critical imperative of engaging with traumatic histories, the significance of active confrontation with trauma is further underscored by Sandra Bloom. According to the psychiatrist, a genuine and lasting rehabilitation is fundamentally connected to a holistic engagement with the deep "spiritual, philosophical, and/or religious context—and conflicts—of human experience" (1999: 12). Bloom's statement emphasizes that trauma affects not just psychological or emotional aspects but also the essential existential frameworks that humans use to understand their life. Moreover, Bloom underscores the role

of narrative in the rehabilitation process, as "for healing to occur, we know that people often need to put the experience into a narrative, give it words, and share it with themselves and others" (1999: 6). The process of narrativization is not only descriptive, as it is also reconstructive. It enables individuals to impose order and meaning on chaotic and overpowering events, since by articulating the trauma through language, victims can commence the process of assimilating these experiences into a cohesive chronology. As Bloom asserts, "[w]ords allow us to put things into a time sequence—past, present, future" (1999: 6). This chronological sequencing is essential, as it allows the traumatic event to be relocated from an incessantly repeated present to a specified past, so establishing the psychological distance for healing.

As it has already been discussed, Sethe's reluctance to share the past with Denver stems from the woman's desire to protect her daughter. Out of protection, though, Sethe projects the fear for the outside world on the girl, as a result of which Denver internalizes her mother's anxieties. According to Ilany Kogan, the author of "The Second Generation in the Shadow of Terror" (2018), such internalization is what the scholar recognizes as "primitive identification." From Kogan's viewpoint, primitive identification denotes the child's unconscious absorption of parental projections, resulting in a diminished sense of individual identity and an incapacity to distinguish between the self and the disturbed parent (2018: 7). Within the framework of *Beloved*, Sethe's fears and anxieties are mirrored in Denver who develops similar emotions in herself and becomes uncertain about and scared of the future. Denver also exhibits anxiety in the presence of her mother, fearing that Sethe will kill her as well. In this context, the past of her mother haunts Denver and shapes the girl's vision of the world which the girl perceives as a hostile environment to be avoided: "124 and the field behind it were all the world she knew or wanted" (*B* 119).

What is more, Denver's and Sethe's perception of the world is strongly shaped by Baby Suggs who, on her deathbed, warns them against white people, claiming "there was no bad luck in the world but whitepeople" (*B* 122). With all the fears and warnings projected on Denver, the girl becomes a second-generation victim. The incident which illustrates how Sethe's dark past influences the girl's existence occurs when Denver is confronted with a question regarding Sethe's jail time. The question is posed by Denver's classmate, Nelson Lord: "Didn't your mother get locked for murder? Wasn't you in there with her when she went?" (*B* 123). Upon hearing this, Denver loses her sense of hearing for two years, living "in a silence too solid for penetration" (*B* 121). Her reaction to the boy's question can be interpreted as a manifestation of denial and psychological repression concerning the

revelations about her mother's past. The apparent contradiction in Denver's response, though, lies in her general willingness to uncover the truth about her mother's past. However, when faced with the question from Nelson Lord, she loses her hearing and withdraws from any social interaction or education, as "it was Nelson Lord—the boy as smart as she was—who put a stop to it; who asked her the question about her mother that put chalk, the little *i* and all the rest that those afternoons held, out of reach forever […] But the thing that leapt up in her when he asked it was a thing that had been lying there all along" (*B* 120-121).

The question prompts in Denver a fear around the revelation of Sethe's past, as "she was too scared to ask her brothers or anyone else Nelson Lord's question because certain odd and terrifying feelings about her mother were collecting around the thing that leaps up inside her" (*B* 121). When the girl finally finds the courage to ask the question concerning Sethe's crime, she is unable to hear the answers, neither from Sethe nor from Baby Suggs. In this context, Denver's loss of hearing may be perceived as a protective mechanism designed to prevent the girl from uncovering the truth. Denver may subconsciously fear discovering the truth about her mother. Therefore, she establishes a system that shields her from learning the truth about the past. Her ability to hear, though, restores with the emergence of "the crawling-already? baby girl" who turns out to be the apparition of Denver's deceased sister and who later manifests herself as an adult lady, Beloved: "[t]he return of Denver's hearing, cut off by an answer she could not bear to hear, cut on by the sound of her dead sister trying to climb the stairs, signaled another shift in the fortunes of the people of 124. From then on the presence was full of spite" (*B* 122).

"124 was spiteful"—The Haunted House on Bluestone Road

With the arrival of the baby ghost, the 124 Bluestone Road house becomes a dark and gloomy place, "full of a baby's venom. The women in the house knew it and so did the children" (*B* 3, 199). A dark nature of the house is highlighted by the first lines of part one and part two of the novel, stating that "124 was spiteful," "124 was loud" (*B* 3). The lines clearly indicate that the house is personified and exhibits distinct traits and character. Viewed in this context, 124 Bluestone Road assumes the qualities of a fictional character, possessing its own identity and mood. For instance, Denver perceives it "as a person rather than a structure. A person that wept, sighed, trembled and fell into fits" (*B* 35). However, it is essential to emphasize that the house's metamorphosis from an inanimate structure to a personified character of the narrative occurs when the infant ghost manifests on the stairs of the house, transforming 124 into a

haunted place. Prior to the "haunting transformation" which the house undergoes, 124 Bluestone Road is a typical Cincinnati residence, initially inhabited by a white family of the Bodwins. Later on, the house is rented by them to Baby Suggs who resides there after being released from slavery. Initially, 124 becomes a safe haven for Baby Suggs, Sethe, and other slave runaways, for it is 124 Bluestone Road to where Baby Suggs goes after gaining her freedom. It is also a safe location for Sethe and her children after the woman's escape from the Sweet Home plantation.

As Carol E. Schmudde states in "The Haunting of 124" (1992), 124 offers Sethe an evolving sense of her identity as a woman (414). In the 28 days of her freedom, prior to the arrival of slave hunters, 124 is a safe shelter for the woman and her children. The 28 days of Sethe's unslaved life is the time "of healing, ease and real-talk. Days of company: knowing the names of forty, fifty other Negroes, their views, habits […] One taught her the alphabet; another a stitch. All taught her how it felt to wake up at dawn and decide what to do with the day" (*B* 111). At the same time, though, 124 becomes a tragic place which witnesses Sethe's act of infanticide and her capture by Schoolteacher and his nephews. After Sethe's release from the jail house, the woman comes back to 124. The location, however, bears no resemblance to its former state:

> [b]efore 124 and everybody in it had closed down, veiled over and shut away; before it had become the plaything of spirits and the home of the chafed, 124 had been a cheerful, buzzing house where Baby Suggs, holy, loved, cautioned, fed, chastised and soothed […] Strangers rested there while children tried on their shoes. Messages were left there, for whoever needed them was sure to stop in one day soon. (*B* 101-102)

There are no visitors to 124 Bluestone Road as there used to be, since people turned their backs on Sethe after the woman's crime of infanticide. Furthermore, the local people of Cincinnati are also concerned about the presence of a specter who resides at 124 and haunts its inhabitants. As stated before, the eerie essence of 124 Bluestone Road and the existence of a ghost are readily deduced from the opening lines of the novel. At the very beginning of the narrative, one encounters an unsettling and malicious supernatural force which transforms 124 into a malevolent environment, prompting some of its residents to flee:

> 124 WAS SPITEFUL. Full of baby's venom. The women in the house knew it and so did the children. For years each put up with the spite in his own way, but by 1873

> Sethe and her daughter Denver were its only victims. The grandmother, Baby Suggs, was dead, and the sons, Howard and Buglar, had run away by the time they were thirteen years old—as soon as merely looking in a mirror shattered it (that was the signal for Buglar); as soon as two tiny hand prints appeared in the cake (that was it for Howard). Neither boy waited to see more […] Each one fled at once. (*B* 3)

The passage offers an introduction to the eerie atmosphere that permeates 124 Bluestone Road. The word "spiteful" implies that the house itself is a manifestation of the resentment, suffering, and trauma. All of its spitefulness is reflected in the way the house behaves, which is nearly like that of a living being. The source of its spitefulness is a ghost of Sethe's baby girl whom the woman killed 18 years before. All the residents of 124 are aware of the ghost's presence and the rage it develops towards Sethe and other members of the Suggs family. As a result of "baby's venom" and fury, Sethe and Denver become the only residents of 124, since Sethe's sons run away, not being able to stand the presence of "a little old baby that could harbor so much rage" (*B* 5). The term "victims" used in the passage above highlights the oppressive nature of the ghost. As the infant ghost cannot articulate its anger verbally, having died at the age of two, it resorts to actions to convey rage, violence, and hatred. Consequently, its wrath manifests through the spilling of objects or the destruction of furniture.

The reason for the ghost's presence at 124 is its desire to remind Sethe of her traumatic past—the past which is too agonizing to remember, yet, too excruciating to forget. The return of the baby ghost and the anger it expresses towards Sethe and her family may be interpreted as the ghost's revenge for what Sethe did in the past. The matter of revenge is discussed by Roberto Speziale-Bagliacca in *Guilt: Revenge, Remorse, and Responsibility after Freud* (2004). According to the scholar, an individual who has endured suffering at the hand of another person can seek retribution, assert his rights, and request justice. Nevertheless, to do so, blame must be assigned to someone, as this is what revenge requires (2004: 51). In *Beloved*, Sethe's guilt arises from the trauma of infanticide, epitomized by her deceased two-year-old daughter, Beloved, who subsequently returns from the dead as an adult woman. Sethe is consumed by guilt, which prompts her to urgently elucidate and rationalize her actions to her daughter. The woman does so in order to attain forgiveness and alleviate the burden of her crime. While Sethe's sons, Howard and Buglar, choose to leave 124 due to their frustration with the spirit's presence and aggressive conduct, Sethe opts to remain in the house. She tries to justify the baby ghost's acts of fury, as the infant "wasn't even two years

old when she died. Too little to understand. Too little to talk much even" (*B* 5). Sethe's attempt to rationalize the ghost's violent behavior may result from her willingness to understand the spirit, whom the woman calls sad and lonely rather than evil. Furthermore, Sethe's choice to remain in the house which is haunted by the specter can be interpreted as her self-imposed punishment for the crime she committed. For Sethe, her guilt is a factor which legitimizes and justifies the haunting and the baby's violent behavior. In other words, Sethe believes she deserves the punishment and, therefore, lets the ghost stay at 124. Such interpretation is suggested by Kathleen Brogan in *Cultural Haunting: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature* (1998). In Brogan's view, it is Sethe's guilt that grants the baby ghost the right to inhabit the house and haunt the Suggs family (1998: 7). In this context, Sethe can be viewed as a martyr of her own history, evoked by the spirit of her daughter. When discussing Sethe's guilt, though, it is crucial to notice the duality in the woman's way of thinking. While she is consumed by the guilt, she is also certain that killing her own child was the right choice and the only way to save her baby daughter. By murdering her daughter, though, she violates the conventional definition of motherhood and acts in opposition to the natural inclinations expected of a mother.

When Paul D arrives at 124, the climate of oppression changes, as the man manages to cast the baby ghost away. Before it happens, though, he is also disturbed by the spirit and senses the presence of the supernatural force upon his attempt to enter 124: "Paul D tied his shoes together, hung them over his shoulders and followed her [Sethe] through the door straight into a pool of red and undulating light that locked him where he stood" (*B* 10). Despite Sethe's claims about the spirit's unthreatening nature, Paul D senses its evil character. Consequently, he assumes a protective role over the woman and her daughter and attempts to establish authority over the ghost, as he casts it away: "[…] it was gone now. Whooshed away in the blast of a hazelnut's shout […] With a table and a loud male voice he had rid 124 of its claim to local fame" (*B* 45). Since Paul D is also a survivor of the atrocities of slavery, his encounters and interactions with the infant specter emphasize the man's personal battles with trauma and recollection. However, the man, in contrast to Sethe, aspires to separate himself from the traumatic events of the past and establish a fulfilling life that is unaffected by the trauma of slavery. His strong desire for a new and happy life with Sethe is demonstrated in the following passage:

> Sethe, if I'm here with you, with Denver, you can go anywhere you want. Jump, if you want to, 'cause I'll catch you, girl. I'll catch you 'fore you fall. […] I been in territory

> ain't got no name, never staying nowhere long. But when I got here and sat out there on the porch, waiting for you, well, I knew it wasn't the place I was heading toward; it was you. We can make a life girl. A life. (*B* 55)

Paul D's assertion to Sethe, "I'll catch you, girl," underscores the man's role as both a pillar of stability and reassurance in the woman's life. His declaration to support Sethe and Denver signifies his profound emotional bond and a dedication to assisting her in confronting the challenges of their shared past. In this context, the man's attitude underscores the importance of relationships in the process of healing after a traumatic event and the value of mutual support in confronting the ghosts of the past. What is more, by saying "you can go anywhere you want," Paul D gives Sethe hope for a fresh start and a life of liberation from the burden of slavery. His declaration, "We can make a life girl," implies that despite their traumatic histories, they can forge a significant life rooted in love and trust. Furthermore, Paul D aspires for both of them to focus on the future rather than to dwell on the past, as "he wants to put his story next to hers," since they have endured more than anyone else and require "some kind of tomorrow" (*B* 322). His perspective on the traumatic past diverges significantly from Sethe's: the man seeks to transcend all trauma and progress forward while for Sethe, there is no tomorrow and no future, as she keeps blaming herself for the sins of her past.

Rememory and the Past Reincarnated

Despite Paul D's success in dispelling the specter of Sethe's daughter, it resurfaces later in a physical form of an adult woman. The daughter's spiritual manifestation as a baby ghost undergoes transformation and changes into a material and tangible character of Beloved. Nevertheless, as A. Timothy Spaulding puts it in his article, "Ghosts, Haunted Houses, and the Legacy of Slavery: Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and the Gothic Impulse" (2005), "Beloved exists in a state of perpetual liminality, caught between slavery and the present moment of social (and narrative) reconstruction, between the spirit and the material world, between the real and the imaginary" (70). In other words, Beloved is suspended between two dimensions, i.e., the tangible and intangible one, thereby, possessing both spiritual and physical features. Her suspension between these two realms is evidenced by her fragmented nature and absence of bodily cohesion:

> [p]ieces of her would drop maybe one at a time, maybe all at once. Or on one of those mornings before Denver woke and after Sethe left she would fly apart. It is difficult keeping her head on her neck, her legs attached to her hips when she is by herself. Among the things she could not remember was when she first knew that she could wake up any day and find herself in pieces. She had tow dreams: exploding, and being swallowed. When her tooth came out—an odd fragment, last in the row—she thought it was starting. (*B* 157)

From the aforementioned passage, it can be concluded that Beloved's physical fragmentation confirms her existence in the material world. Nonetheless, it concurrently presents the risk of her body melting and losing cohesion, resembling a hybrid of a human and a specter. As regards the reason for Beloved's second return, it lies in Paul D's exorcism of the baby ghost, which serves as the catalyst for Beloved's corporeal manifestation. In this context, Beloved's return may be perceived as an act of vengeance against Paul D and Sethe and her strong endeavor to possess her mother. When Sethe realizes that the woman who appears on the doorstep of 124 Bluestone Road is her daughter, she is convinced that the resurrection of Beloved is the woman's chance to be finally forgiven and understood. She hopes for Beloved to comprehend that Sethe's act of infanticide was an effort to shield her from the humiliation of being regarded as a mere biological specimen by Schoolteacher. Beloved, however, haunts the woman as retribution for her history and prevents Sethe from forgetting her past. From a psychoanalytical perspective, the arrival of Beloved symbolizes the return of the repressed that must be resurrected, as the only way to overcome and accept the trauma is to face it.

According to Michael Kreyling, the author of "'Slave life; freed life-everyday was a test and trial': Identity and Memory in *Beloved*" (2007), rememory is "a process not just attempting to record past events in the order in which they occurred, but to rethink them into the advancing present" (126-127). To paraphrase, rememory shapes the present and allows the retrieval of prior experiences to integrate memories into the current context. Therefore, its nature is dynamic and fluid, as the prefix "re" denotes its repeating quality (Hirsch 2002: 75). Moreover, as Marianne Hirsch clarifies in "Marked by Memory: Feminist Reflections on Trauma and Transmission," "rememory" functions as both a noun and a verb. As a noun, it refers to the memory itself; yet, as a verb, it indicates the process of remembering (2002: 74). Consequently, it can be inferred that "rememory" is a fusion of these two terms, a hybrid which coins the ability to remember with the concept of memory. Furthermore, when

examining the notion of rememory from a collective standpoint, it is intricately linked to the category of cultural memory (Bal 1999: vii). The relationship between rememory and cultural memory pertains to their perspectives on the past and present, as both emphasize the importance of historical events in shaping contemporary experiences. As Mieke Bal states in the Introduction to *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (1999), cultural memory is "an activity occurring in the present, in which the past is continuously modified and redescribed even as it continues to shape the future" (1999: vii). What Bal highlights in the quote is a dynamic character of cultural memory which is not a static recall of past events, but a continuous process that influences both the present and the future. In other words, cultural memory evolves gradually in response to new facts, conclusions, and cultural transformations. Its dynamism lies in the fact that a culture's recollection and interpretation of its past is perpetually occurring in the present which is shaped by contemporary situations and viewpoints. Therefore, its fluidity enables societies to reconsider historical events by including present values and perspectives. As a result, the perception or understanding of past events may undergo changes. Similarly, through rememory, the present can modify the past, providing a new perspective and a different conclusion.

With reference to *Beloved*, the word rememory emphasizes the text's focus on the challenges of the mind in relation to time. In a conversation between Sethe and Denver, the woman elaborates on her perception of time and rememory, stating that

> [if] a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world […] Some day you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it's you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else. (*B* 43).

The passage implies the enduring effect of memories and underscores the distinction between them and temporary, physical reality. While physical objects may be destroyed, memories persist. Another conclusion drawn from the quote indicates that memories are not limited to personal experiences, as they exist inside a communal framework, indicating that memories can be shared and experienced collectively. This suggests the concept of collective memory, in which individual experiences are interconnected with a broader history of the community. Furthermore, rememory transforms the abstract, psychological past into a

tangible and physical reality, embodied by the character of Beloved. Her arrival transposes old memories into the present, causing the trauma to be re-experienced by Sethe.

As A. Timothy Spaulding notices in his article "Ghosts, Haunted Houses, and the Legacy of Slavery: Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and the Gothic Impulse" (2005), Morrison's incorporation of rememory as a pivotal notion in the novel transforms Beloved from an unstable and ambiguous symbol of slavery into a tangible manifestation of the past within the present. Regarded as the manifestation of Sethe's rememory, Beloved, functioning as both a signifier and a character, starts to attain coherence and singularity. She embodies not merely the materialization of Sethe's unconscious, but rather the tangible remnant of slavery manifesting in the present (Spaulding 2005: 73). Beloved's arrival in a corporeal form, in contrast to her ghostly presence in a form of a baby, denotes a transition from a spectral haunting to a tangible confrontation with the legacy of slavery and its repercussions (Spaulding 2005: 68). Her reappearance is an important turn for Sethe, prompting the woman to change her approach to the terrible past she has experienced and face it in the present. Moreover, Spaulding claims that "[i]nstead of an abstract, invisible force that wreaks havoc on the unsuspecting inhabitants of the house, Beloved assumes the role of a character in the text, one whose presence all the other characters accept as real" (2005: 68). The scholar highlights the fact that Beloved is not only a mere manifestation of Sethe's personal desire to suppress her history. In Spaulding's view, Beloved serves as an embodiment of a collective or cultural unconscious, significantly influencing the lives of other characters in the narrative (2005: 69). Such is the case with Denver and Paul D, whom the reemergence of Beloved influences considerably. For Denver, not only does Beloved represent a link to the past which Sethe fails to articulate to her younger daughter, but the woman also stands for the external world to which the girl lacks access. Denver also realizes that Beloved is not only her dead sister coming back to life, as she believes Beloved embodies a broader significance. At the end of the narrative, when asked by Paul D whether Beloved was her sister, the girl responds: "At times. At times I think she was—more" (*B* 314). The girl's answer may indicate Denver's maturity and comprehension of the true significance of Beloved's resurrection. The girl finally understands that the arrival of Beloved is her opportunity to step out of 124 Bluestone Road and open up to the outer world. For Paul D, on the other hand, Beloved serves as a medium to open "his little tobacco tin" which the man closed a long time before. The tin is a metaphor of Paul D's traumatic and repressed history, encompassing the physical and emotional anguish, shame, and torment the man endured as a black slave. In order to move forward, he confines the past within a tobacco tin in his heart and intends to never open it

again. Beloved's arrival, though, provides Paul D with the opportunity to unseal the "rusted shut" tin and express the emotions the man has long suppressed.

The concept of rememory is also discussed by Marianne Hirsch in her "Maternity and Rememory: Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" (1994). In the essay, the scholar asserts that "memory and forgetting are replaced by the strange third option Morrison calls rememory: repetition + memory, not simply a recollection of the past, but its return, its representation, its re-incarnation, and thereby the re-vision of memory itself" (1994: 107). According to Hirsch, it is through Sethe's rememory that Denver, Paul D, and other members of the African American community in Cincinnati, Ohio, are compelled to confront Beloved, who is alluring, yet frightening. Beloved embodies the recollection of slavery and the enduring presence of the past. Its presence, however, does not overpower or obliterate, but can be tolerated, so that the characters of the narrative are able to move on (Hirsch 1994: 106-107). Furthermore, as discussed before, the discourse surrounding the character of Beloved should not be confined solely to Beloved as an embodiment of Sethe's deceased daughter. In a broader context, Beloved stands for a materialized representation of slavery, symbolizing the "sixty million and more" of Africans who suffered the Middle Passage and the atrocities of slavery.

The name Beloved is also significant, as it is generic in nature and implies the loss of all loved ones as a consequence of slavery, beginning with the Africans who perished on the slave ships (Wyatt 1993: 479). The collective anguish and a traumatic experience of The Middle Passage are illustrated in the following fragment of the novel:

> All of it is now it is always now there will never be a time when I am not crouching and watching others who are crouching too I am always crouching the man on my face is dead his face is not mine his mouth smells sweet but his eyes are locked some who eat nasty themselves I do not eat the man without skin bring us their morning water to drink we have none at night I cannot see the dead man on my face daylight comes through the cracks and I can see his locked eyes I am not big small rats do not wait for us to sleep someone is trashing but there is no room to do it in if we had more to drink we could make tears we cannot make sweat or morning water so the men without skin bring us theirs […] in the beginning the women are away from the men and the men are away from the women storms rock us and mix the men into the women and the women into the men. (*B* 248, 250)

The passage is Beloved's stream of consciousness which emphasizes the woman's sense of disorientation. Its fragmentary nature and the absence of punctuation serve as indicators of her confusion. The reason why the linguistic structure of the passage is visually fragmented and disconnected is to evoke the memories and sensations of the Middle Passage. In the view of Jean Wyatt, the disorientation Beloved undergoes is reminiscent of the confusion experienced by the Africans "who were thrown into the slave ships without explanation, suspended without boundaries in time and space" (1993: 480). Furthermore, the passage is replete with symbolism and imagery, reflecting the trauma experienced by Africans who were captured and transported to a new continent on board the ship. The first line of the fragment emphasizes the timeless nature of trauma, implying that the painful past is continuously present, making it hard for its victims to forget it and move forward. With regard to the sense of community and shared trauma, they are underscored by the reference to crouching, both individual and collective, which symbolizes fear and oppression of the Africans during their transport to America. What is more, the unstable environment of the enslaved is further illustrated in the imagery of storms, which indicates unpredictability of the whole situation. As the storm symbolizes chaos, instability, and danger, such is the condition of the enslaved Africans. The aforementioned passage also illustrates the significance of Beloved, as it presents her as "a woman who has herself suffered the horrors of slavery" (House 1990: 17). In this context, Beloved is the embodiment of slavery and the materialization of the history of African Americans. She also illustrates the importance of the past in shaping the present, as it is essential to recover the unwritten history of African Americans and confront it. In other words, understanding the past is crucial for altering the present, overcoming the trauma, and moving forward without the burden of what happened before.

In the two chapters proceeding Beloved's stream of consciousness, there are declarations of Sethe and Denver delineating Beloved's identity for each woman. For Sethe, "BELOVED, she is my daughter. She mine. See. She come back to me of her free will and I don't have to explain a thing" (*B* 236). Sethe articulates her sense of ownership repeatedly in the monologue, as for the woman, the matter of possession is crucial. Being a slave, she was stripped of all rights, including the most fundamental right a mother can conceive, i.e., the right to her own children. Consequently, her assertion that Beloved is hers underscores the woman's profound desire for maternal ownership of her child. What is more, the fact that the tenses are intermingled and there is an absence of linearity may be explained as Sethe's confusion with reference to time and the woman's profound yearning to convey her maternal

love and affection for Beloved. Another explanation for Sethe's disorientation with time may lie in Sethe's urgency to rationalize her past actions that culminated in the infanticide. As regards Denver, the girl also articulates her connection to Beloved, similarly to Sethe, asserting that "BELOVED is my sister. I swallowed her blood right along with my mother's milk" (*B* 242). In contrast to her mother, though, Denver does not emphasize the strong desire for Beloved's possession. The reason why the issue of possession over Beloved is not significant to Denver may be accounted for by the fact that the girl was born out of the circle of slavery, not experiencing directly the atrocities of the institution. Instead, the girl expresses her fears and doubts concerning who the real threat at 124 Bluestone Road is: her mother or her sister.

Toni Morrison's application of stream of consciousness extends beyond the character of Beloved. The novelist also employs this technique with reference to Sethe and Denver. In the chapter following Beloved's stream of consciousness, the voices of the protagonists mix. At the beginning of the chapter, Beloved recalls peaceful times of her mother picking flowers, trying to smile at the girl. Later, however, the woman is abducted by men without skin, enslaved and transported abroad the ship with other Africans:

> Sethe is the one that picked flowers, yellow flowers in the place before the crouching […] She was about to smile at me when the men without skin came and took us up into the sunlight with the dead and shoved them into the sea […]. She was getting ready to smile at me when she saw the dead people pushed into the sea she went also and left me there with no face of hers. […] Three times I lost her: once with the flowers because of the noisy clouds of smoke; once when she went into the sea instead of smiling at me; once under the bridge when I went in to join her and she came toward me but did not smile. (B 253-254)

In this passage, Sethe's character plays a crucial role, serving as a powerful representation of the collective trauma endured by numerous African mothers who were forcibly taken from their ancestral lands and violently separated from their children during the transatlantic slave trade. Her difficult situation illustrates the systematic disintegration of family units under the oppressive institution of slavery. Simultaneously, the presence of Beloved surpasses her immediate identity as Sethe's resurrected daughter. Beloved also serves as a powerful emblem for the numerous children whose parents were violently abducted, enslaved, and subsequently deprived of their fundamental right to parenthood. This

dual symbolism endows both characters with symbolic significance, enabling Morrison to express the extensive, intergenerational suffering caused by slavery.

Subsequently in the chapter, the protagonists' voices manifest in a form of a dialogue which is devoid of punctuation. Jean Wyatt posits that the strategy of omitting punctuation allows the sentence of each participant to be influenced by the sentence of the subsequent speaker (1993: 481). Wyatt also notes the similarity of their dialogue to that of a mother and infant, characterized by a mutual desire to confirm each other's presence and identity (1993: 481). In other words, the necessity for validation helps to establish a sense of security and a feeling of mutual possession among the women. The dialogue in its structure is reminiscent of a poem, as the voices of the protagonists alternate, reflecting and reproducing each other in a manner that enables the identification of the individual:

> Beloved
> You are my sister
> You are my daughter
> You are my face; you are me
> I have found you again; you have come back to me
> You are my Beloved
> You are mine
> You are mine
> You are mine (*B* 255-256)

The passage underscores the protagonists' thirst for possession: while Beloved desires to possess Sethe exclusively, Sethe and Denver both wish to have Beloved for themselves. What illustrates the women's profound yearning to reclaim Beloved is the repeated use of "You are mine." The phrases "You are my sister," "You are my daughter," and "You are my face; you are me" also play a crucial part in the narrative, since they underscore the complex dimensions of Beloved's identity. She is not merely a child demanding maternal recompense but also a symbolic sibling, representing the generational trauma shared among women, and indeed, a mirror reflecting the fragmented and tormented selves of Sethe and Denver.

Postcolonial and Gothic—Hybrid Nature of *Beloved*

The classification of *Beloved* is intricate and layered, as the novel blends elements from multiple literary genres, thereby defying a straightforward categorization. It is deeply rooted in historical context, drawing inspiration from the true story of Margaret Garner. As a result, *Beloved* can be placed within the domain of historical fiction, as it weaves together historically grounded events and themes to reflect the lived experiences of enslaved Africans. At the same time, the novel's deep emphasis on the trauma of slavery positions it squarely within the genre of the slave narrative, a form historically employed to detail the brutality, resistance, and resilience linked to enslaved individuals. In addition to these classifications, the novel integrates Gothic elements, including the presence of ghosts, haunted houses, and spectral apparitions, which contribute to a unique atmosphere in the narrative. These elements represent the enduring and pervasive legacy of slavery and trauma, along with the psychological wounds carried by its victims. Moreover, *Beloved* reveals distinct postcolonial characteristics with its focus on the overlooked African American slave community. By articulating the traumatic history of slavery, it dismantles the prevailing worldview that sustains racial hierarchies and marginalizes the voices of the oppressed.

With regard to academic categorization of *Beloved*, A. Timothy Spaulding claims that the novel is a postmodern slave narrative which employs the Gothic genre in order to broaden the scope of the original slave narrative and traditional history. Spaulding elucidates that the hybridization of genres enables the confrontation of issues that were obscured and ignored in a mainstream literary discourse (2005: 61). Spaulding's point of view is shared by Yogita Goyal in her article "Black Diaspora Literature and the Question of Slavery" (2016). Goyal classifies *Beloved* as a neoslave narrative, since its function is to "generate a fuller consciousness of the past through the transmission of memory in the present" (2016: 148). In other words, it aims to cultivate a deeper awareness of the past by conveying memory in the present. Goyal also contends that although historical accounts offer the truth regarding the institution of slavery, neoslave narratives in general are a form of imaginative literature which encapsulates the emotions and thoughts of the enslaved (2016: 150).

Another argument proving the hybrid nature of the novel is its categorization as a postcolonial Gothic narrative, symbolically depicting a hidden history and repressed traumatic memories of slaves through the incorporation of Gothic motifs. In contrast to white American Gothic writers who projected their own faults, failures, and suppressed desires onto the black slave body, Toni Morrison uses Gothic themes to challenge monstrous representations of the

blacks in literature. The novelist, like other African American writers, aims to challenge the dominant literary narrative that stigmatizes the blacks as othered, excluded, and invisible. As a postcolonial scholar, Morrison vocalizes what has previously been silenced and suppressed and demarginalizes the experience of the colonized by giving them voice in her narratives. The argument about the novel's demarginalization and vocalization of the silenced is supported by Ruth van den Akker in her 2013-article, "Hush, Little Baby-Ghost: The Postcolonial Gothic and Haunting History in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*." In the paper, the scholar examines the interaction between Gothic and postcolonial elements in the novel and concludes that the integration of both genres facilitates the articulation of the unspeakable and brings forth a previously silenced history of slavery (2013: 1). Morrison's incorporation of Gothic elements in the narrative is deliberate, as the author constructs an alternative depiction of slavery. Its alternative character is evident in Morrison's exploration of the structural aspects of the Gothic novel while compelling the readers to redirect their attention from fantastical elements, such as the haunted house and the ghost, to the authentic Gothic components of the text: slavery and its systematic perpetuators (Spaulding 2005: 63). To paraphrase, the Gothic elements in *Beloved* do not arise from the otherworldly. Their source is atrocities of slavery, such as violence, oppression, and cruelty inflicted on the blacks.

Introducing Gothic aspects to postcolonial narratives enables the representation of alternative perspectives and challenges the hegemonic discourse by giving voice to the silenced. Gina Wisker, in her article "Crossing Liminal Spaces: Teaching the Postcolonial Gothic" (2007), discusses the impact of integrating the two genres, asserting that "the postcolonial Gothic reinhabits and reconfigures, it reinstates and newly imagines ways of being, seeing, and expressing from the points of view of and using some of the forms of people whose experiences and expressions have, as Toni Morrison puts it, largely been unheard of and even discredited" (2007: 401-402). It is also crucial to emphasize that history is a critical component of both postcolonial and gothic literature, as both disciplines are distinguished by their reference to the past and its ongoing influence on the present. David Punter, in "Arundhati Roy and the House of History" (2003), discusses the haunting nature of history and its active impact on the present, claiming that "the threat of return" defines both postcolonial and gothic narratives (2003: 193). In case of *Beloved*, the novel integrates "the return of the repressed" in the form of haunting history which keeps the past present, highlighting the narrative's postcolonial and Gothic character. The infanticide, the haunted house at 124 Bluestone Road, and the presence of the ghost constitute the Gothic essence of the narrative. However, these Gothic characteristics are merely a method which enables the

repressed past to resurface in the present (Akker 2013: 4). This repressed past is presented from the point of view of the silenced who are finally granted the right to speak. By allowing her protagonists to express their previously suppressed and neglected experience of slavery, Morrison offers a counterpoint to traditional hegemonic narratives written from a colonial perspective. Therefore, as Kwang Soon Kim claims in "The Location of Black Identity in Toni Morrison's Fiction" (2010), *Beloved* can be analyzed via the lens of postcolonial theory, which critiques Western cultural dominance, affirms marginalized subjectivities, and depicts the daily experiences of oppressed individuals (2010: 3).

Despite the fact *Beloved* begins as a typical Gothic story, with mysterious and gloomy surroundings and the presence of the supernatural, the convention of the Gothic genre is just a tool in Morrison's hands to express African American heritage and make a connection between the past and the present. In the novel, as illustrated before, the force which links the past to the present and enables the formulation of the future is the ghost of Beloved. Morrison's incorporation of the ghost is intentional, as it enables the characters to confront and reconcile with their repressed history. However, not only is the confrontation with the difficult past individual, but it is also collective. The ghost of Beloved transitions between two distinct categories of the past: the personal past of each character and the collective past of African Americans. In this context, the novel is not just a narrative of an individual experience, but rather "the story of cultural haunting." Kathleen Brogan, in *Cultural Haunting: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature* (1998), asserts that the narratives composed by African American authors constitute a new genre in American literature, known as the stories of cultural haunting. Cultural dimension of these narratives lies in their objective to resurrect the collective traumas of African Americans and to reflect on the past, so that one could live the present and move on to the future. As Brogan explains, "cultural ghost stories, which feature the haunting of people by ghosts of its own past, represent one way a group actively revises its relationship to the past" (1998: 174). In this regard, narratives of cultural haunting are distinct from conventional ghost stories, as they emphasize a shared history and collective memory. Brogan further elucidates that the incorporation of Gothic elements into narratives is deliberate, as the transition to the Gothic reconstructs history and prevents it from fading into obscurity. In her view, "through the agency of ghosts, group histories that have in some way been threatened, erased, or fragmented are recuperated and revised" (1998: 5-6). Since the ghost of Beloved embodies the atrocities of slavery, its arrival resurrects the traumatic past of African Americans collectively.

Jenny Sharpe, in *A Literary Archaeology of Black Women's Lives* (2003), discusses a general reason why spirits are employed as a representation of slavery in African American literature. As she believes, "slavery continues to haunt the present because its stories, particularly those of slave women, have been improperly buried" (2003: 45). The term "improperly buried" is essential in the discourse on slavery, indicating that the past has not been adequately acknowledged or confronted. Conversely, the past of slavery has been marginalized, overlooked or neglected, leading to an absence of acknowledgment of its importance. Sharpe's statement suggests that slavery reemerges as a specter, existing in a liminal space between the realms of the deceased and the living. As it has not been adequately buried in the collective memory of African Americans, it persists in haunting the present.

Another aspect concerning the ghostly apparition in *Beloved* is its dual nature. At the beginning of the narrative, Beloved takes a form of a poltergeist—a ghost whose presence is marked by physical disturbances, including loud sounds, displacement of object and other instances of unexplainable behavior (German: *der Poltergeist*—a ghost that moves furniture—Cambridge Online Dictionary). It cannot be seen; yet, its presence is heard. Further in the narrative, having been exorcised by Paul D, Beloved materializes in a human form, described as a "young woman, approximately nineteen or twenty years old, and slender" (*B* 66-68). Her shift from a spiritual being to a corporeal one epitomizes Beloved's dual nature, as the woman transgresses the boundary between death and life. Beloved's act of crossing the bridge before her arrival at 124 indicates the woman's transformation. The bridge itself represents the link between the realm of the deceased and the realm of the living. By crossing it, Beloved leaves the spiritual sphere of the dead and enters the sphere of the living. It is crucial to note that despite Beloved's manifestation as a "fully dressed woman," she remains outside the realm of the living (*B* 60). She is neither part of the physical world, nor the spiritual one. In this context, the woman becomes a hybrid of both dimensions, since she is suspended between two realms. Following Jacques Derrida's definition of a specter, Beloved can be identified as one, for "the specter is a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. It becomes, rather, some 'thing' that remains difficult to name: neither soul not body, and both one and the other" (1994: 5). To paraphrase Derrida's explanation, the specter is a contradictory amalgamation, merging the depiction of an absence with a tangible presence. It defies conventional binary divisions between thought and body, presenting a distinctive realm where both can coexist. Such is the case with Beloved and her hybrid identity, navigating between two worlds while struggling to find a sense of belonging in either.

Transgenerational Trauma, National Amnesia, and the Healing Process in *Beloved*

From an academic standpoint, especially within conventional psychological and psychoanalytic paradigms, trauma has traditionally been understood as an experience inherently confined to the living. This traditional perspective asserts that trauma results from direct, intense exposure to an event that jeopardizes one's life or physical safety, or the safety of others, and subsequently presents a spectrum of psychological and physiological symptoms in the individual who directly experienced it. This division generally restricts the experience and processing of trauma to individuals who are physically present and conscious during or immediately after the traumatic event. Such a perspective frequently underlies clinical diagnoses and therapeutic interventions, wherein the focus is directed toward the individual's firsthand experience, recollection, and personal interpretation of traumatic events. David Lloyd supports this approach to trauma in his article "Colonial Trauma/Postcolonial Recovery?" (2000). The scholar contends that individuals who died cannot be deemed traumatized, as trauma necessitates a state of "living on" (Lloyd 2000: 219-220). Michael Rothberg, in *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (2000), arrives at a similar conclusion, asserting that the experience of trauma pertains solely to those who are still alive (138). However, in case of Beloved, who is a hybrid of a ghostly and corporeal form, the woman can be perceived as a victim of trauma as well. Her reappearance and manifestation as both a specter and a corporeal entity render her a victim of trauma associated with slavery, as she exhibits the emotions and traits of a living individual. As discussed before, Beloved plays a significant part in confronting Sethe and other members of the African American community of Cincinnati, Ohio, with the past of slavery. Due to the painful and traumatic nature of reflecting on the atrocities of slavery, its victims tend to avoid revisiting the past and consign it to oblivion. Toni Morrison employs the term "national amnesia" to describe the consequences and aftermath of slavery as something that neither the black nor the white population wishes to recall (Morrison qtd in Taylor-Guthrie 1994: 257). Consequently, in order to surmount this amnesia, Morrison composed a novel in which a female slave expresses her anguish regarding the institution of slavery in the context of her identity as a woman and a mother. In *Beloved*, the novelist highlights the importance of remembering, regardless of its painful nature, in the healing process. Morrison emphasizes this point when Amy Denver, a white woman who assists Sethe in the delivery of her final child on the shores of the Ohio River, tells her that "anything dead coming back to life hurts" (*B* 42). The quote implies the anguish linked to revisiting past traumas and suggests that the

act of "resurrection" is a struggle of confronting repressed feelings and memories. The return of past experiences—via memory, dreams, or reminders—can renew old wounds, creating the sensation that they are "coming back to life." Despite the pain associated with revisiting the past, though, it is essential for the healing process to commence.

By creating *Beloved*, Toni Morrison engages in a memory reconstruction process, considering it essential to maintain a connection with the past and the ancestors. In her 1983-essay, "Rootedness," the novelist highlights the significance of ancestry in the process of one's identity formation, since "when you kill the ancestor, you kill yourself" (1983: 344). In other words, one must familiarize oneself with the ancestral knowledge, comprehend it, and embrace one's heritage to achieve personal growth and self-identification, as ancestors are the bearers of history and culture (Morrison qtd in McKay 1983: 415). The absence of ancestral knowledge intensifies confusion about one's origins and complicates the process of self-definition. Such is the case with Denver who is unable to identify herself or establish her own position in the community, as she is denied the access to her ancestral past by Sethe. Since her birth, the girl's life has been defined by a sense of loneliness and isolation. The walls of 124 appear to constitute a fortress which protects Denver from the external world, hindering her quest for self-discovery and the truth about her past. Later in the narrative, however, the girl opens up to the outside world and the community of Cincinnati and leaves 124 in order to save her deteriorating mother and liberate her from Beloved's influence and control. As it has already been discussed, Denver is the only protagonist in the narrative who is born out of the circle of slavery. Nevertheless, she is tormented by its past and, therefore, becomes a victim of transgenerational trauma which is transmitted to the girl by her mother. According to Maurice Apprey who discusses the process of transmission in his 1999-article, "Reinventing the Self in the Face of Received Transgenerational Hatred in the African American Community," the trauma of the previous generation may affect the next generation, as the attempt of the former to keep the past forgotten and neglected "does not mean that the next generation will not experience in uncanny ways, the experience of the previous one" (1999: 138). In *Beloved*, Denver symbolizes the next generation of African Americans whose lives were not affected by the institution of slavery directly. However, the impact of her mother's traumatic past on the girl's everyday existence is undeniable, since it is because of Sethe's act of infanticide that Denver is isolated from the external world and is as well victimized by the haunting legacy of slavery as her mother is.

The phenomenon which is connected to transgenerational trauma is trangenerational memory, discussed by Marianne Hirsch in *The Generation of Postmemory. Writing and*

Visual Culture after the Holocaust (2012). In paraphrasing Marianne Hirsch, transgenerational memory refers to the deliberate effort to comprehend the historical experiences of one's ancestors (2012: 33). For Denver, her constant interest in the past and her intentional attempt to understand it makes the girl a carrier of both trangenerational memory and trauma. The girl, though, manages to take a step forward and opens herself to the world once she recognizes that it is Beloved who constitutes a genuine threat to Sethe. The girl also realizes that the only person who can step out of the haunted circle of 124 Bluestone Road is herself. By doing so, Denver becomes emancipated from the burden of transgenerational trauma and epitomizes hope for future generations. She represents a potential for a new life for African American women on their journey to freedom and self-identification. As Marianne Hirsch claims, *Beloved* is a narrative of maternal creation and survival which, in contrast to the rest of the novel, is "a story to pass on" (1994: 101). It is a story intended for transmission, as it gives hope for a better future for next generations of indirect trauma victims. Hirsch also underscores the fact that Toni Morrison in *Beloved* "allows the daughters to find themselves in the mother's story so that Denver might develop into the mature, self-reliant, caring and community-oriented woman she becomes at the end of the novel" (1994: 101). The girl's mature decision to leave the "fortress" of 124 Bluestone Road is supported by the spirit of Baby Suggs, the girl's grandmother. Before Baby Suggs's death, the woman is a pillar of the Cincinnati community and the matriarchal figure who brings its members together in the gatherings known as the Clearing. When Denver has doubts whether to leave the house or not, it is the spirit of Baby Suggs who encourages the girl to take a step outside the porch of 124 and bring help for Sethe:

> Denver stood on the porch in the sun and couldn't leave it. Her throat itched; her heart kicked—and then Baby Suggs laughed, clear as anything. 'You mean I never told you nothing about Carolina? About your daddy? You don't remember nothing about how come I walk the way I do and about your mother's feet, not to speak of her back? I never told you all that? Is that why you can't walk down the steps? My Jesus my.' But you said there was no defense. 'There ain't.' Then what do I do? 'Know it and go on out the yard. Go on.'" (*B* 287-288)

Having been reminded by Baby Suggs of the atrocities slavery brought on her family, the girl breaks away from the fortress of 124 and leaves it. Her act of stepping out may be interpreted as the girl's rebirth or awakening from the years of isolation and loneliness. She

finds a job at the Bodwin family and soon becomes a member of the community. When asked by Janey Wagon, the Bodwins's servant, about her mother's state, Denver confesses that Sethe is very sick and that her mother's condition is worsening due to the presence of Beloved, whom the girl calls her cousin. Janey Wagon, concerned and worried upon what she has just found out, tells everything to the colored women of Cincinnati:

> [t]he news that Janey got hold of she spread among the other coloredwomen. Sethe's dead daughter, the one whose throat she cut, had come back to fix her. Seethe was worn down, speckled, dying, spinning, changing shapes and generally bedeviled. That this daughter beat her, tied her to the bed and pulled out all her hair […] They fell into three groups: those that believed the worst; those that believed none of it; and those, like Ella, who thought it through. (*B* 300-301)

It was Ella, an ex-slave and Sethe's friend from the time before the infanticide, who convinces other colored women of Cincinnati that help is needed. The thirty of them gather in front of 124, praying and singing in order to get rid of Beloved. Upon their arrival at 124, the image which appears in front of them is not Denver, sitting on the step, waiting for Mr Bodwin to pick her up. Instead, the women see themselves from the past, "younger, stronger, even as little girls lying in the grass asleep […] They sat on the porch, ran down to the creek […] Baby Suggs laughed and skipped among them, urging more. Mothers, dead now, moved their shoulders to mouth harps. The fence they leaned on and climbed over was gone" (*B* 304). Their recollection of the past evokes the atmosphere of 124 Bluestone Road prior to the tragic event. The women are reminded of the good moments they shared at 124, with Baby Suggs being a pillar of the black community, bringing safety and comfort to those in need. Nevertheless, with Sethe's act of infanticide, the community's approach to the woman, her children, and Baby Suggs changes drastically. As Evelyn Schreiber states in "Shared Memory: Slavery and Large-Group Trauma in Beloved and Paradise" (2010), it is Sethe's act of murdering her own child that fractures her connections with the community, resulting in her abandonment (42). The community's failure or reluctance to acknowledge a connection between their own traumas and Sethe's tragic act leads to their condemnation of her. After the baby's death, nobody is willing to help Sethe or her family. Instead, the community assembles outside 124, observing the woman's arrest in silence:

> [o]utside a throng, now, of black faces stopped murmuring. Holding the living child (Denver), Sethe walked past them in their silence and hers. She climbed into the cart, her profile knifeclean against a cherry blue sky. A profile that shocked them with clarity. Was her head a bit too high? Her back a little too straight? Probably. Otherwise the singing would have begun at once, the moment she appeared in the doorway of the house on Bluestone Road. Some cape of sound would have quickly been wrapped around her, like arms to hold and steady her on the way. As it was, they waited till the cart turned about, headed west to town. And then no words. Humming. No words at all. (*B* 179)

The community seems to view Sethe's upright posture as a sign of pride and a reflection of her perceived superiority over them. Their incapacity or reluctance to empathize with the woman creates the community's animosity towards Sethe. The African American people of Cincinnati refuse to recognize any association with the woman who has just resorted to killing her own child. The reason for that may stem from the community's defense mechanism which shields them from acknowledging their ability to do the same thing when faced with a life-threatening situation involving one's children. Roy F. Baumerstei, Kalen Dale, and Kristin L. Sommer, in "Freudian Defense Mechanisms and Empirical Findings in Modern Social Psychology: Reaction Formation, Projection, Displacement, Undoing, Isolation, Sublimation, and Denial" (1998), discuss a mechanism of defense and designates it as projection (1090). Utilizing projection theory in the discourse surrounding *Beloved*, it can be asserted that the black community of Cincinnati tends to criticize and denounce Sethe's actions rather than acknowledge their own potential for similar behavior. Therefore, the witnesses of Sethe's seizure exhibit a passive reaction to the woman's arrest and remain silent. Their passivity may derive from their own struggle to repress the trauma of slavery which they personally endured. The community's resistance to allow their repressed memories to resurface leads them to abandoning Sethe, her children, and Baby Suggs.

The mechanism of abandonment is also explained by Sandra Bloom in "Trauma Theory Abbreviated" (1999). According to Bloom, when there is no verbal communication regarding one's state of being, it is through one's action that their behavior is judged. Bloom asserts that people have predominantly diminished their ability for nonverbal interpretation, resulting in most of these 'cries for help' going ignored. Rather, they tend to evaluate, denounce, ostracize, and isolate those who exhibit asocial or self-destructive behavior without comprehending the significance of their message (Bloom 1999: 13). In the context of

Morrison's narrative, the act of Sethe's infanticide brings back the most atrocious and dramatic memories in the black community. As they want to keep their painful past buried, they resort to abandoning Sethe and her family. Over time, collective suppression of the traumatic past renders healing unattainable for the black community of Cincinnati. It is not until eighteen years later that their suppressed past reemerges upon their arrival at 124 Bluestone Road to exorcise Beloved and rescue Sethe, whom they had previously condemned and forsaken.

The only person who demonstrates concern for Sethe and who takes any action to halt the cart which takes Sethe to the jail house is Baby Suggs. Prior to Sethe's act of infanticide and her subsequent seizure, Baby Suggs holds a pivotal position within the community. Not only does she offer refuge to runaway slaves, but she also serves as a spiritual preacher, uniting the community during the Clearing—"a wide-open place cut deep in the woods nobody knew for what at the end of a path known only to deer and whoever cleared the land in the first place" (*B* 102). The importance of the Clearing is paramount, since it serves as an opportunity for the community of former slaves to unite with one another and focus on "the grace they could imagine," regardless of the pain they endured in the past (*B* 103). The grace refers to one's love for themselves, to which Baby Suggs encourages during the Clearing, stating that "in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard" (*B* 103). Despite Baby Suggs's love and care for the community, the woman becomes an object of jealousy, which is best illustrated by the community's reaction to the gathering at 124 which the woman organizes:

> [n]inety people who ate so well, and laughed so much, it made them angry […] 124, rocking with laughter, goodwill and food for ninety, made them angry. Too much, they thought. Where does she get it all, Baby Suggs, holy? Why is she and hers always the center of things? How come she always knows exactly what to do and when? Giving advice; passing messages; healing the sick, hiding fugitives, loving, cooking, cooking, loving, preaching, singing, dancing and loving everybody like it was her job and hers alone. (*B* 161)

Although they have endured similar traumatic experiences of slavery, the community, rather than empathizing with Baby Suggs, exhibits jealousy and hostility towards the woman. Their envy originates from Baby Sugg's apparent fortune, which the community associates with her house, the plentiful food, and her family. Therefore, the community, driven by envy,

neglects to notify Sethe of Schoolteacher and his nephews' upcoming arrival, which results in the woman's act of infanticide and her subsequent seizure. Following the baby's death and Sethe's arrest, the community to which Baby Suggs dedicated herself greatly abandons her, leaving the woman with a broken heart, as "to belong to a community of other free Negros—to love and be loved by them, to counsel and be counseled, protect and be protected, feed and be fed—and then to have that community step back and hold itself at a distance—well, it could wear out even a Baby Suggs, holy" (*B* 209). However, eighteen years later, the same community is given another chance to save Sethe from the burden of her past. At the same time, they receive an opportunity to come to terms with their own traumas.

As Ashraf H. A. Rushdy asserts in "Daughters Signifyin(g) History: The Example of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" (1992), Beloved embodies "the past that must be remembered in order to be forgotten; she symbolizes what must be reincarnated in order to be buried, properly" (1994: 571). As ghosts are considered souls trapped between the spiritual and physical realms, lacking true belonging to either, it is essential to provide peace to their spirits by, following Rushdy's point of view, burying them properly. Beloved's spectral return signifies that her spirit is unsettled and cannot attain peace unless she is acknowledged by the community. The past of slavery, long neglected to avoid revisiting the horrors of the institution, ultimately reemerges through the character of Beloved. Her reincarnation is undoubtedly a difficult experience for the community, as it compels them to confront the atrocities of their painful past. The confrontation, however, leads them to understand that Beloved represents more than just a reminder of Sethe's personal trauma. They ultimately recognize that Beloved constitutes an integral aspect of their own history, embodying a synthesis of collective traumas and their repressions (Berger 1999: 201).

Having realized the threatening nature of Beloved, who develops into a cannibalistic force that devours the present through disturbing recollections of the past, the community seeks to exorcise the spirit to avert Sethe's total breakdown and destruction. In performing the exorcism, the thirty women of Cincinnati show their solidarity with Sethe and their support for the woman. Their decision to liberate Sethe from the detrimental impact of the ghost can be viewed as the community's ultimate acknowledgment of the woman and her final integration into the community. It is conceivable that the community, driven by guilt related to their failure to notify Sethe of Schoolteacher's arrival, is seeking redemption and, as a result, begins the process of exorcising the ghost:

> [t]he singing women recognized Sethe at once and surprised themselves by their absence of fear when they saw what stood next to her. The devil-child was clever, they thought. And beautiful. It had taken the shape of a pregnant woman, naked and smiling in the heat of the afternoon sun […] Standing alone on the porch, Beloved is smiling. But now her hand is empty. Seethe is running away from her, running, and she feels the emptiness in the hand Sethe has been holding. Now she is running into the faces of the people out there, joining them and leaving Beloved behind. Alone. Again. (*B* 308-309)

It must be emphasized that although the same women refused to warn Sethe about her upcoming seizure by Schoolteacher and his nephews eighteen years before, they have now resolved to protect the woman from her haunting past. By doing so, they are not only assisting Sethe in recovering from the trauma, but they are also beginning to confront their own history and initiate the healing process. In other words, the arrival of Beloved, however painful it is, makes the process of both individual and collective healing possible, as if it had not been for Beloved, the healing of Sethe and the whole community would not be achieved.

What is more, it can be concluded that Sethe's personal narrative and her efforts to suppress the past encapsulate the collective experience of the African American community. According to Irina-Ana Drobot, in "The Ghost in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Paranormal or Psychological Phenomenon?" (2019), Beloved represents more than Sethe's personal loss and grief. The ghost symbolizes the shared anguish of other slavery victims who, like Sethe, suffered unimaginable horrors of losing the beloved ones (431). Therefore, it may be argued that the community's exorcism of Beloved is an effort to confront the communal past of African Americans, accept it, and properly bury it in order to prevent its recurrence as a haunting spirit. As regards the role of sound in the process of exorcising Beloved, the voices of the African American women who congregate in front of 124 play a significant part. The women, through their singing, dispel the enchantment that Beloved imposed on Sethe:

> [t]ogether they stood in the doorway. For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her with all its hear and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it , and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash. (*B* 308)

The metaphor of baptism in the passage highlights the power of community as regards Sethe's rebirth and recovery from the trauma. Hearing the voices of the black women, Sethe abandons the ghost and seemingly leaves the burden of her past behind. However, the memory of that tragic day from eighteen years before returns when Sethe sees Mr Bodwin arriving at 124. In that instant, the past asserts itself upon the present, as Sethe experiences once more the anguish of taking her daughter's life. This time, though, Sethe's anger and fury are directed at Mr Bodwin, "the man without skin," whom Sethe mistakes with Schoolteacher (*B* 309). By assaulting him, Sethe emancipates her recollection of the past, thereby alleviating her guilt and trauma. It is also crucial to underscore the fact that the whole process of Sethe's liberation is witnessed by the community. Their presence is essential in the context of the collective history of African Americans, for whom the past of slavery had been a traumatic burden that was deeply ingrained in their consciousness and resurfaced when triggered. The catalyst for recalling the past in the novel, as discussed before, is Beloved who represents "the denied ghosts of the American past" (Brogan 1998: 8). Their haunting will persist as long as the past, along with its traumas and horrors, is suppressed and silenced. Therefore, in order to stop the haunting, it is necessary to confront the past, regardless of the pain and trauma it has inflicted. Its acknowledgement is essential, as it is impossible to progress without coming to terms with the history. As Kathleen Brogan emphasizes in *Cultural Haunting: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature* (1998), once accepted, the denied ghosts are ultimately embedded in America's history, converting negative hauntings into a positive historical awareness (8).

Although *Beloved* "is not a story to pass on," due to its unflinching examination of the harsh and brutal truths of slavery, Toni Morrison deliberately opts to confront these painful histories, refusing to let them fade into silence. The writer engages in a deliberate act of remembrance and narrative revival, crafting a story deeply embedded in the ancestral memories of her characters' communities, their shared traumas, and their continuous journeys toward healing. By emphasizing these frequently overlooked or unvoiced histories, Morrison contends that even the most dreadful atrocities—those physically and psychologically endured during slavery—can be reshaped into a collective narrative of recognition and healing once they are adequately acknowledged and embraced by the community of trauma survivors and their descendants. This act of storytelling serves as a means for the community to engage in collective reflection, allowing it to face its history, weave it into its cultural identity, and ultimately progress toward a healing process grounded in truth and recognition.

Morrison’s novel affirms that the act of remembrance, even of the most painful memories, is essential for overcoming the weight of historical trauma, as healing is possible only through the honest recognition and retelling of these dark chapters of history within a communal framework.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the thesis, it has been demonstrated that Toni Morrison's two selected novels, i.e., *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye*, function as significant literary spaces where violence, haunting, and the uncanny intersect to express the persistent pain of racial violence and its lingering repercussions. The analysis of the complex interrelations among these themes reveals that violence, haunting, and the uncanny serve as fundamental representations of trauma, memory, and prove the enduring and haunting character of history in the experiences of African American womanhood.

As regards the category of violence, the research emphasizes that in the novels under discussion, Morrison's use of the term transcends mere physical acts, i.e., abuse, rape or social brutality. First and foremost, violence inflicted on the black womanhood in *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* emerges in the form of psychological scars, highlighting how cultural silencing, race-based hostility, and brutality towards African American women and their social marginalization influence their self-awareness and self-perception. The study shows that the psychological traumas in the narratives function as haunting specters which symbolize the inescapable and unavoidable past of slavery and racism that persists to affect the present. By applying postcolonial discourse, trauma theory, and spectral analysis to the discussion, the paper demonstrates how violence imprints ghostly traces that disturb the distinctions between life and death, urging characters to face unresolved histories that put their identity and sense of belonging at risk. In this context, Morrison's use of the category of violence serves as a form of spectral inscription, as it marks the characters with unwanted memories that continue to exist and haunt them.

In the thesis, it has also been highlighted that both novels elicit an overwhelming sensation of haunting, wherein the horrific legacies of slavery, racial violence, and social exclusion materialize not merely as corporeal apparitions but as symbolic specters that permeate the lives and psyches of her characters. These spectral hauntings represent more than just products of the characters' imagination. They constitute concrete expressions of trauma that continuously demand recognition and remembrance, refusing to be put to oblivion. As it has been discussed in the thesis, for the process of healing to occur, one needs to come to terms with their painful past, regardless of its severity. In this context, the act of remembrance plays a crucial role in the process of healing, as what needs to be accepted and healed, must not be neglected, ignored or forgotten. Morrison's engagement with haunting

and the uncanny, as argued in this dissertation, is an intentional technique the novelist applies to emphasize the importance of acknowledging spectral traces of violence for genuine reconciliation and emancipation to appear.

In her fiction, Morrison vividly depicts the historical realities of slavery, racism, and violence directed at African Americans, women in particular, while examining themes of cruelty, haunting, and the uncanny to address hidden histories and overlooked truths that have been marginalized and neglected. Consequently, one could assert that Morrison's literary *oeuvre* provides essential evidence and an in-depth discussion on the lasting impacts of racial violence, marginalization, and injustice in the United States. The novelist's application of haunting, as previously illustrated in the paper, corresponds with Sigmund Freud's notion of the uncanny (German: *Unheimlich*), signifying "the return of the repressed." In *Beloved*, the reappearance of the ghost of a murdered daughter brings forth all the repressed and hidden memories, complicating Sethe's ability to live a normal life, as she is compelled to face the haunting history in order to reconcile with her past traumas.

Morrison's second novel which is discussed in the paper, *The Bluest Eye*, also employs the category of haunting and the uncanny. Here, however, the application of both concepts is to indicate how distorted and racialized beauty standards affect the character of Pacola and Pauline Breedlove. The women, both absorbed in white culture, develop self-loathing and a profound fascination with the dominant beauty standards that define acceptable representations of femininity and childhood. These images generate illusions regarding what is desired and accepted, perpetuating silence and marginalization within systemic violence. While in the case of *Beloved*, haunting and the uncanny refer to the tragic past of slavery, in *The Bluest Eye* they correspond to aesthetic and psychological distortions. Within the framework of *The Bluest Eye*, Pauline's and Pecola's rejection of their own blackness creates a haunting space of alienation and trauma that oscillates between the familiar and the abject, disrupting notions of racial harmony and self-identity. This aligns with Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection which the scholar discusses in her *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection* (1982). Kristeva's theory of abjection highlights the significance of the repulsion elicited by bodily experience. Her research on abjection reveals parallels with the study of disgust, as both categories entail physical sensations of aversion triggered by a source, along with the simultaneous urge to distance oneself from that source in multiple ways (1982: 11). In Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, the disgust and abjection are evoked by the blackness of the

characters' skin and their inability to accept their racial identity, which consequently leads them to self-hatred and internalized racism.

Scholarly Significance of the Thesis and the Incentive for Further Investigation

Despite the extensive scholarly research on Toni Morrison's literary *output*, further academic investigation still remains essential, as more engagement with the novelist's body of work can contribute to better understanding of racial histories and current issues related to the marginalization of African Americans and people of color in the US. The observations and conclusions drawn from Morrison's two selected novels the dissertation takes under discussion encourage a thoughtful and creative examination that honors the novelist's intellectual depth and engages with current social and academic issues. In the twenty-first century, despite the facade of tolerance, respect, and equal treatment for all individuals, regardless of their ethnic background, episodes of racism and discrimination against people of color continue to endure. Therefore, to highlight the issue of racism in the United States, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement was initiated in 2013. As Barbara Ransby, the author of *Making All Black Lives Matter: Reimagining Freedom in the Twenty-First Century* (2018), reports, the Black Lives Matter movement originated as a hashtag on social media, emerging in reaction to both state and vigilante violence directed at black individuals (n.pag. Web). The BLM campaign was catalyzed by the racist killing of Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida, in 2012, as well as the police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014. The slogan has transformed into the rallying call for this generation of black youth advocates who participated in Black Lives Matter protests between 2013 and 2017.

From its very beginning, the fundamental message of the BLM campaign has been to recognize black existence and oppose racial brutality and social injustice which African Americans have been experiencing in the US. Some scholars situate the campaign firmly within the historical framework of civil rights movements in America, claiming that it represents a continuation of a persistent struggle in America. One of the academics supporting this view is Christopher J. Lebron, the author of *The Making of Black Lives Matter: A Brief History of an Idea* (2017). In the Introduction to the book, Lebron recounts a brutal incident which led to the death of a seventeen-year-old black adolescent, Trayvon Martin:

> [t]he story of the movement that seeks to redeem a nation begins with Martin. The evening of February 26, 2012, Martin was walking through Sanford, Florida community wearing a hoodie and holding only a soft drink and some candy. George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer, deemed Martin suspicious and called the police though Martin had not actually done anything actionable—his only possible crime seemed to be walking while black. Though advised by the 911 operator to stand down and keep his distance, Zimmerman initiated a confrontation that resulted in a scuffle that ended with him shooting seventeen-year-old Martin dead. (2017: x-xi)

The outcome that emerged as controversial was the acquittal of George Zimmerman, the individual responsible for the death of Martin. The man was found innocent on all counts associated with the teenager's death. The verdict of the jury was an incentive for Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi—three African American activists—to initiate the BLM movement as an act of protest against white supremacy and unfair treatment of black people in America.

Angela J. Davis is a prominent scholar who specializes in criminal law and procedure concerning racial issues in the American justice system. Davis is the editor of the essay collection, *Policing the Black Man: Arrest, Prosecution, and Imprisonment* (2017), which consists of papers by distinguished legal scholars, including Bryan Stevenson, Jeremy Travis, and Sherrilyn Ifill, among many others. The work scrutinizes the effects of the criminal justice system on African American boys and men, illustrating that the system has historically displayed bias and racist attitudes towards black males and adolescents in the United States. Although the main objective of this dissertation is to focus on the condition and experiences of black women and various forms of violence they fall victim to, as portrayed in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*, it is also essential to emphasize the aggression and brutality faced by African American men. Black men and adolescents frequently endure wrongful accusations of crimes solely due to their skin color, proving that racism in the US still remains a cultural and political issue that persists despite widespread denial of its existence.

Current incidents of violence inflicted on black people by the US police are not restricted to African American men only. As Jessica Watters argues in her article, "Pink Hats and Black Fists: The Role of Women in the Black Lives Matter Movement" (2017), Black women are frequently affected by police violence as well, being subjected to the same forms of victimization as their male counterparts: "[r]eports suggest that black women are victimized in similar ways as black men through police violence, random stops, racial

profiling, and targeting of poor, disabled, and trans women" (204). Additionally, Watters underscores the fact that African American women are exposed to gender-specific risks from police interactions, including a higher likelihood of sexual harassment and assault (2017: 204). One of the most widely publicized instances of police victimization of a black woman in the US is Sandra Bland's case. On July 10, 2015, Texas State Trooper, Brian Encinia, conducted a traffic stop on a 28-year-old black woman, Sandra Bland, due to her failure to signal a lane change. Following an intense confrontation, he detained her and transported to a local correctional facility. Three days later, on the morning of July 13, she was discovered dead in her cell, seemingly by suicide (Lai et al. 2015: n.pag.).

The case of Sandra Bland underscores persistent racial disparities and stereotyping within law enforcement, positioning the woman as a pivotal figure in the movement advocating for social justice against police violence and racial inequities. Her death garnered so much national focus on the matters of racial profiling, stereotyping, and police brutality towards people of color that on June 15, 2017, Governor Greg Abbott signed Senate Bill 1849, referred to as the Sandra Bland Act. The act was issued to guarantee the mental health safety of prisoners, providing them with "the ability to access a mental health professional at the jail through a telemental health service 24 hours a day" (Anderson 2017: n.pag. Web). Sandra Bland's case serves as a significant example highlighting the biased and racist attitudes of American police towards black women. However, many other unnamed black women have also experienced victimization by law enforcement, leading to the creation of a second hashtag campaign, #SayHerName, which was initiated by Kimberlé Crenshaw (Watters 2017: 204. Web).

Andrea J. Ritchie, in *Invisible No More: Police Violence Against Black Women and Women of Color* (2017), offers further discussion on black women victimization and marginalization by American legal system. Ritchie critically examines mainstream discourse that predominantly centers on police brutality towards black men, emphasizing the often overlooked or disregarded experiences of violence faced by black women and women of color. Their tragic histories are often ignored by the media, governments, and social justice movements, proving the point that black women and women of color are still perceived as less significant and marginalized.

Michelle Alexander, an African American attorney and a civil rights activist, in her highly influential research, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2010), highlights the importance of pro-women movements, claiming that

these campaigns have confronted the marginalization of women's experiences in media narratives. As Alexander posits, innovative advocacy by organizations such as A New Way of Life, BYP100, Families for Justice as Healing, and Essie Justice Group has commenced to transform the narrative, revealing the detrimental effects of mass incarceration on women, their families, and consequently, their communities (2010: xxi). Alexander goes further in her arguments, claiming that the problems and issues of African Americans, regardless of gender, are very often overlooked and ignored. Alexander justifies her point by sharing her observations on financial resources for schooling, adequate housing, job availability, drug treatment, mental health, and trauma assistance within black communities. The activist concludes that the financial resources for the support of African Americans are consistently insufficient. What is not in short supply, though, is marginalization and victimization of people of color along with their pejorative portrayals across various domains, including police records and media coverage (Alexander 2010: xxx).

The objective of the aforementioned arguments is to emphasize that despite the fact it is theoretically unnecessary for black Americans to advocate for their rights and just treatment, the instances of victimization and marginalization of people of color illustrate a contrary reality. Research and social observations suggest that African Americans continue to experience pervasive bias and discrimination in a variety of social contexts. In spite of the progress made through civil rights legislation and social movements, racial disparities continue to exist across multiple domains. For instance, discriminatory practices and unfair procedures in housing segregation aimed at black Americans are discussed by Richard Rothstein in *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (2017). As Rothstein reports, the systematic denial of financial services, i.e., loans and mortgages, to residents of certain neighborhoods due to their racial or ethnic background represents a widespread manifestation of structural racism. Historically, as he continues, this process entailed the identification of specific geographic regions, predominantly inhabited by minority populations, as high-risk areas with the use of maps marked with red lines, the practice commonly known as redlining. Rothstein also emphasizes the intentional actions taken by government institutions to shape the housing landscape in America according to racial divisions—consequences of which persist in affecting social, economic, and racial inequalities in contemporary society (2017: 124).

As the center of this dissertation revolves around multifaceted victimization of Toni Morrison's female characters in *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye*, it is crucial to emphasize that

the author's incorporation of violence, hunting, and the uncanny in the abovementioned narratives provides a fundamental reconfiguration of the American literary canon's treatment of trauma and history concerning the experiences of black women. In Morrison's selected fiction which the thesis thoroughly discusses, it is the black woman who constitutes the novelist's main focus and whose traumatic past and its impact on the present are of significance. Morrison, through her *oeuvre*, succeeds in transforming a challenging past of slavery and racism into a medium for truth, recollection, and healing for the entire African American community.

The historical context of *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*, along with the extensive academic research conducted to date, may raise uncertainties and prompt questions about the relevance of further academic exploration of Morrison's work, as one might view both the novels and the dissertation as potentially lacking significance in today's society. However, by highlighting the issue of violence and the marginalization of black women in times of slavery, the Reconstruction era and in the first half of the twentieth century, as shown in Morrison's fiction, it is possible to reevaluate the challenges faced by black women in the context of modern times. While the practices of slavery and racial segregation have ended, there continue to be occurrences of hostile and racist behaviors directed at black Americans, both men and women. Therefore, it can be concluded that Morrison's fiction still continues to provoke academic and public discussion on race-related issues in the US, being an incentive for further research. It is also essential to underscore that, despite African Americans appearing to have overcome the traumas of slavery and systemic racial segregation, black communities still continue to face various modern race-related challenges and traumas of the contemporary world. Quoting W.E.B. Du Bois, "[t]he problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line" (32). It appears, however, that the challenges related to race, such as ongoing instances of race-based violence, systemic discrimination, and hostility aimed at African Americans and other people of color, remain among the most pressing and lasting issues in today's American social and political environment. Even with progress in civil rights laws and changes in public conversation, systemic inequalities, racial biases, and acts of violence driven by racial hatred are still ingrained in numerous institutions and social behaviors. This ongoing reality sustains a cycle of marginalization and exclusion that significantly shapes the experiences of marginalized communities in the United States.

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SUMMARY

This dissertation focuses on the themes of violence, haunting, and the uncanny as explored in Toni Morrison's two selected novels, *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*. The novelist, regarded as one of the most impactful writers of the 20th and 21st centuries, with her fiction brings to light the frequently overlooked narratives of slavery, violence, and the experiences of black womanhood in the American context. Through her fiction, Morrison addresses racial amnesia, reinforces black agency, and contests oppressive narratives concerning the representation of African Americans. Therefore, it can be argued that her body of work acts as a medium for black voices to be recognized and validated, shaping socio-cultural discussions on race in the United States.

The first chapter, "Postcolonial Theory," delineates the theoretical framework of the dissertation and emphasizes the essential concepts of the theory, focusing on its fundamental notions of imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and the construction of otherness, as discussed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Jacques Lacan.

Chapter Two, "Discourses on African American Womanhood: Stereotyping, Black Feminism, and African American Female Literature," provides a detailed overview of the enduring stereotypes and biases surrounding black womanhood, tracing their origins from the times of slavery to the twentieth century. The chapter also discusses the history of black feminism, along with the role and position of black womanhood in African American liberation movements. The last sections of Chapter Two highlight the rise of black women writers in the 1970s, particularly honoring Toni Morrison and her contribution to the development of African American female literature.

Chapter Three, "Violence, Rejection, and Internalized Racism in *The Bluest Eye*," is devoted to a postcolonial discussion of the category of violence. Specific emphasis is placed on the examination of the multidimensional nature of violence in Morrison's debut novel, *The Bluest Eye*. The narrative presents violence in various forms, including domestic oppression, sexual abuse, and internalized violence.

Chapter Four, "The Violence of Slavery and its Impact on Black Motherhood as Exemplified by Morrison's *Beloved*," discusses multifaceted character of the category of violence as regards Toni Morrison's 1987-novel. The discussion involves a detailed analysis of dehumanizing mechanisms of slavery on black womanhood and manhood, underscoring

the significance of resistance in the process of reclaiming human dignity in the face of systemic violence.

Chapter Five, "The Importance of Memory and the Manifestation of Trauma in African American Gothic Literature," highlights how the categories of trauma and memory function as essential tools for cultural resistance and reclamation of history. The chapter explores how spectral hauntings and uncanny atmospheres serve as symbols for the enduring specters of trauma, i.e., the repressed memories that resurface to disrupt identity and social order.

The last chapter, "The Haunting Past of Slavery: Transgenerational Trauma, Repression, and Healing," provides an in-depth discussion on how the trauma of slavery represents unaddressed grief, repression, and the suffering passed down through generations, while simultaneously suggesting space for healing through the processes of remembrance and recognition. In Chapter Six, research on trauma, repression, and healing is founded on a comprehensive examination of Morrison's *Beloved*.

The thesis concludes by asserting that Toni Morrison's *oeuvre* possesses significance that extends far beyond the realm of literature. The novelist's portrayal of black women's trauma and resilience continues to resonate in modern social and political contexts as, notwithstanding the abolition of slavery and the success of civil rights movement, racial violence, exclusion and systemic injustice persist in the contemporary world, highlighting the ongoing relevance of Morrison's narratives. The conclusion of the dissertation draws on modern instances of racial violence in the US, as exemplified by the police brutality and aggression towards African American men and women, along with public reactions in the form of social media campaigns, including the Black Lives Matter initiative. In the conclusion, it is hoped that this dissertation provokes more academic research on the matter of racial violence and bias, extending beyond the literary context to encompass social and political dimensions as well.

Methodology applied in the dissertation delineates an interdisciplinary framework rooted in postcolonial and trauma studies to examine the themes of violence, haunting, and the uncanny within Morrison's selected narratives. The initial chapters delve into essential postcolonial ideas—imperialism, otherness, and racial stereotypes—drawing on the insights of such thinkers as Jacques Lacan and Edward Said. Moreover, Morrison's portrayal of black womanhood is contextualized within mechanisms of systemic silencing and marginalization.

Therefore, an additional methodological tool in this study incorporates the concept of subaltern as articulated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

The psychoanalytic frameworks established by Ernst Jentsch and Sigmund Freud elucidate the concept of the uncanny as fundamentally linked to repressed anxieties, thereby enhancing one's comprehension of the enduring eeriness associated with trauma. Furthermore, the thesis utilizes theories of trauma and memory, drawing on the works of Marianne Hirsch and Maurice Halbwachs. Both theories are applied in order to examine transgenerational trauma as a form of spectral inheritance which persistently influences identities and social relations. The discussion of transgenerational trauma is also based on the writings of Ron Eyerman, Gabrielle Schwab, and M. Gerard Fromm. The exploration of slavery's legacy is further examined through the lens of Kathleen Brogan and Avery Gordon's spectral studies which demonstrate how apparitions and spectrality encapsulate collective memory and social trauma.

STRESZCZENIE

Tematem niniejszej rozprawy naukowej jest kategoria przemocy, nawiedzenia, a także zjawisko niesamowitego w wybranych narracjach autorstwa afroamerykańskiej pisarki, Toni Morrison. Dysertacja bada powyższe kategorie w odniesieniu do powieści „Najbardziej niebieskie oko" (1970) i „Umiłowana" (1987). Toni Morrison, uznawana za jedną z najbardziej wpływowych pisarek XX i XXI wieku, w swojej twórczości ukazuje często pomijane narracje dotyczące niewolnictwa, przemocy oraz doświadczeń czarnoskórej kobiecości w kontekście amerykańskim. W swoich dziełach Morrison porusza kwestie amnezji rasowej i krytycznie podważa opresyjne narracje związane z reprezentacją Afroamerykanów w literaturze. W związku z tym można argumentować, iż literacki dorobek Morrison funkcjonuje jako medium, dzięki któremu głosy czarnoskórych są słyszalne, rozpoznawane i weryfikowane, kształtując dyskursy społeczno-kulturowe oraz rasowe w Stanach Zjednoczonych.

Rozdział pierwszy pt. „Teoria postkolonialna" przedstawia teoretyczne ramy pracy oraz podkreśla kluczowe pojęcia teorii postkolonialnej, skupiając się na jej najważniejszych terminach dotyczących imperializmu, kolonializmu, neokolonializmu oraz konstruowania inności. Dyskusja na temat inności oparta jest na założeniach Gayatri Charkavorty Spivak i Jacques'a Lacana.

Rozdział drugi omawia głęboko zakorzenione kulturowo stereotypy i uprzedzenia dotyczące czarnej kobiecości, począwszy od czasów niewolnictwa po wiek XX. Rozdział ten skupia się również na historii czarnego feminizmu oraz aktywnej partycypacji Afroamerykanek w ruchach na rzecz praw obywatelskich. Końcowe sekcje rozdziału poświęcone są rozkwitowi literatury autorstwa afroamerykańskich pisarek, który przypadł na lata siedemdziesiąte ubiegłego stulecia. Szczególna uwaga poświęcona jest Toni Morrison i jej wkładowi w rozwój afroamerykańskiej literatury kobiecej.

Rozdział trzeci, „Przemoc, odrzucenie i rasizm zinternalizowany w powieści *Najbardziej niebieskie oko,*" poświęcony jest postkolonialnej dyskusji na temat kategorii przemocy. Szczegółowa analiza obejmuje wielowymiarową naturę przemocy w debiutanckiej powieści Morrison „Najbardziej niebieskie oko," w której to przemoc przyjmuję formę opresji domowej, wykorzystania seksualnego oraz przemocy zinternalizowana.

Rozdział czwarty omawia wieloaspektowość kategorii przemocy w kolejnej powieści Toni Morrison, która jest przedmiotem badań niniejszej dysertacji, mianowicie „Umiłowana." Dyskusja obejmuje analizę dehumanizujących mechanizmów niewolnictwa wobec czarnej kobiecości i męskości, podkreślając znaczenie oporu w procesie odzyskiwania godności w obliczu przemocy systemowej.

Rozdział piąty poświęcony jest kategorii pamięci i traumy w odniesieniu do afroamerykańskiej literatury gotyckiej. W rozdziale piątym autorka dysertacji podkreśla istotę tych kategorii, wskazując je jako niezbędne narzędzia w procesie oporu kulturowego i odzyskiwania historii. Ponadto, rozdział przedstawia, jak atmosfera spektralnego nawiedzenia i niepokoju symbolizuje trwale zakorzenione kulturowo traumy, których obecność objawia się w postaci wypartych wspomnień, zakłócających poczucie tożsamości i porządku społecznego.

Ostatni rozdział rozprawy, „Nawiedzająca przeszłość niewolnictwa: trauma międzypokoleniowa, represja, uleczenie," stanowi szczegółową analizę tego, jak trauma niewolnictwa reprezentuje nieprzepracowany żal, represję i cierpienie przekazywane z pokolenia na pokolenie. Jednocześnie, daje ona przestrzeń do uzdrowienia, które możliwe jest poprzez procesy pamięci i rozpoznania. W rozdziale szóstym badania nad traumą, represją i uzdrowieniem wykorzystane są w celu szczegółowej analizy powieści „Umiłowana."

W konkluzji dysertacji autorka podkreśla istotę twórczości Toni Morrison, która znacząco wykracza poza wymiar literacki. Wykluczenie, przemoc i uprzedzenie na tle rasowym stanowią punkt odniesienia do współczesnych kontekstów społecznych i politycznych, charakteryzując obecną rzeczywistość w Stanach Zjednoczonych. W konkluzji omawiane są współczesne przykłady przemocy na tle rasowym, a jeden z przykładów stanowi brutalność i agresja amerykańskiej policji w stosunku do Afroamerykanów i innych mniejszości etnicznych w USA. W rezultacie, na co wskazuje autorka dysertacji, powstało wiele inicjatyw społecznych oraz kampanii w mediach społecznościowych, których celem jest zwrócenie uwagi na wciąż aktualny problem rasizmu w Stanach Zjednoczonych. W konkluzji autorka wyraża nadzieję, iż niniejsza dysertacja stanie się przyczynkiem do zgłębienia problemu przemocy i uprzedzeń na tle rasowym przez środowiska naukowe i wyjdzie poza kontekst literacki, obejmując zarówno wymiar społeczny i polityczny zagadnienia.

Metodologia przyjęta w niniejszej rozprawie wyznacza interdyscyplinarną ramę badawczą, opartą na teoretycznych kontekstach postkolonialnych oraz studiów nad traumą, umożliwiającą szczegółową analizę tematów przemocy, nawiedzenia oraz kategorii niesamowitego w wybranych narracjach Toni Morrison. W początkowych rozdziałach pracy

skupiono się na kluczowych pojęciach związanych z teorią postkolonialną—imperializm, inność oraz stereotypy rasowe—czerpiąc z refleksji wybitnych myślicieli, takich jak Jacques Lacan czy Edward Said. Ponadto, portret czarnoskórej kobiecości w twórczości Morrison osadzony jest w kontekście mechanizmów systemowego wykluczania i marginalizacji, odwołując się do kategorii *subaltern*, omówionej przez Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

Ramy teoretyczne oparte na psychoanalizie, sformułowane przez Ernsta Jentscha i Zygmunta Freuda, wyjaśniają pojęcie niesamowitego (niem. *unheimlich*) jako zjawiska ściśle powiązanego z wypartymi lękami, tym samym pogłębiając rozumienie trwałej obecności niepokoju związanego z traumą. Praca opiera się także na teorii traumy i pamięci, odwołując się do koncepcji Marianne Hirsch oraz Maurice'a Halbwachsa. Obie teorie służą do analizy traumy transgeneracyjnej jako formy nawiedzającego dziedzictwa, które nieustannie oddziałuje na kształtowanie tożsamości jednostek oraz ich relacje społeczno-kulturowe. Dyskusja na temat traumy międzypokoleniowej opiera się także na pracach Ronalda Eyermana, Gabrielle Schwab oraz M. Gerarda Fromma. Metodologicznie, dysertacja wykorzystuje badania widmowe (ang. *spectral studies*) Kathleen Brogan i Avery'ego Gordona, które ukazują, jak zjawy i duchy ucieleśniają pamięć zbiorową i społeczną traumę.