Entanglements of Trauma:

The Intersectionality of Race, Gender, and Class in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*

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Introduction

Toni Morrison is a well-known African American female writer and one of her greatest achievements is the ability to portray what it means to be Black[1] in American society. She was born in 1931 and grew up in Lorain, Ohio and got her master's degree in American Literature from Cornell University. Together with a Pulitzer Prize won in 1988 for her novel *Beloved*, Morrison was also the first African American woman to receive a Nobel Prize for literature in 1993 ("Toni Morrison's Biography").

In Morrison's novels her characters have difficulties for self-definition and of racial liberation, and they repeatedly depend on emotional, along with physical aspect of belonging, in order to survive their racial trauma. A place or a concept of belonging that is recovered through memory, brings protection from trauma. The core of cultural trauma of slavery emphasizes both of *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and *Beloved* (1987), however, the characters in both novels undergo personal and contextual difficulties in unique ways. The sense of belonging is a psychic support for the "self" and how an individual's own uniqueness influences their perceptions, and it develops in relation with trauma, community, and memory. Psychoanalytic, cultural, and social theories help to account for the almost insuperable task of recovery from trauma to gain subjectivity. Bodily trauma becomes a placeholder for both memory and trauma, which explains why trauma remains and why it is passed on from generation to generation (Caruth 63; Schreiber 11).

This project discusses how the idea of Black feminist thought, intersectionality, and cultural trauma is presented in Toni Morrison's novels, *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved.* The purpose of this project is to examine how trauma and Black female identity in relation to intersectional issues of race, gender, and class are manifested in the two novels. In order to attain this, the paper will examine the understanding and exploration of trauma theory and the role of memory. Furthermore, the analyses of cultural trauma and memory discuss the importance of verbalizing trauma and the need of an empathetic witness to listen to the trauma story if one is to recover and heal. Both of Morrison's novels contribute to discussions of trauma recovery by portraying the role of community as an essential and powerful force in establishing a possibility of healing through remembering. In order to analyze the two novels by Toni Morrison, theories by bell hooks[2] and Patricia Hill Collins will be introduced.

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[1] The words "Black" and "African American" will interchangeably be used throughout this paper. I have chosen to capitalize "Black" for the same reasons as Crenshaw as she explains as follows: "I capitalize "Black" because "Blacks, like Asians, Latinos, and other 'minorities,' constitute a specific cultural group and, as such, require denotation as a proper noun […] by the same token, I do not capitalize "white," which is not a proper noun, since whites do not constitute a specific cultural group" (Crenshaw 1244).

[2] It is intentional that bell hooks' name is written in lowercase.

Theoretical Framework

This paper seeks to contribute to the understanding of the racial and social challenges that African Americans undergo in a white American society. In order to attain this, there will be an elaboration on contemporary trauma theory and Black feminist theory. For the chosen theories, the paper will introduce different academic articles and books from specialists in order to support the statement. The theory section is divided into two parts, where the first part deals with cultural trauma theories. The second part of the theory section discusses Black feminist thinking and theory. The first part of the theory section examines the understanding and exploration of contemporary trauma theory and the role of memory, which is split into four different trauma theories. The first theory is by Ron Eyerman, a sociology professor, who focuses on cultural trauma theory, where he explores the formation of African American identity. The second and third part will examine professor Evelyn J. Schreiber's contribution to Black American trauma, where she discusses the construction of Blackness and enslavement, and trauma in psychoanalysis, which touches upon Black Americans and their life experience. Hereafter, the fourth theory will examine Cathy Caruth, where she discusses the outcome of memory and remembrance and how it leads to trauma.

Moreover, the paper will introduce the two feminist theorists, bell hooks and Patricia Collins, to discuss the understanding of Black feminist thinking. Patricia Hill Collins is an American sociologist known for her research and theory that covers the intersection of race, gender, class, sexuality and nationality. Moreover, Collins' fame and praise as a sociologist is largely due to her development of the concept of intersectionality, and in 2016 she published the book *Intersectionality* together with Sirma Bilge. Moreover, bell hooks is considered to be one of the most influential academics due to her thoughts on Black feminist theory. When she published her book *Ain't I a Woman?: Black Women and Feminism* (1981) the terms such as racism and sexism became a talking point. She discusses the iniquity of Black women in the U.S. (hooks, *Ain't I a Woman* 12).

Moreover, the paper will delve into the concept of identity through an intersectional analysis of the two chosen novels by including Patricia Collins, Sirma Bilge (2016), and Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991). It will focus on how different aspects, such as, social and historical context, race, gender, and class intersect, combine and influence people's understanding of themselves. By including trauma theories and Black feminist thought, we attain a knowledge of African American's, and especially female's, standpoints and experiences in American society, which hereby helps to analyze the two chosen novels from a critical perspective.

The analyses investigate primarily on how trauma, race, gender and identity are portrayed in the selected works by Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and *Beloved* (1987). Toni Morrison is both a theorist and novelist which makes her perspective particularly interesting and who adds a rather controversial perspective to the issue of intersectionality. The analyses will be divided into two main sections where I analyze the two novels one by one and in chronological order. Through intersectional analysis of both novels this paper hopes to highlight the interconnection and similarities and differences in the two novels. Lastly, there will be given a discussion on how spectrality is seen in her novels, and how Morrison uses specters to bring the traumas of African American life to the forefront by calling attention to histories and experiences, both cultural and personal.

Theory

Cultural Trauma Theory

In contrast to psychological or physical trauma, which involves the experience of prominent emotional agony by an individual, cultural trauma touches upon the dramatic loss of identity and meaning. It is a torment in the social fabric where it affects a group of people that have attained some level of cohesion, such as the collective memory of slavery (Eyerman 4). In his book *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (2001), Ron Eyerman, Professor of Sociology, suggests that one should rather focus on traumatic affects instead of traumatic events, because when talking of trauma, it refers to something that is experienced in psychoanalytical accounts and calling experiences 'traumatic" needs explanations. Therefore, the trauma does not necessarily need to be felt by everyone in a community or experienced directly by any or all (3). Cultural trauma occurs when an individual of a collectivity experience that they have been exposed to a horrific event which then leaves indelible bruises upon the group consciousness. Therefore, their memory will be marked forever and causes a dramatic change in their identity, which is played out by future generations (Alexander 1).

In his introduction to *Cultural Trauma*, Eyerman states that his primary intent with this book is to explore the formation of the African American identity through the theory of cultural trauma. However, the trauma in question is slavery, not so much as a personal experience, "but as a collective memory: a pervasive remembrance that grounded a people's sense of itself" (Eyerman 1). Cultural trauma has an enduring effect where the remembrance of the event cannot be easily forgotten. The

memory will be played repeatedly in individual consciousness, becoming fixed in collective memory. Furthermore, Eyerman draws upon the concept of collective memory in order to understand African American trauma. The concept focuses on memory as something that is socially constructed and spatially and temporally determined. Collective memory is therefore understood as recollections of a:

> shared past that are retained by members of a group […] that experienced it, and passed on either in an ongoing process of what might be called public commemoration, in which officially sanctioned rituals are engaged to establish a shared past, or through discourses more specific to a particular group or collective. (Eyerman 4-5)

Even though it is individuals who remember, their memory cannot be understood without focusing on the context in which it is situated. Memory is collective in that it is supra-individual, and individual memory is derived in relation to a group. Due to the fact that individuals are derivatives of collectivities, families, and communities they become aware of themselves through continuous reflection upon shared memory. Therefore, memory is always group memory (5). Furthermore, Eyerman states that there is a difference between trauma as it affects individuals and as a cultural process. As a cultural process, trauma is conveyed through several forms of representations and associated with the reformation of collective identity and the reworking of collective memory. He states that the belief of a particular African American identity became apparent after slavery had been abolished during the post-Civil War period. The trauma of slavery was not necessarily something that was experienced directly by many of the subjects of this study, however, came to be central to their efforts to forge a collective identity out of its remembrance. Slavery was traumatic when looking back on past events, and therefore, formed a "primal scene" that could, possibly, unite all "African Americans" in the United States, "whether or not they had themselves been slaves or had any knowledge of or feeling for Africa" (1).

Psychoanalysis and Trauma

The literary critic and professor of English and African American Studies, Claudia Tate, discusses that psychoanalysis can be used in order to inform us about the complicated social workings of race in the United States and she examines the complicated relationship between identity and ideology (Schreiber 7). She explains that the parallel between socially constructed identity and ideology represents the repetition of communal behavior. Tate discusses that everyone is born into a

community discourse that constructs their identity socially. Moreover, psychoanalytic theory concerns trauma that individuals have experienced in their lives, and which later affects their self-esteem (Schreiber 8). Moreover, trauma can be caused when the victim lacks protection from their surroundings. In order to treat trauma, it requires to help the individual feel safe and secure. Traumatic events often confront people with the severity of helplessness and extreme fear (8).

Experiencing traumatic events often leaves people feeling abandoned (Schreiber 8), and this form of neglect is an important theme in Toni Morrison's novels. Moreover, people do not only experience trauma from certain traumatic incidents, they may also experience trauma from their physical environment and support systems as well. These elements manifest key concepts in Morrison's novels, where the individual, family and culture intersect. A feeling of safe self-esteem and a solid feeling of social ties tend to protect the individual against the effects of trauma because of a sustained social support (9). Schreiber states that "retelling and remembering the trauma within a supportive community enables trauma victims to move forward" (16). Morrison's novels also portray how home, family and community can moderate trauma, which affects the self-esteem. Being exposed to trauma and the outcomes of trauma differs depending on the time span of life during where the trauma takes place (9).

Individuals who are traumatized as children are likely to carry their trauma into adulthood. In order to protect themselves, traumatized children develop different ways of mental functioning hoping to prevent the return of the helpless or hopeless state of traumatization. However, these compensations are frequently damaging to the individual or the community (9).

Cultural Memory

In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1995), Cathy Caruth, an English Professor, states that a victim who has experienced trauma, does not necessarily become traumatized by an experience that can cause traumatic effects, but rather the remembrance of it. Caruth roots her analysis in the power and objectivity of the beginning traumatic event, explaining that the unknowing reenactment of an event is difficult to simply leave behind (Caruth 3). The event is buried in the unconscious, and is therefore experienced irrationally, "in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor […] [and] returns to haunt the survivor later on" (4). Caruth states that what causes trauma is a shock that seems to work like a "bodily threat", and what is "passed on, finally, is not just the meaning of the words but their performance" (Caruth 63, 115). She explains the nature of trauma, which is embedded in the body, where its performance conveys from individual to individual and

from generation to generation. This bodily and transmitting aspect of trauma creates a problematic cycle of inherited behavior (Schreiber 11). The theory suggests that a trauma experienced by a group in the historical past can be experienced by an individual, living centuries later, who shares something similar of the historical group, due to the timeless and repetitious characteristics of traumatic experience and memory (Balaev 150).

Black Feminist Thought

The book *Black Feminist Thought* (2000) by Patricia Hill Collins seeks to focus Black women into intersectionalist thought, where it addresses the power struggles that Black women face, not only due to their race but also to their gender. Her work is intensely personal, and she employs non-academic knowledge, where she includes real-life individual experiences of Black women. The book as a whole is intended to represent Black women's collective intellectual legacy and relate insights into social relations and justice. In the first chapter of her book, "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought", Collins gives a description for the several features that, according to her, differentiate common U.S. Black feminist thought. She discusses the importance for Black feminism because U.S. Black women constitute an oppressed group, and therefore it is necessary to view Black feminist thought as a critical social theory (25). Collins does not only focus on the individual's own experiences. She believes that whatever the individual Black woman thinks and has experiences can also "characterize Black women's experiences and ideas as a group" (27-28). They all share some common ideas or experiences, and therefore they can be seen as a collectivity (29).

Core Themes in Black Feminist Thought

Controlling Images: Mammies, Matriarchs, Womanhood and the Other

One of the significant core themes, that Collins discusses is her description of the concept "controlling images". When discussing "controlling images", Collins highly focuses on the negative stereotypical representations and images of Black women, where Black women have been put in categories in society. These images are used to construct Black women's oppression to appear natural and normal of everyday life (Collins 77). Controlling images focuses on the importance of intersectionality in the U.S. Collins analyses how controlling images affects both Black women and men. These stereotypifications of Black people are responsible for the oppression which people of color encounters on a daily basis. These controlling images are not only stereotypes to show the differences between Blacks and whites, however they are a dangerous tool to justify mistreatments of oppressed

groups. These controlling images are a form of social injustice and to show the power relations between Blacks and whites. It is important to understand that stereotypes are not just a form of generalizations, however they are systematically used to maltreat certain groups (76-78). Collins accounts for how:

> The dominant ideology of the slave era fostered the creation of several interrelated, socially constructed controlling images of Black womanhood, each reflecting the dominant group's interest in maintaining the Black woman's subordination. (79)

In addition to this statement, she introduces the first controlled image, which is the "mammy". The mammy was firmly enshrined in the consciousness of white America when Black women emerged from slavery. Moreover, Black and white women were both significant to slavery's continuation and therefore, the controlling images of Black womanhood was used to mask social relations, which affected all women. Back in the 19th century in the U.S. an ideology of feminine behavior had begun. It was an ideology of the ideal woman and later to be known as the "cult of true womanhood". The cult of true womanhood focused on the traditional family ideals (Welter 156) and that a real woman must have four virtues, such as, piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity (Collins 79). Black women were confronted with different set of controlling images – the mammy. The mammy image was regarded as something asexual and Black women were expected to be faithful and an obedient domestic servant to her white family. The mammy had to clean, cook and even take care of the white family's children as if it were their own (80). The mammy image also had a symbolic function where it supported oppression of gender and sexuality. Black women and white women had physical, cultural, and intellectual differences, and the mammy image was a form to show the oppositional differences between Black and whites, and thus distinguish Black women from the rest. All in all, the mammy was entirely expected to commit herself entirely to her work. All the functions of a mammy were primarily physical (81).

Collins goes further on and explains the second controlling image, which is the "matriarch". Similar to the mammy image, the matriarch image is also "central to intersecting oppressions of class, gender, and race" (84). What differentiates the mammy and the matriarch image, was that the mammy image usually represents the Black mother figure in white households, whereas the matriarch represents the Black mother figure in Black households. The mammy was exemplified as the "good" Black mother and the matriarch was exemplified as the "bad". The problem with this image was that Black mothers were not viewed as a good mother nor a good wife. Because they were often away

from their homes, children and husband, working all day for their white families, they scarcely had any time at being home. This prevented them from fulfilling their daily chores as a mother and a wife. Being away too often they couldn't provide for a decent upbringing for their children and they could not teach them properly, which therefore led to social problems in Black societies. Black mothers were viewed as unfeminine and aggressive and were often criticized by both white groups and Black men of emasculating their husbands and lovers (85). Black females were often left by their partners and were viewed negatively and labelled as a failed mother (83).

In *Ain't I a Woman* (1981) bell hooks states that even though the matriarch image is depicted as negative, many Black women, in general, were proud to be labeled matriarchs. It meant that the term had more positive implications than other labels which were used to characterize Black womanhood. It was considered more positive than the mammy image (80). hooks further discusses that the myth white people used about Black women being sexually loose as a way to devalue Black womanhood, they also used the myth about matriarchy to impress "upon the consciousness of all Americans that Black women were masculinized, castrating, ball-busters" (80-81). However, Black women still continued to embrace the matriarch image because it permitted them to consider themselves as privileged. hooks consider this as brainwashing because they end up embracing concepts that actually do them more harm than good (81).

Apart from the mammy and the matriarch image, Collins also presents the image of Black women's portrayal as the Other. She discusses how African Americans are assigned all of the negative characteristics opposite and subordinate to those reserved for whites. Even though many Black women typically resist being objectified as the Other, the controlling images still remain powerful and influence their relationships with whites. Black women are dealing with existing standards of beauty – especially with their skin color, facial features, and hair texture. These features are examples of how controlling images derogate Black women (Collins 97). It doesn't matter whether the Black women are intelligent, educated or beautiful. If the Black women's features and skin colors are most African, they have to step back (98). Part of the objectification of all women lies in assessing how they look. Having white skin and straight hair simultaneously privilege people in a system that raises whiteness over Blackness. Therefore, Black women experience a pain of never being able to measure up to standards of beauty, which are standards that are used by white men and women and Black men. It becomes impossible to escape these controlling images since they are hegemonic (100).

In *Feminism is for Everybody* (2015) hooks states that all white women in the US know that their status is different from women of color. They already know this from the time they are children

watching television and looking at magazines and seeing only their images. White women know that being white is a privilege in the US, and the only reason nonwhites are "absent/invisible" is because they are not white (55). Challenging the industry of sexist-defined fashion also made females, especially Black women, to examine the obsessive, life-threatening aspects of appearance fixation (33). Mass media also had a huge impact on the way females would view themselves. It had become the norm to see "reed-thin, dyed-blonde women" images in movies, on television, and in advertisements, which could result in confusing messages to females (34). While white women have been placed on a symbolic pedestal, Black women are seen as fallen women. In the Black community the "fair-skinned black woman who most nearly resembled white women was seen as the "lady" and placed on a pedestal while darker-skinned black women were seen as bitches and whores" (hooks, *Ain't I a Woman* 110).

Black Women and Motherhood

The theme of motherhood plays an important role in Toni Morrison's novels. She constantly challenges the stereotypes of Black motherhood and her female characters make an important statement against society. Her characters do not submit to society's ideology of Black maternity. Therefore, it is relevant to discuss Black females and their standpoint on motherhood. In *Black Feminist Thought* (2000) Patricia Collins argues that Black women have different roles in African American communities. She discusses the differences of mother roles, where she distinguishes biological mothers from other women, also termed as 'othermothers' (Collins 192). Collins brings up two points about motherhood; the one where she discusses the community's impact on a child's upbringing, and the one of the biological mother's parenting style. She argues the differences between biological mothers and othermothers and gives a simple explanation on the two.

For biological mothers it is expected of them to raise and provide for their children, however in some cases it is necessary for other women to step in and take over that responsibility. The explanation is that in some Black communities they do not believe it to be rational for a single mother to raise a child alone and bear the responsibility by themselves. Therefore, it is sometimes necessary for othermothers to step in so they can share that responsibility (192). Although Black men and fathers are sometimes physically present in the household, the relationship between a child and the provider is typically women-centered. When the biological mother cannot fulfill her responsibility as a mother, the community, grandmothers, aunts or even older siblings take on the responsibility by taking care

of someone else's child (193). It was traditionally a norm for African American communities to take care of each other's children (194).

Moreover, Collins talks about mothers, daughters, and socialization for survival and how mothers strive to guide their daughters in the right direction in life. The mothers or othermothers had to teach their children to fit into the sexual politics of Black womanhood, in order to ensure their daughters' physical survival (198-199). Many Black mothers are often described as strong disciplinarians and overly protective, in order to socialize their daughters to be independent, strong and self-confident (Collins 200). However, Black women's efforts to provide a physical and psychic base for their daughters can affect their mother styles and the emotional intensity of Black mother-daughter relationships. For example, mothers in Black women's fiction are usually strong and devoted, however, they are rarely affectionate. For many Black women who go through intersecting oppressions discover that they have neither the time nor the patience for affection when providing for their children (202).

Intersectionality as an Analytic Tool

The theory of intersectionality is developed by the Black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, where she specializes in race and gender issues with focus on intersectionality and social politics. Crenshaw uses the term intersectionality to try to bring together the studies of gender, class, and race under an "umbrella term" in order to explain the different discourses and how they can be used in an interconnected analysis (Collins and Bilge 80-81). In 2016 Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge co-wrote their book *Intersectionality* and instead of examining gender, race, class, and nation as distinctive social hierarchies, Collins and Bilge examine how these different factors build on each other and work together (25). There have been varied answers concerning the definition of what intersectionality is, however, Collins and Bilge use the following description:

> Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood and shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytical tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves. (2)

Collins and Bilge point out that it is basically impossible to divide these different categories into one theory. Therefore, they conclude that the different categories must be analyzed as a total. This approach is what they call an intersectional approach. Collins and Bilge give an example on why single-factors cannot work alone but have to work together. They discuss that, for example, a Black female cannot just be put into one category, such as Black. Since they are also females, another category comes in, and the list could go on (3). Collins and Bilge state that intersectionality as an analytic tool examines how power relations are intertwined and are mutually constructing. Within these power relations there are different categories of analysis and terms that reference important social divisions, such as, race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, nation, and religion. It is necessary to use intersectionality as an analytic tool in order to address a variety of problems and social issues (4). Intersectionality focuses on how the different power relations in the different categories, such as race, gender etc. affect each other (7).

In "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color" (1991) Crenshaw examines how intersectionality can be used when discussing identity politics in connection to violence and domination against women of color. Crenshaw believes that it is a problem if one only acknowledges one kind of discrimination, when it comes to identity formation[3] and the analysis of dominance and violence. According to her, inequality is established through an intersection of discourses and not by a single factor. She states that: "the problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference […] but […] that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences" (Crenshaw 1242).

To acknowledge this problem and to solve it one has to create awareness of these interacting discourses. Therefore, the acceptance of how different discourses intertwine will help the formation of identity on an individual level and also help minority groups that discrimination to be accepted and recognized (1299). This paper will therefore use intersectionality in order to discuss collections of social problems within the selected novels by Toni Morrison.

Analysis

[3] In this paper, 'identity formation' is simply understood as the complex process of an individual's development on their identity and how the individuals view and define themselves (Herman "Identity formation").

The Bluest Eye

In "The Adolescent Complexities of Race, Gender, and Class in Toni Morrison's '*The Bluest Eye*'" (2004) Paul Mahaffey views the novel in the genre of adolescent literature that deals with issues of trauma, race, gender, and class and discusses how these issues affect the young protagonist. The main protagonist in the novel is the eleven-year-old Pecola Breedlove. She is a young, Black girl who tries to find a safe and nurturing relationship in an "adult world of white, assimilationist attitudes", however, she is only met with exclusion and unhappiness from her community due to her racial, gender, and social class background (Mahaffey 155). This exclusion from her community, as well as her family, eventually silences Pecola and crushes her desires for having blue eyes. This abandonment pushes the poor girl into the dark and bitter reality of the world. The novel does not only follow Pecola Breedlove, but also on the story of the two coming-of-age, Black girls, Claudia and Freida, who manage to break free from social standards (155).

Intersectionality

Paul Mahaffey discusses how Toni Morrison's use of triads plays a significant role throughout *The Bluest Eye,* such as, the issues of race, gender, and class (Mahaffey 157). Due to the community's and society's way of thinking and their beliefs toward these societal issues, Pecola ends up feeling neglected and lost. The novel deals with the complexities that are connected with self-definition in terms of societal issues and how they are intertwined (157). While Claudia and her sister survive "black girlhood […], they reveal the tragic circumstances that destroy the innocence of another black girl, [Pecola]" (157). In order to analyze the constructions of power relations within *The Bluest Eye*, there will be a discussion of the different categories of analysis that concern the social division. As mentioned earlier, three interconnected categories are important to understand, namely race, gender, and class.

Race

Paul Mahaffey goes on further to write that the experiences of race that Pecola encounters during her teenage years, all happens in a community that has "internalized the dominant culture's racist ideas of a superior goodness associated with "whiteness" and a physical and mental ugliness associated with "Blackness"" (Mahaffey 158). The narrative takes place in the town of Lorain, Ohio in 1941 where the residents live in a segregated community. The impact of racial stereotypes on Pecola's identity development and on the other characters in the novel play an important role. The novel's

focus stays on the adolescent experience, especially the one of Pecola's. Toni Morrison gives an explanation to why she thinks it is interesting for the story to focus on the adolescent experience. She writes in the "Afterword" of *The Bluest Eye* that she discusses racial beauty in order to examine "how something as grotesque as the demonization of an entire race could take root inside the most delicate member of society: a child; the most vulnerable member; a female" (*TBE*[4] 206). Morrison tries to dramatize the pain that casual racial contempt can cause by choosing a unique situation rather than a representative one. Unlike the average Black family and the MacTeers family, the intensity of Pecola's situation is caused because of a ruined and damaged family. Morrison continues to write that, even though Pecola's life is singular, she believes that some parts of Pecola's woundability[5] are embedded in all young girls (207). The marginalized female characters in Morrison's novel support the plot development and they give a necessary subjectivity in order to show their raced and gendered experiences. And she does so successfully through the eyes of an innocent child.

Physical beauty is an important factor throughout the novel. Many of the characters' self-esteem in the novel get affected from physical beauty, due to different media outlets of that time period. The media defines what beauty is based on white culture, and therefore some of the Black characters in the novel have trouble defining themselves. They believe that white beauty is more superior than Black beauty. The Breedloves are an example of how beauty and status are connected. The beauty ideal in the relation between beauty and whiteness goes beyond bodily exterior. The beauty ideal becomes to signify one's own value and worth in society. Some of the characters believe that their beauty is what determines their worth in their community and in society.

At school there is a new girl, Maureen Peal, that Pecola admires. Being described as a "high-yellow dream child with long brown hair braided into two lynch ropes that hung down her back" (60), Maureen attracts both the grown-ups and the children her age when she moves into the Black community with her parents, because she can excel in white culture due to her being light-skinned and wealthy. Her long brown hair that is braided into two lynch ropes, resembles that of young European girls. Maureen lives up to the standards of beauty, however, by describing her hair as "lynch ropes" Morrison indicates a sinister quality of such beauty, and at the same time accepting the white ancestor responsible for those ropes. Morrison encourages the reader to look closely at the interwoven history of sexual and racial discrimination in the U.S. that is encoded in the metaphoric description

[4] *TBE* is an abbreviation for the novel *The Bluest Eye*.
[5] What is meant with the word "woundability" is the tendency to absorb and internalize Western standards.

of the braided hair. Therefore, Maureen does not represent a positive force in the girls' lives. Her hair can be braided the way white girls' hair would be and not in cornrows.

The Black community admires Maureen because of her light color, and this causes a lack of self-esteem in Pecola, Claudia, and Frieda. This obsession with skin color replicates the hierarchy of white culture and a structure that the three girls consider as strange; "[we] could not comprehend this unworthiness. Jealousy we understood and thought natural – a desire to have what somebody else had; but envy was a strange, new feeling for us" (72). Claudia and Frieda cannot help but notice that Maureen "enchanted the entire school" (60) and that they both are "bemused, irritated, and fascinated by her" (61). Due to the different emotions the sisters get they start to explore Maureen even further, so they can better understand why she is considered special and why she is someone who is loved so dearly by the Black community, when Claudia and Frieda are both someone who is more or less invisible to the same community. The two sisters further examine Maureen in order to find any type of flaws to "restore [their] equilibrium" (61). They mock her by "uglying up her name" by changing Maureen Peal to Meringue Pie. They later find out that she has a dogtooth, which further devalues her whiteness. They learn that Maureen was born with six fingers on each hand, however, it had been surgically corrected. By discovering two physical deformities, the sisters end up calling her "Six-finger-dog-tooth-meringue-pie", and this naming allows them to acquire a way of criticizing this perfect image of whiteness. Different from the two sisters, Pecola is not in a mental state to recognize and express the idea that whiteness has its imperfection. She, on the other hand, is very much astonished by Maureen. One day she accepts her help at school when Maureen saves her from a group of boys who bully her about her "Blackness". Furthermore, Pecola and Maureen get into an argument when Maureen questions Pecola about her family and personal life. However, Claudia notices the uncomfortable inquisition of Pecola, and thereby interferes at the end when she has had enough of Maureen's arrogance and her questionings, by demanding Maureen stop harassing Pecola. However, Maureen responds to Claudia's involvement by insulting them both by saying that "I *am* cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I *am* cute!" (71). Pecola accepts her insults, but Claudia and Frieda repay the insult by shouting "Six-finger-dog-tooth-meringue-pie".

Moreover, the three girls' interaction with Maureen shows "two diametrically opposed means of constructing a racial identity" (Mahaffey 160). For a young Black female, like Pecola, growing up in a Black community that idolizes basically everything Maureen represents, she thinks that the only help left for her is to accept the community's racial preference, and then go back into a solitary community of the self. In the novel, Morrison shows the mental destruction and trauma that intra-

racism can cause to a young mind, and also shows a solution to that intra-racism in the two sisters who bravely confront and challenge the assumed superiority of whiteness (160). Claudia pinpoints the larger cultural mechanism of envy and its manifestation in the social construction of beauty when she thinks that; "The *Thing* to fear was the *Thing* that made *her* beautiful, and not us" (*TBE* 72). This ideology of racial devaluation results in Claudia to react in anger and violence.

Morrison also explores the relation between race, beauty, and ugliness. During her adolescent years, Pecola tries to find her self-identity and meaningfulness, however it is not found. Pecola is already a vulnerable teenager and being Black makes it more difficult to search for her own self-definition. She tries to seek comfort in her parents, especially from her mother, however neither her mother nor her father are supportive. They do not show a positive image of how parents should be. Pecola does not get any affection from her parents and the main reason for this is due to her melanin. This form of insecurity Pecola gets leads to a racial self-hatred. Pecola gets distressed over her Blackness and she starts to view herself as ugly. This perception of herself as being an ugly Black girl comes from her family (Mahaffey 158). Her parents believe that being Black is equal to being ugly, and since her parents don't embrace their own race and beauty this negative concept of themselves affects Pecola's own conscience.

The Breedloves are a lower-class family that live in a storefront apartment: "they lived there because they were poor and black, and they stayed there because they believed they were ugly" (*TBE* 36). The Breedloves have convinced themselves that due to their black skin they are ugly. This perception of themselves is given by society, from both white and colored people. The Breedloves convince themselves that because they live in a dirty storefront apartment it somehow makes their economic situation a part of their identity. Morrison does not describe their economic situation as unique, however, she describes their ugliness as unique (36). The Breedloves are not physically ugly, but Cholly, Pecola's father, is described as being ugly only due to his behavior. The rest of the family is only "ugly" because they believe that they are due to societal pressures, such as advertisements, movies, and books that are put upon them. It is this ideal image that causes them to feel ugly and they accept the role which white culture[6] has put upon them. Collins discusses in *Black Feminist Thought* that Black females are dealing with standards of beauty which they are never being able to measure up to (Collins 100). Morrison goes further on to challenge Western standards of beauty and demonstrates how the concept of beauty is socially constructed. She writes that:

[6] In this context, white culture defines what is considered normative – it creates the standard for judging values. Moreover, white culture, in this context, is considered to assign a higher value to some ways of behaving than others. It often defines the "other" as dangerous or deviant.

> 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. It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. The master had said, "You are ugly people." They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, ever movie, every glance. "Yes," they had said. "You are right." And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it. (*TBE* 37)

This quote is an illustration of how the dominant racial group's view on beauty serves to demean other races. The passage also shows the insecurities that Black people have about their self-identity. The important point of this quote is that this burden of feeling ugly as a Black person is accepted without any coercion. All of the Black characters in the novel, especially the Breedlove family, feel insecure and less important because of their race. Due to these ideals that are set by society, the Breedloves are unable to develop any form of racial consciousness (Mahaffey 159). The Breedloves do not only view themselves through their own eyes but also through the eyes of society. Because of this double consciousness, the Breedloves accept and support the idea that they are less than the others. This is a very powerful quote because Morrison shows the damage that Black people suffer as a construct of these beauty standards in a racialized society. The issue that Morrison focuses on is that by accepting these ideals set by society, Black people become their own oppressors.

To support this statement, the African American author, Donna K. Bivens discusses internalized racism in her chapter from *Flipping the Script: White Privilege and Community Building* (2005). According to Bivens internalized racism should be understood as systematic oppression because it is not only an issue of individuals, but it is a system that is structured. Although internalized racism can result in self-low esteem or self-hatred among people of color, Bivens makes it clear that not all people of color feel that way. Many people of color have high self-esteem and self-love, but they too can struggle with internalized racism (Bivens 44-45). Bivens provides a definition of internalized racism and what it is:

> As people of color are victimized by racism, we internalize it. That is, we develop ideas, beliefs, actions and behaviors that support or collude with racism. This internalized racism has its own systemic reality and its own negative consequences in the lives and communities

> of people of color. More than just a consequence of racism, then, internalized racism is a systemic oppression in reaction to racism that has a life of its own. (Bivens 44)

For centuries it has been taught that white is superior to Black (Pinkney 95), and therefore, people of color have imprinted this idea that causes them to unconsciously hate themselves and other people of color and to then idealize whiteness (Brown, Sellers and Gomez 57). According to Professor Patricia Cormier-Hamilton self-knowledge and a strong self-identity is crucial for African Americans in order to be protected from internalized racism (Cormier-Hamilton 125). Furthermore, she discusses that Morrison highlights two challenges the characters in *The Bluest Eye* face: "first, the inherent difficulty all minorities have in assimilating into a domain society without betraying one's race, and second, the danger of alienation from oneself" (125). Therefore, it is important for the Black community in *The Bluest Eye* to support and embrace each other, in order to break free from internalized racism.

Gender

As discussed earlier, Pecola struggles tremendously with her racial identity and with the community's attitude towards race and beauty. However, these are not the only factors that she has to compete with. She also struggles with both society's and her community's ideologies on gender (Mahaffey 160). Womanhood and marriage are presented in the novel through Mrs. Breedlove, also known as Pauline, where she believes that innocence is ruined through deprivation of marriage and the oppression that follows. Pauline is Pecola's mother, and she experiences oppression from her husband, Cholly, however, she is neither innocent nor helpless. Pauline utilizes authority over her children by using physical and verbal assault. One of the most damaging relationships in terms of gender in the novel, is perhaps Pecola's relationship with her mother. Besides the mother's contribution to Pecola's belief in racial self-hatred, she also contributes to Pecola's negative self-image involving her gender. Pauline's internalization of the belief that Black females are at the lowest bottom of the social hierarchy within the Black community and the dominant community, results in Pauline to withhold any nurturing love from her family, especially Pecola who is the only other female member in the family. As Collins states, mothers in Black women's fiction are usually strong and devoted, however, they are rarely affectionate (Collins 202).

In the novel, Pauline and Pecola do not have a loving mother-daughter relationship. Pauline adores everything that is white and basically fears everything that is Black. Since Pecola's skin tone is dark black and resembles her father, her mother can't give her proper love and affection as a mother should. Pauline Breedlove also believes that white beauty is the standard for all, and that only white

women are beautiful. Before Pauline had Pecola she would go to the movies in order to forget her own miserable life. When Pauline goes to the movies, she uses the standard of beauty that she has learned there: "She was never able, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and not assign in some category in the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen" (*TBE* 97). So, when Pauline has Pecola she cannot help but use that standard to her as well. Pauline is held captive by the images of the silver screen.

As a mother, it is expected of Pauline to nurture and love her own children, instead all that nurturing is directed towards the white family she works for. Everything seems perfect at the Fisher household and she idolizes them because they are a perfect white family, whereas she resents everything that belongs to herself and her home. Pauline is someone who "represents a self that exudes nothing but mania for all that is white, and a lovelessness for everything that is her own" (qtd. in Mahaffey 161). When Pauline is at home, all of her energy is directed towards her passionate religious life. The Breedlove household is a negative image. Pauline, therefore, becomes what Patricia Collins calls the "Outsider-within"– a term that expresses Black female oppression in a Western culture (Collins 15). The term is an oxymoron which describes the contradictory social position of black females in the U.S. Black females are not considered as a full member of society because of their gender and race (15-16). Pauline, and basically every Black character in the novel, is regarded as an "outsider-within" because they can never be fully accepted into society due to their race and gender.

In "Focusing on the Wrong Front: Historical Displacement, the Maginot Line, and *The Bluest Eye*" (2002) Jennifer Gillan discusses that one of the issues that people of color struggle with is that of citizenship in American society. She writes that "citizenship is measured by one's ability to purchase the commodities that identify one as looking American" (288) and therefore, the Breedloves do not have this ability because they are Black and poor. Pauline and Cholly cannot live up to the nuclear family model, where typically the husband is the breadwinner. They are not able to maintain this gendered division, and therefore, they are forced by economic circumstances into a role reversal, where Pauline is the primary breadwinner. She becomes a servant for a wealthy white family, the Fishers, where she is responsible for domestic tasks. Being their servant, Pauline feels what it is like to be them and to feel the privileges that white families have (Gillan 289). At the Fishers' house, "she could arrange things, clean things, line things up in neat tows […] Here she found beauty, order, cleanliness, and praise" (*TBE* 125). Pauline's dreams and desires of living a life like an ordinary white family and own what they own get fulfilled when she is at the Fishers just; "knowing there were soap

bars by the dozen, bacon by the rasher, and reveling in her shiny pots and pans and polished floors (126). As the Fishers' servant, Pauline can move "unconsciously and unobstructed through the public sphere" (Gilllan 291) in a way that she cannot as Mrs. Breedlove. Being Polly, a nickname she gets from the Fishers, is perhaps the only way she can get close as a Black woman to experience the privileges of disembodied citizenship. Embodying the role of Polly becomes a replacement for what Pauline wants, which is a satisfying and substantial self. In a society where everything is working against her, Pauline has to cope by choosing to believe in a fictional reality.

Pauline's relationship with her daughter is particularly tragic because they are in a situation where the mother and daughter live in a patriarchal and racist environment, and therefore not allowing them the opportunity to build up a positive and subjective identity. Neither of the two rely on each other in order to empower and lift each other up as Black females. Pauline does not offer Pecola a strong supportive system as a mother should, which results in Pecola to be a victim to the demands of white social standards (Mahaffey 161). As a contrast to Pauline, Ms. MacTeer, Claudia and Frieda's mother, is a great example of this strong supportive system that she offers to her children. She takes action when one of her children is being violated. Due to this empowerment and supportive system she gives to her children, they do not fall victim to society's demands. Her children become more aware of their self-identity, gender, and race because they have someone who uplifts them and supports them. Pecola and her mother have grown so much apart and are practically strangers. When Pauline looks at her daughter, she gets a feeling of resentment because of Pecola's Blackness, a feature that is so painful to Pauline that she wants to obliterate it from her existence. Whereas, when Pecola looks at her mother she sees nothing, but a stranger called "Mrs. Breedlove". Her relationship with her mother does not supply her with any "positive means of becoming a strong, self-loving, and subjective adult female" (Mahaffey 161).

Class

The negative communal attitudes of race and gender are harmful for Pecola's childhood, but that is not all. She is also met with harsh and exclusionary awareness of belonging to a class in society from some people of the Black community. The dominant culture has a power to oppress those people who can be classified as the Other. According to Mahaffey, when Black girls are classified as the Other, they undergo a "fault between childhood and adulthood" (Mahaffey 162). As with Pecola's development of her racial identity, her classification as the Other with regard to class starts with her family. The Breedloves' poverty is "traditional and stultifying" (*TBE* 36), however, not unique for

the Black community. What makes Pecola's poverty noteworthy is when she meets other people of the Black community who are from the middle-class and socially accepted by the dominant society. Morrison describes these specific members as thin brown girls: "They come from Mobile. Aiken. From Newport News. From Marietta. From Meridian […] who learn how to do the white man's work […] Here they learn […] how to behave. The careful development of thrift, patience, high morals, and good manners" (79-81). They have all been to college and have discovered how to dispose themselves of the funkiness of Black life (81).

The wish to get rid of the funkiness shows that they want to escape their Blackness by the self's desire to hurt the image of the body. To fit into white society, these middle- and upper-class Black women will act as whites. Patricia Collins argues in *Black Feminist Thought* (2000) that African Americans are typically being divided into two categories – the "Brights" and the "Lesser Black". This division affects especially dark skinned and light skinned women differently. Darker women tend to be judged inferiorly, whereas lighter skinned Black women tend to be more preferable by whites. This different valuation and treatment of dark- and light skinned Black women affects the relationships among African American women (Collins 100).

When Morrison starts the first passage by describing the girls as "they", she purposely chooses not to present one specific character. However, she rather generalizes them with the word "they", in order to emphasize that these thin brown girls lack individuality and their conformity to the American ideal of beauty. Moreover, Morrison makes a distinction between being brown and being Black. Being described as brown, as opposed to being Black, means that they are one step closer to being white. Being brown makes the girls feel more superior to other Black women. These girls try to behave and look like white people by straightening their hair and softening their skin. Morrison presents the girls of having no pride or appreciation in their race, ethnicity, and culture. These girls show resentment towards their own race in order to assimilate into white society and to approach the white's standards of beauty. By learning how to behave and do the white man's work they also learn how to reject the values of their own culture. They become unable to think for themselves or deviate from social norms. The Black community therefore creates its own hierarchy and mimic Western culture.

The former passage about the Mobile girls is actually an introduction to Geraldine who is also considered to fall under the same category as the Mobile girls. Geraldine's encounter with Pecola provides yet another moment in Pecola's youth where an adult damages her weak mind and soul. Geraldine is a middle-class Black woman who runs a special structure in her household. She meets

Pecola for the first time when her son, junior, tricks Pecola to come with him to his house. When Geraldine sees Pecola she inventories Pecola's scruffy appearance and quickly assumes that:

> She had seen this little girl all her life. Hanging out of windows over saloons in Mobile, crawling over the porches of shotgun houses on the edge of town, sitting in bus stations holding paper bags and crying to mothers who kept saying "Shet up!" Hair uncombed, dresses falling apart, shoes untied and caked with dirt. They had stared at her with great uncomprehending eyes. Eyes that questioned nothing and asked everything. Unblinking and unabashed, they stared up at her. The end of the world lay in their eyes, and the beginning, and all the waste in between. (*TBE* 89-90)

The little girl, who stands in front of Geraldine in her middle-class home, is one of those girls who is obviously a helpless victim of racism, sexism, and classism. Geraldine has previously reacted to other young Black girls in her past, and therefore she displays no sympathy for Pecola because she gets reminded of the things that she has tried to escape. She has sought to escape everything that is connected to the poor, struggling African community; their physical looks, their behavior, the way they speak, and their lifestyles. Instead of talking nicely to Pecola, Geraldine calls her a "nasty little black bitch" (*TBE* 90), and commands her to get out of her home. Geraldine knows that it is impossible to change her skin color and race, however, she knows that she can change her behaviors and appearance in order to look whiter. This alteration process is more of a loss than a gain transformation, because by acting whiter she loses a part of her individuality.

Geraldine's behavior towards Pecola and her treatment shows the intense, adult self-interest of class interests which also turns out to affect her son. She forces the idea into her son's mind that "[c]olored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud" (85). His adolescent life is one of segregation and loneliness. Therefore, he tries to reduce these two things through sadistic behavior towards other young children his own age. And Pecola is one of them. These assumptions of Western standards that Geraldine has will eventually affect the way Junior and Pecola view themselves and the world around them. Junior's relation to other children is interesting because: "[he] used to long to play with the black boys […] smell their wild blackness, and say "Fuck you" with that lovely casualness […] Bay Boy and P.L. had one time been his idols. Gradually he came to agree with his mother that neither Bay Boy nor P.L. was good enough for him" (85). This is an example of how the structural classist problem is situated. Geraldine's deeply rooted radical and prejudiced principles

come to affect Junior so severely, that his unbiased behavior will someday be compromised. He is not allowed to socialize with white children nor play with Black children, and therefore he turns his frustrations out on young Black girls by bullying them.

Inherited and Generational Trauma

The cultural and individual traumas that are experienced in post-slavery discrimination appears in the novel. The children in the novel "learn about American culture, their Black communities, and their own self-worth through the legacy of racial discrimination" (Schreiber 65). They must therefore come to terms with social stereotyping while they try to develop their values and beliefs. However, historical and familial inherited trauma complicates their lives, while they are trying to discover a unique self. While they are trying to figure out who they are as a person, they yearn for protection, safety, and love. Their core identities are defined by the white culture and are shaped by their parents' trauma, and that results in low self-esteem and a sense of helplessness.

Fragmentation of the Self and Western Standards of Beauty

As discussed earlier, the disassociation of identity is connected to the racial prejudice that white culture displays among Black people and how it affects their identity. It is impossible for Black people to live up to white standards, therefore, they have to rely on their own race's acceptance in order to gain self-worth. Through the Breedlove's, Morrison shows the negative impact that Western culture has on Black people. Their tragedy is a result of the clash between the ideal standard of life set by Western culture and their own. The Breedloves are the complete opposite of the standardized, ideal American family. Not only do they fail to conform to the Western cultural system and to the ideal family, but they also start to forget their own Black values, such as solidarity.

Being a young adolescent, Pecola is an example of the prevalent negative effects that racial prejudice has on Blacks and how it can lead to insanity. According to Pecola color is the most important factor to her sense of self: her feeling of self-disgust. She thinks that beauty and self-worth are linked with whiteness and its features, and therefore she cannot establish a positive image of herself. Pecola believes that she is ugly and therefore she is vulnerable to her family and society's gaze. One of the novel's theme is Pecola's ontological "unbeing", and as Morrison writes: "she is not *seen* by herself until she hallucinates a self" (*TBE* 211). Pecola stays invisible to herself until she finally accepts an ego that fits her ideal of what beauty is. Like her mother she also lives in a fictional reality where she obtains a false self in order to adjust to false realities. Pecola represents the Black

people's history of oppression and rejection, and she is afflicted by the exposure to domestic and communal violence. She has experienced both rejection and suffering from her family and community, which are important to identity formation.

The novel deals with trauma as a communal issue that comes from systematic oppression and discrimination. Dysfunctional families, like the Breedloves, are its outcome. The parents do not respect each other, they neglect and abuse their children. Thus, the Breedloves' self-hatred is mirrored in their relationships. Pecola ends out being a victim of intergenerational transfer of racial self-hatred. An important and harmful relationship in terms of empowerment, as Patricia Collins discusses in *Black Feminist Thought*, is the relationship between Pecola and her mother, Pauline. The mother and daughter relationship are crucial for the contribution to Pecola's racial self-hatred. This relationship results in negative images regarding her identity. Pecola's mother rejects her because she herself has self-contempt. Her children are not good enough to acquire attention and love, she only teaches them to be afraid. Ever since Pecola was born, her mother has hated her and when she sees Pecola for the first time she remarks: "Head full of pretty hair but Lord she was ugly" (*TBE* 124).

As Collins discusses in *Black Feminist Thought* (2000), many Black mothers often played the mammy role in paid working settings, and the mammy work forced women to accept their own subordination, which Pauline does with pride (79). bell hooks discusses that many Black mothers found pride in labeling themselves as matriarchs, although it is considered as a negative image (hooks, *Ain't I a Woman* 80). However, for Pauline it is the opposite. She takes more pride in being labeled as a mammy figure. Patricia Collins writes that the mammy image is associated with "true womanhood" and which accompanies the traditional family ideals (Collins 79). Therefore, Pauline chooses this image because her affection is placed in the Fisher's home: "All the meaningfulness of her life was in her work. For her virtues were intact" (*TBE* 126). When Pauline works for the white Fisher family, she is sweet and caring towards their child. The little white girl calls Pauline for Polly, whereas her own daughter addresses her as Mrs. Breedlove. To Pecola, her mother does not feel like her "mother", she is simply just another grown-up. Pecola therefore, becomes an "outsider-within". Pecola is not an outsider just because of her skin color. When Pecola gets raped by her own father she starts to become mentally ill and ends up being a prematurely pregnant young girl. And therefore, she is rejected from what should have been her social community.

One day when Pecola visits her mother at work at the Fisher family, the little white girl accidentally drops a pie in the kitchen and cries. Pauline feels immediately ashamed of Pecola and starts to hit her and then later goes back to the little white girl to comfort her, even though it wasn't

Pecola's fault. A mother's relationship with their child is important for the child's personal development and its self-concept. And since her birth, Pecola has been exposed to a shaming and condemning gaze (Ramírez "The Theme" 80). Moreover, Pauline even fails to be a mother for Pecola when she hears about Pecola's rape by distrusting her statement. By not believing Pecola about the rape, done by her father, it prevents her yet again from protecting her daughter from being sexually assaulted a second time. Therefore, at the white family's home Pauline is what we can call a "mammy"; the good mother, and at her own home she is a "matriarch"; the bad mother (Collins, 79, 82). Collins argues that the two terms "mammy" and "matriarch" are "socially constructed controlling images of Black womanhood, each reflecting the dominant group's interest in maintaining Black women's subordination" (Collins 79). The "mammy" figure, also seen as the good mother, seems like a positive image to describe Pauline. However, the mammy image symbolizes the obedient and faithful servant to the white family. Pauline is only considered as a good mother because she is obedient and faithful to the white family. She somehow becomes a house slave. Due to the fact that Pauline herself has experienced trauma and oppression she finds it difficult and time-consuming to show any signs of love and to teach her daughter about life choices. The bond between a mother and daughter is crucial in order to empower each other, however, Pauline and Pecola do not have a loving mother-daughter relationship. Therefore, they have trouble developing a positive female identity.

Due to the fact that Cholly, Pecola's dad, has gone through horrible experiences in his life, it results in him being incapable of having fatherly attributes. He is neglectful and abusive towards Pecola. Pecola's rape leads up to shaming and denigrating events in her life, which causes her to disassociate from herself. Both her mother and father have assigned negative self-images and therefore transmitted and carried on the system that has oppressed them. However, the community is also responsible for Pecola's trauma. Ones self-hood and worthiness are defined by the dominant culture, and color is one of them. Light-skinned people are more superior than dark-skinned people. These values define one as a "better" person according to the members of their community. For example, Claudia reviews that:

> All of us – all who knew her [Pecola] – felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health […] her poverty kept us generous. […] and she let us […]. We honed our egos on her, padded our characters with her frailty,

> and yawned in the fantasy of our strength. And fantasy it was, for we were not strong. (*TBE* 203)

Due to Pecola's "ugliness" she is bullied by other Blacks who disregard and contempt her. Therefore, she becomes the scapegoat of the community. She becomes an easy victim, since she is a child and comes from harsh circumstances. She is even accused of her own rape by her community. A woman implicates Pecola for the rape: "She carry some of the blame" (187) and implies that Pecola did not fight him, even though she was only eleven years old. The community's hatred towards Pecola is immediately transferred to her unborn baby, whom they believe will "be the ugliest thing walking" (187) and hopes that the baby won't live on. However, Claudia and Freida try to change this intergenerational transmission of self-contempt. They refuse to comply with the dominant culture's standard of beauty. Unlike the Breedlove family, Claudia's family still tries to keep the communal values. They provide for Pecola in spite of the rape and Claudia stands up for Pecola when she is bullied. Claudia and her family illustrate the power of Blacks to confront and revolt against an oppressive system.

When Pecola is at Claudia's house, she becomes very fond of the Shirley Temple cup and even asks for candies that has a picture of little Mary Jane. When Pecola eats the candy, it represents pleasure and escape into fantasy. Eating the candy: "is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane" (*TBE* 48). She thinks that if her eyes are blue like the Shirley Temple doll, people will not consider her ugly anymore and love her. Maybe then, the people and even her parents would say: "Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes" (44). However, Pecola is rejected, and she identifies herself with weeds: "Nobody loves the head of a dandelion" (45). Because she is outcast and unloved, she undergoes trauma of discrimination. Her only protection is therefore to consume white culture, and in order to do so she drinks a lot of milk and eats Mary Jane candies. The only way Pecola can become "Mary Jane" is at the price of herself. In order for Pecola's wish about having blue eyes to come true, and to take on a new identity, "can only be achieved through usurpation of herself" (Cardona 16).

It is interesting to look at how Black people want to consume white culture in order to feel more beautiful or accepted into society. Here, Pecola wants to "eat the other" in order to become beautiful. She relies on the perceptions of others, of the dominant culture, for validation. Pecola fails to comprehend the message that Mary Jane's picture sends to her. Failing to understand that there is something destructive about those blue eyes and beauty, she still continues to wish for the

unattainable. She starves for attention and validation and even if her wishes were fulfilled by having blue eyes, she would still not understand the price that she will have to pay in order to become someone she is not.

In contrast to Pecola, Claudia receives a white Shirley Temple doll for Christmas by her mother. A doll that represents white culture which Blacks desire to embrace and which Claudia despises. Claudia ruins the doll by dissecting it "to see what it was that all the world said was lovable. Break off the tiny fingers, bend the flat feet, loosen the hair, twist the head around, and the thing made one sound – a sound they said was the sweet and plaintive cry" (*TBE* 19). However, the adults would get angry at her for being ungrateful and destructive, and she would wonder how come the adults have such an attachment to the doll. Claudia completely rejects the desire for white culture that the adults have. She envies the doll's lovability and therefore wants to ruin the doll, because if she cannot have the same affection and admiration, she doesn't want it. The girls are unable to love themselves as Black, but they are also made to hate themselves as white. Claudia's character is interesting because she represents hope and survival, whereas Pecola represents self-hatred. What differs Claudia's character from Pecola is that she has pride, which Pecola lacks. Claudia embraces her Blackness and identifies as Black, whereas Pecola strives for the bluest eyes.

As the story continues, Pecola begins to go deeper into a world of fantasy. She starts to become insane and wants her dream to come true. Therefore, she visits Soaphead Church, a "magician", where she requests blue eyes that will change the world. Soaphead Church takes the role as "a god" and grants her wish for blue eyes, however, only she will be able to see them. When Pecola's father rapes her for the second time, she gets a mental breakdown and goes into a fantasy world where she can feel safe. She enters a personal world of silence and madness and is still convinced that she has acquired blue eyes. Even though she "acquires" blue eyes she is not free. She stays imprisoned in some sort of a schizophrenic state that enables her to be free: "the damage done was total" (*TBE* 202). Pecola steps into madness, "a madness which protected her from us" (204). Pecola has no more strength to fight her painful life, so she retreats into schizophrenia. She tries to find protection in her own fantasy world, in order to live on. Talking to herself in the end, Pecola uses that voice as a survival strategy. She asks her alter ego why she didn't come earlier, and it replies by saying "You didn't need me before" (194). The psychic invasion of whiteness ends in a twofold negative outcome: self-hatred and aggressivity.

The story presents a society that allows the foreclosure of childhood and imposes an early adulthood, where Pecola has been a victim and a witness of aggression, and therefore discovers

different strategies to defend herself vigorously than someone who has never been that endangered. Pecola's tragedy shows how fatal consequences can have from the internalization of the system of values from the white culture. In the end of the novel Claudia starts to understand how the community and themselves have failed Pecola and that they have all participated in her victimization: "All of our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed" (203). Claudia is lucky enough to move into adulthood as a contrast to Pecola's entrapment in trauma.

The Oppressed Turn into the Oppressor

In *Ain't I a Woman?* bell hooks states that: "In patriarchal society, men are encouraged to channel frustrated aggression in the direction of those without power – women and children" (105). This statement is not only targeted on men, but it can also work on women. This type of anger can be seen in some characters. As discussed earlier, Geraldine tries to act out white cultural demand and therefore she lacks emotional attachment and motherly affection towards her son, Junior. This produces aggression in him. For example, Junior discovers that his mother is more fond of their blue-eyed cat than him and therefore "learned how to direct his hatred of his mother to the cat" (*TBE* 84). Due to being lonely and having no friends, Junior acts out aggressively by abusing his cat and Pecola. Junior "threw a big black cat right in Pecola's face. She sucked in her breath in fear and surprise and felt fur in her mouth. The cat clawed her face and chest" (87-88). Pecola tries to soothe and comfort the cat, but Junior "snatched the cat by one of its hind legs and began to swing it around his head in a circle […] [with] full force against the window" (88-89). According to Schreiber Junior's actions indicate his lack of a loving contact and relationship with his mother (Schreiber 71) and therefore, he perpetuates the abuse he absorbs from his mother.

Moreover, the Breedlove family also fosters a home of hatred and aggression. Cholly and Pauline project their aggression through physical violence. They are constantly fighting and screaming at each other. They are each other's scapegoat:

> She needed Cholly's sins desperately. The lower he sank, the wilder and more irresponsible he became, the more splendid she and her task became. […] No less did Cholly need her. She was one of the few things abhorrent to him that he could touch and therefore hurt. He poured out on her the sum of all his inarticulate fury and aborted desires. Hating her, he could leave himself intact. (*TBE* 40)

When Cholly burns down their house, the family almost lose everything they have left and are at their lowest point in life; "if you are put out, you go somewhere else; if you are outdoors, there is no place to go" (15). They are an example of hopelessness; they have lost their racial and cultural identity, they have no family bond, no self-realization, and now without a home too. They have become no one. Becoming homeless brings out early insecurities in them (Schreiber 74). Pecola inherits her parents' personal traumas. Due to her parent's constant fighting makes "Pecola tighten her stomach muscles and ration her breath" (*TBE* 38). She physically stores the trauma that they act out, and according to Caruth, what causes trauma is a shock that works like a bodily threat (Caruth 63). For example, when Pecola's classmates bully her, she physically reacts to them: "She seemed to fold into herself, like a pleated wing" (*TBE* 71). Her brother, Sammy, also inherits his parent's personal trauma, however, he reacts differently. He frees himself from the violence by running away, while Pecola has different methods to endure this trauma. Morrison writes: "[t]hough the methods varied, the pain was as consistent as it was deep. She struggled between an overwhelming desire that one would kill the other, and a profound wish that she herself could die" (41). Moreover, she is longing for disappearance, to fade away physically, one piece at a time: "Her fingers went, one by one; then her arms disappeared all the way to the elbow. Her feet now. […] Only her tight, tight eyes were left. They were always left" (43). But she knows that she will never be free as long as she is ugly (Schreiber 74).

Cholly's trauma begins as a baby when his mother leaves him with his Aunt Jimmy. Being taken in by his Aunt Jimmy, Cholly grows up in a stable home with positive people around him like Blue Jack, drayman: "Cholly loved Blue. Long after he was a man, he remembered the good times they had had" (*TBE* 132). However, his good memories of his early days turn into a nightmare and end up traumatizing Cholly later on, when he is about to have an intimate encounter with his sweetheart, Darlene. A moment that should have been a lovely memory, unfortunately turns into humiliation when they meet two white men. While Cholly and Darlene are about to have intercourse the two white men approach them and shine their flashlight on them and say, "get on wid it. An' make it good, nigger, make it good" (146). By subjecting himself to the demands of the white men, he feels humiliated and emasculated. During this situation Cholly directs his humiliation and anger towards Darlene:

> Never did he once consider directing his hatred towards the hunters. Such an emotion would have destroyed him. (148).

Cholly feels humiliated and the two white men violate his manhood. The white men make Cholly feel both physically and emotionally unsafe.

Schreiber describes Cholly as being someone who is unable to avoid feeling like a small, helpless child in need in white culture (Schreiber 76). When he rapes Pecola he somehow reenacts his own "rape" when he had intercourse for the first time. Therefore, Pecola literally absorbs his sexual trauma. Cholly lacks a stable parenting figure, and therefore he ends up being a bad parent as well. The lacking feeling of being a parent, he is disconnected to his children. His own self-hatred causes him to aggressively assault his daughter as he confuses her with Pauline. When Pecola repeats the same behavior that her mother has of rubbing her foot on her leg, Cholly gets triggered and feels the same "tenderness, a protectiveness" (*TBE* 160) that he had felt when he first encountered Pauline. However, this feeling changes quickly into a "hatred mixed with tenderness" (161). This mix of love and aggression, that he also felt towards Darlene and Pauline, results in the rape of his daughter (Schreiber 77).

Pauline's aggressions also originate from childhood trauma. Pauline grew up in a big family having 10 siblings in Alabama. Pauline's first childhood trauma began when she was only two years old. She experiences her first physical trauma when a nail punctures her foot. By having a crooked foot, she begins to feel like an outsider to her family; "why she alone of all the children had no nickname; why there were no funny jokes and anecdotes about funny things she had done; why no one remarked on her food preferences […]. Her general feeling of separateness and unworthiness she blamed on her foot" (*TBE* 108-109). Already at an early age she feels emotionally neglected and estranged from everyone and the feeling of not belonging anywhere (109). She later dreams of being rescued from her loneliness and Cholly's arrival makes her feel safe. They even loved each other in their younger years, and they enjoyed each other's company. However, not long after their marriage loneliness and estrangement begin to set in again. They move to a new town away from everyone they know. They move to new surroundings and rejection from the whites is something Pauline is already familiar with and accepts, however, she did not expect rejection from her own Black community as well. Her feeling of loneliness in Alabama when she was young suddenly comes back again, when Cholly and her move up North. In her loneliness she turns to Cholly for reassurance, but Cholly has his own friends and work to occupy him and therefore rejects her. Being both outcasts they could rely on each other and find safety and comfort in each other's presence. However, Pauline is now left alone yet again. Schreiber describes their relationship as two people: "provid[ing] a

positive imaginary self for the other, mirroring self-worth" (Schreiber 77). But now she no longer has someone to rely on, nor someone to "mirror" for self-worth.

Pauline later on loses a tooth while eating candy at the movies, and this makes her lose hope of meeting the expectations of the dominant culture: "*There I was, five months pregnant, trying to look like Jean Harlow, and a front tooth gone. Everything went then. Look like I just don't care no more after that. […] [I] settled down to just be ugly"* (*TBE* 121). Even though Pauline did love her children she didn't show it, and she admits that: "*Sometimes I'd catch myself hollering at them and beating them, and I'd feel sorry for them, but I couldn't seem to stop"* (122). This violent behavior takes over in physical expression of her trauma and aggression. Due to her lost tooth, she gives up on herself and accepts her "ugliness", and this she passes on to her children. Her children, especially Pecola, inherit the physical trauma of Pauline's lack of familial attachment and her belief of "ugliness". Pauline compensates for the losses through her position at the Fisher family. The Fishers "gave her what she had never had – a nickname – Polly" (126). Polly is the person Pauline wants to become, a "satisfying and substantial self" (qtd. in Schreiber 78). Pauline is granted a home of imaginary support at the Fishers with the cost and exclusion of her own family. Instead of giving love to her children, she fills them with fear: "[i]nto her son she beat a loud desire to run away, and into her daughter she beat a fear of growing up, fear of life" (*TBE* 126). At the Fishers' home Pauline feels beautiful and wanted, however she does not share this beauty with her daughter. If only Pauline introduced this world where everything seems alright, Pecola might have turned out differently. However, due to Pauline's lack of sensitivity, positive attitudes, and a strong support-system Pauline is unable to create a secure mother-child relationship.

Narrative Structure

The race, gender, and class issues are not only transmitted through plot and characters. Morrison's use of formal devices, such as structure and narrative voice, are also important in order to understand the issues discussed in the novel. The novel is both multi textual and polyphonic (Malmgren 251). The novel begins with two different prologues, and in the first prologue, Morrison uses the popular childhood Dick and Jane stories to frame Pecola's childhood and family within the classic 1940s American image of white middle-class family. It is the story of "Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane [who] live in the green-and-white house" (*TBE* 1) along with a dog and cat. The family is an ideal American family who are extremely happy, and the father is big and strong, and the mother is kind. This description of the happy family is repeated three times, however, each time after the first, Morrison

intentionally removes grammatical indications of normalcy like punctuation and capitalization. In the third repetition, the description lacks spacing between words, it is chaotic, fragmented, and shows an incomprehensible image of this perfect family. This disordering resembles the chaos of the Breedloves when they are compared to other Black families in their community, like the MacTeer family, or the white family, like the Fishers for whom Pauline works. Carl Malmgren writes in his article "Texts, Primers, and Voices in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*" (2000) that the first description represents the ideal white family, orderly and "readable", the second represents the MacTeer family, complicated but still readable, and the third represents the Breedlove family, incoherent and ignorant (257). The primer sections of the novel use some parts of the third version as titles, in order to introduce the chapter and what it is about. The first primer chapter, dealing with, for example, the history and environment of the Breedlove's storefront apartment, begins:

> HEREISTHEHOUSEITISGREENANDWH
> ITEITHASAREDDOORITISVERYPRETT
> YITISVERYPRETTYPRETTYPRETTYP. (*TBE* 31)

The story gets reinforced by this fragmentation at the beginning of the chapters that deal directly with Pecola and her family with sections from the story. The story is constructed from the idea that childhood tales do not exist within the context of a young person's imagination of what growing up is like or what should be like. However, it is rather within a young person's imagination negatively affected by a grown-up world of racial, gender, and class politics (Mahaffey 158). Dick and Jane are the ideal image that every child should imitate. However, the novel shows that this type of assimilation can be fatal to a child's psyche, and it suggests that this reality does not exist for everyone in American culture. Pecola desperately tries to fit into this unattainable image of Dick and Jane, however, fails inevitably to do so.

In the second prologue the narrative voice is the one of Claudia. The prologue is written in first person plural in the past tense and is narrated by the adult version of Claudia, where she looks back on her childhood in 1941 to describe what happened back then. However, the majority of Claudia's narration is written in the present tense when she describes the events. Here it is not the adult version of Claudia, but her 9-year-old version of what she had experienced. This gives the reader a better insight to what goes on inside a 9-year-old's mind and how a child perceives different events. Therefore, Claudia narrates the story from two different perspectives: the one where she is an adult,

and the other where she is a child. However, Claudia does not have access to the different characters' thoughts in the book.

The novel is composed of two related types of texts that are split up. There are four seasonal sections that are narrated in the first person by Claudia MacTeer, and seven primer sections that have various narrative voices, and each primer section starts with the "Dick and Jane" prologue (Malmgren 251). As in the beginning of the novel there are two prologues, therefore the ending is also divided into two parts. The first part of the ending is narrated by Pecola in a first-person point of view where she has a dialogue with her imaginary friend. The second part is written in the first person plural and it is a concluding remark that begins with "So it was" (*TBE* 202), where Claudia sums up and comments on the outcomes of the narrative (Malmgren 251). As mentioned above, the seasonal sections are written in the first person, however, at times they also have a double voice. Malmgren writes that in some sections Claudia "speaks as the nine-year-old girl going through experience, ignorant, for example, as to what "ministratin' is" (252). On the other hand, Claudia also shifts to an adult point of view (252) when narrating some incidents where she sometimes looks back on what she remembered from her childhood, and even questioning herself: "But was it really like that? As painful as I remember? Only mildly" (*TBE* 10). These sections are therefore polyphonic.

As mentioned previously, *The Bluest Eye* can be considered as a polyphonic text. The term polyphony was coined by the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, and he discussed this writing technique when analyzing Dostoevsky's novels. He discussed the use of polyphony as a literary device, the author presents different perspectives, which leads in multi-voiced narratives[7] (Mankhi and Alhusseini 409). When a text is polyphonic it means that a text contains many different voices, that the text is not dominated by a single narrative, or that the text only conveys to single consciousness of the worldview of the author. The presented characters in the novel should not only act as a mouthpiece of that single authorial consciousness, however, when using polyphony, each character has their own voice, perspectives, and narratives (Kangira and Voss 27). Therefore, when reading *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison does not force her own narrative voice between the characters and the reader, however she gives space to the characters own worldview. By using polyphony as a literary device, it feels as if the novel was written by multiple characters and not only from Morrison's own standpoint. This means that Morrison does not write of a single objective world, she allows the novel to have plurality of consciousness, having each character describing their world: "the reader

[7] It should be noted, that just because a text has multiple voices, does not mean that the text is automatically characterized as a polyphonic text. Plurality of voices does not necessarily lead to polyphony. A text being characterized as polyphony means that the text must have more than one discourse or utterance.

does not see a single reality presented by the author, but rather how reality appears to each character" (Kangira and Voss 27).

Morrison allows the novel to have multiple voices and narratives, which represent different truths. Claudia's perception of the world is not the same as Pecola's worldview. They both have a unique consciousness and a unique way of interpreting the world around them. This is what, according to Bakhtin, is the essence of polyphony, that the characters are able to break free from the authorial discourse and become subjects of their own discourse (Bakhtin 7). Morrison leaves the characters free to discuss and challenge the reader, and perhaps even herself. The characters in the novel, whether it be the Breedloves or the MacTeer family, all have different worldviews and multiple thoughts which come together and which can provoke the thinking patterns of the reader. The plurality of consciousness and polyphony is needed, because it grants them different ideologies and different perspectives to the reader. Each voice in the novel has its own freedom and independence, and each voice is heard on it's own terms without being dominated by other voices. Although the novel is mostly through Claudia's standpoint, her voice does not interfere with, for example, Pauline's voice, or Pecola's.

What makes the novel interesting is how Morrison has chosen more than one narrator in the novel. We have already discussed that Claudia is perhaps the main narrator, shifting between the adult version of her and the child version of her. But there is also an omniscient narrator. In order for the reader to get a closer understanding of the other characters, such as, Pecola, Cholly, and Pauline etc. it is necessary to have a third person omniscient narrator. This form of narration gives the reader a more detailed description of the characters, their thoughts, and their historical backgrounds. It is important for the story to have their own narratives included as well, since they help the reader to sympathize with them. Since Claudia cannot know everything about the characters or their past, it is relevant to have a third person omniscient narrator, that goes more in depth with the characters. It allows the reader to get a better insight into their lives and thoughts, in a way that we would not if Claudia had been the only narrator. Therefore, the reader gets the chance to not only read from one perspective, but also from the other character's point of view. However, even in some of the primer sections where the reader learns more about Pauline or Cholly it is not only a third person omniscient point of view. In some of the primer sections the narration is also multivocal where the narrative shifts between first and third person omniscient. This shift can sometimes confuse the reader, for example, when we read about Pauline's story, the chapter begins in a third-person omniscient point of view, then the narration suddenly shifts to a first-person point of view and then back again to a

third-person omniscient point of view. The reader gets small paragraphs from Pauline's own personal perspective. This makes the narrative more interesting, and it includes the reader more, in order to understand the characters from their own perspective and in their own language.

In terms of voice, Pecola does not have one. According to Malmgren: "Morrison's novel contains repeated instances of Pecola's negation as other characters refuse to see her" (Malmgren 259). Pecola is defenseless and is unable to speak up for herself, and therefore she is literally and figuratively silenced throughout most of the text (259). The only way the reader knows anything about Pecola is through Claudia's narrative or the third-person omniscient. Morrison uses Claudia as the narrator to make the silence speak and to give a voice to the voiceless (Malmgren 259). When Claudia is a child, she herself is silenced. She notes that: "[a]dults do not talk to us – they give us directions" (*TBE* 8). Therefore, growing up and becoming an adult means that they acquire a voice, however, it is something Pecola is prevented from doing. Since Pecola cannot tell her own story, Claudia believes that it is her duty to do so. For example, Claudia makes the readers imagine Pecola's beauty and her unborn child by saying that "it's head covered with great O's of wool, the black face holding, like nickels, two clean black eyes, the flared nose, kissing-thick lips, and the living, breathing silk of black skin" (188). Claudia gives a beautiful description of Pecola's unborn child. The reason for why it is important for Claudia to describe the baby as beautiful is to show that Blackness is beautiful and that one should embrace their Blackness (Malmgren 260). Through polyphony, Morrison sheds light on the issues that her Black characters face every day.

Morrison's Use of the Novel

Toni Morrison started writing *The Bluest Eye* in the mid 1960s, but it was first published in 1970 (*TBE* IX). During that era one can see in the novel that Morrison has absorbed something from that 1960s culture and thereby reflecting on the issues during the 60s. The whole novel itself becomes, in some way, a political question, by asking oneself the abstract question of what types of narrative constructs the identity of the characters. The 1960s was the most turbulent and divisive decades in America, there was the civil rights movement, the antiwar protests, and the divide in the political world. Many activists started to drop out of political life and there was the beginning of the counterculture – a culture that was against the prevailing culture (Eder 21). A novel that contains and reflects on so many cultural problems in the 1960s, makes one wonder why Morrison didn't just write a tract instead of a novel? Morrison is in some ways an advocate for African Americans, where she focuses on Black American experience in an unjust society. So why is literature her chosen ground?

There are probably many reasons for why Morrison chose literature as her venue. In an interview with Mavis Nicholson, Toni Morrison says that she wanted to read a book about people like her, people who were Black and young and who had lived in the Midwest. However, nobody wrote about them, and whenever they did, they were never centerstage, they were background scenery. Moreover, the novel contains a strong taste of her own life; the geography, the town she grew up in, however, the relationships were not the same. She therefore had to collect information from real people. She says: "you are scared when you write your first book, and you don't trust your imagination. So you go straight to what you know, and the more I got into it the more I loved the part that was invention, that was not factual, but true, somehow truer because it was in fact true" (ThamesTv). She wanted to play toward the imagination, and the way she does that is through the novel's form.

The novel works as a medium that is able to hold the reader within it, and that could be the first of the reasons to the question: to hold the reader in suspension in the novel. Morrison uses a specific type of form in the novel, for example the passages about Pauline. There are parts on Pauline where the reader gets an insight to her thoughts. Those parts are written in large blocks of italics where she speaks to the reader. Morrison utilizes this form through her novel in order to let the voice of the unheard speak. The novel permits the voices of the oppressed to speak in a way they could not otherwise. By incorporating Pauline's voice, Morrison permits Pauline to tell her own story from her perspective of how she ends up being a "hateful" woman that the readers see her to be. There are many more of these types of form like Pauline's. Whenever a character is speaking from their point of view the reader gets an insight to the characters and reads something that you wouldn't otherwise know if it was not for Morrison to embody those voices. One of Morrison's many strengths when writing is her ability to embody the voice.

Another reason could be that the novel generates sympathy. The novel somehow makes the reader sympathize with a violent man, Cholly. In one scene Cholly is at his Aunt Jimmy's funeral where he meets Darlene. They start to flirt and play out in the field which causes her dress to get dirty and he says:

> "You ain't dirty" "I am too. Look at that." […] Cholly felt sorry for her; it was just as much his fault. Suddenly he realized that Aunt Jimmy was dead, for he missed the fear of being whipped. There was nobody to do it except uncle O. V., and he was the bereaved too. "Let me," he said. He rose to his knees facing her and tried to tie her ribbon. (*TBE* 144)

Morrison allows these little gestures to Cholly where he reassures Darlene that she is not dirty. In a novel that contains a lot of demonized cleanliness Cholly's kind assurance that her dress is not dirty in a moral sense, is a symbol of humanity and affection. These small details work to strengthen the reader's sympathy for Cholly. The sympathy gets stronger when Cholly decides to meet his father for the first time. When meeting his father "he was staring at a balding spot on his father's head, which he suddenly wanted to stroke" (153). The reader once again sees that humane touching impulse. Cholly wants to touch and feel his father's mortality. He sees that his father resembles him quite a lot, from the way he looks to the way he sounds, and the reader can feel that with him. However, his father rejects him and Cholly ends up soiling himself and runs away, thus becoming an abject character. These details about Cholly gives the reader a sense of his complexity and an insight to why he has become a violent and abusive man. The fascinating thing about Morrison's writing technique is that she makes the reader see Cholly complexly enough to have sympathy for him despite his dreadful behavior and crimes.

Beloved

Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* is not only a fiction, but also a "historical and sociological memory tool" that inspires the reader to become involved of the collective remembering of slavery (McNaulty 9). One of the major themes that are highlighted in *Beloved* are the importance of memory and giving voice to the voiceless. The reader is therefore taken back in time to the slavery era in 1873. The novel centers around Sethe, a runaway slave, that killed one of her children, in order to keep her away from slave holders. She tried to kill her other children as well, but she was caught before she could complete her act (Ruetenik 319). Although the story is about a mother who commits infanticide, Toni Morrison writes in her foreword to *Beloved* that: "[t]he figure most central to the story would have to be her, the murdered, not the murderer, the one who lost everything and had no say in any of it" (*Beloved* XII). In order to learn about the murdered child, the story is told through different characters. And bit by bit we learn the true reason behind the heroine's unspeakable act. *Beloved* portrays the lives of African Americans who are striving hard to restore their lives again and to maintain a sense of self that they have lost. Morrison opens up a forgotten world that contains many cultural issues of trauma, race, gender, slavery, and rape.

Intersectionality

Race

In her essay, "Animal liberation or human redemption: racism and speciesism in Toni Morrison's Beloved" (2010), Proffesor Tadd Ruetenik describes *Beloved* to be a "morally sophisticated slave narrative" that highlights the issues of racism in American historical consciousness and focuses on "exploited humans" (318). Unlike *The Bluest Eye* when Morrison focused on the shift from African American pursuit of whiteness to an acceptance of African American culture, in *Beloved*, however, Morrison moves beyond racial lines to where the perception of white beauty is not relevant (Postma 28), however, white presence is. In the novel, being an African American implies automatically that they are enslaved people. Even when the enslaved people escape and become free people, they are, however, unable to escape from the ties of slavery. The character's physical, emotional, and mental misery are produced by slavery, and therefore shape their senses of self through brutal experience with slavery and white violence. The characters are not able to form a sense of identity in the novel because of the cultural and social trauma they experience, and therefore they struggle with identity formation (Day "Identity Formation"). One of the most negative effects of slavery that the novel focuses on is the way former slaves are haunted, even after their liberation, by the dehumanization they undergo and the presence of whiteness in society. Black men and women in *Beloved* are defined by their slave owners and the society they live in. The novel shows how cultural trauma is produced by slavery and white oppression and how African Americans struggle to understand their own identity.

There are many reasons for why African Americans struggle with identity formation in the novel. And some of the main factors are in fact due to white oppression. The African American slaves are robbed of their own culture; they are not allowed to speak their own language, have their own religious beliefs, nor have the power over their own social structure. They are being robbed of their identity and therefore, they slowly forget about their past lives and assimilate into a completely new society. In order to become more westernized they have to erase their former identity and take up a new Western name (Inglés 14-15). The importance for a slave owner to name their slaves is that it creates a relationship of property between the slaves and slaveowners. For example, in one scene in the novel a Mr. Garner, a white slaveowner, asks Baby Suggs, a slave: "What you call yourself?", and she replies, "Nothing […] I don't call myself nothing" (*Beloved* 167). Baby Suggs then tells him that she goes by her husband's name, Suggs, and that her husband used to call her Baby. Even though

Mr. Garner thinks that the name, Baby Suggs, is an unfit name for a freed slave, Baby Suggs tells him that "Baby Suggs was all she had left of the 'husband' she claimed" (167).

Some of the enslaved in the novel even carry the name of their owners throughout their lives, even when they become free. Although some enslaved are free, they are still not able to break free from the invisible chains between the slaveowners and (former) enslaved because they still carry the name their old master has given them. Carrying a name that has been forced upon them makes it even harder for them to heal and forget about their past as enslaved (Inglés 15). For some of the enslaved people they even start to unconsciously identify themselves as their former slave owner. For example, many of the characters who are enslaved on Mr. Garner's plantation carry his last name. When Paul D, a formerly enslaved on Mr. Garner's plantation, is introduced for the first time to Denver, Sethe's daughter, he is introduced as Paul D Garner. Denver greets him back with a: "Good morning, Mr. D", however, Paul D quickly corrects her by saying: "Garner, baby. Paul D Garner" (*Beloved* 13).

The issue that Morrison tries to highlight in this scene is not that it is impossible for enslaved people to gain and develop self-love or self-respect even though they have lived under cruel circumstances. The issue is that enslaved and former enslaved Blacks are struggling with identity formation and self-consciousness and to define themselves rather than being let defined by others. Although Paul D is a free man, he still carries his former masters name, Garner – maybe because of habit or maybe because it is the only identity he knows of. Paul D has no individual identity, just like the other Pauls on the plantation. The white men at the plantation do not view the enslaved as having their own individual identity, therefore they have named them all Paul, such as Paul A, Paul F, and Paul D. Paul D does not really know who he is beside being Paul D Garner from Sweet Home, and therefore, he develops an identity crisis. He has gone through dehumanization and this process has deprived him of his sense of Self. He does not know where to turn, so the only option is to turn to his former master's and identify himself as one of the Garners. He, therefore, allows other people to define him instead of defining himself.

Not only does he let his master define him he also starts to unconsciously view Sethe in the same way as the Schoolteacher and other white men on the plantation do. Similar to how the Schoolteacher compares Sethe's features as animalistic, Paul D also accuse Sethe of behaving like an animal when they discuss the murder incident of Beloved: "you got two feet, Sethe, not four" (*Beloved* 194). He interprets the story just like the rest of the white people, however he quickly realizes what he had said and wonders what made him say it and feels deeply ashamed. He notices that he has failed to have an independent consciousness. However, towards the end of the novel Paul

D encounters Denver again. Denver greets him in the same way as she did the first time they met; "Good morning, Mr. D." This time Paul D does not correct her but instead answers, "Well, it is now" (*Beloved* 313). Paul D has finally gotten rid of his last name and has claimed ownership of his Black consciousness (Bussie 233). By getting rid of the name Garner, Paul D finally manages to overcome his past and overcome the oppression he has internalized. He begins to understand that he cannot blame himself for his past, nor can he blame Sethe for her actions and past. By accepting himself and claiming ownership of himself he can finally move on and not be stuck in the past.

Through the gaze of white people, Black people are seen as subhuman, more likely as an "animal", and this affects the characters' view on how they consider themselves because they have internalized white society's racism (Day "Identity Formation"). Paul D internalizes the abuse he experiences and, regardless of his inner resilience and force to carry on, the dehumanization ends up breaking his identity (Day "Identity Formation"). One day Paul D tries to murder one of his white masters, Brandywine, after his former slave master, the Schoolteacher, sells him. Paul D gets caught and sent to prison. Along with other forty-five inmates, Paul D is forced to work on the chain gang and is exposed to humiliating violence, such as physical and sexual abuse. Not only does Morrison take up on the sexual exploitation of Black women in the novel, but she also addresses the sexual exploitation of Black men. In the novel the act of sex and rape are used as a power tool; a tool to gain control and ownership of their victims. Patricia Collins writes that during slavery rape was a "weapon of domination, a weapon of repression, whose covert goal was to extinguish slave women's will to resist, and in the process, to demoralize their men" (Collins, *Black Feminist* 158). Angela Davis, a Black activist, also support this theory by writing that "the rape of black female slaves was not […] a case of white men satisfying their sexual lust, but was in fact an institutionalized method of terrorism which had as its goal the demoralization and dehumanization of black women" (qtd. in hooks, *Ain't I a Woman* 27). Although Angela Davis only mentions Black women in this context, it can still be relevant to Black men as well.

The horrible treatments that Paul D has endured makes him doubt his manhood. He protests about his oppressed identity and status and says "Mister [a chicken] is allowed to be and stay what he was. But I wasn't allowed to be and stay what I was. […] no way I'd ever be Paul D again, living or dead. Schoolteacher changed me. I was something else and that something else was less than a chicken" (86). Paul D ends up suppressing his past. He internalizes the discriminations that are imposed on him and the discriminations emasculates him so much that he feels unworthy of human contact (Day "Identity Formation").

The dehumanization of African Americans in the novel goes beyond the denial of human rights. It goes beyond to characterize them as animals. When Sethe desperately tries to defend her action of killing her child, she says that white people could: "take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore […] you forgot who you were" (*Beloved* 295). For this reason, Sethe could not endure to let this pass on to her children, "her best thing, her magical best thing – the part of her that was clean" (296). She further asserts that "no one, nobody on this earth, would list her daughter's characteristics on the animal side of the paper" (296). Here, Sethe makes a reference to a scene where Sethe overhears the schoolteacher giving lessons to his sons. He requires his sons to make a list of Sethe's human and animal characteristics by dividing them on separate sides of the page. However, Sethe does not know what the word characteristics means, so she asks the white woman of the house and she responds: "[a] characteristic is a feature. A thing that's natural to a thing" (230). Being regarded as an animal offends Sethe extremely (Ruetenik 320).

Paul D also gets exposed to animal degradations. At one point in the novel, Paul D is forced to wear a bit in his mouth, a device that is typically used on horses. The bit in his mouth caused a "wildness that shot up into the eye the moment the lips were yanked back". Paul D describes the horrible suffering from the bit to Sethe; "how offended the tongue is, held down by iron, how the need to spit is so deep you cry for it" (*Beloved* 84). This passage indicates how the slaves were silenced by their slaveowners. They were literally taking away the slave's ability to speak. This indicates how Paul D, along with the rest of the slaves, were a result of property. The fact that the "tongue is, held down" expresses how Paul D is unable to speak and unable to receive basic human rights. Morrison creates a vivid scene and describes the restrictions of a slave. Sethe explains that she had seen this wildness many times, even before Sweet Home, and looks in Paul D's eyes to see whether there was any trace of wildness in them. She had seen many children who had the bit in their mouths and they "always looked wild after that" (84). Once the slaves are broken it is almost impossible to assemble those broken pieces back together again. Giving the slaves the bits in their mouths makes them become animalistic and subordinate to the humankind (Ruetenik 321). Moreover, the lips being "yanked back" furthers the inhumane image, because the word "yank" is usually associated with an animal.

A former slave, Stamp Paid, also reflects on the barbaric actions of the whitepeople:

> Whitepeople believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle. […] But it wasn't the jungle blacks brought with them to this place from the other (livable) place. It was the jungle whitefolks planted in them. And it grew. It spread […] until it invaded the whites who had made it. Touched them every one. Changed and altered them. Made them bloody, silly, worse than even they wanted to be, so scared were they of the jungle they had made. The screaming baboon lived under their own white skin; the red gums were their own. […] this new kind of whitefolks' jungle was hidden, silent. (*Beloved* 234-235)

This is a very deep and powerful passage because it shows that Black people are not born as wild beings, as the whitepeople think, but are physically and mentally tortured, to such an extent, that they eventually break and thus become wild in the hands of white people. However, Black people are not the only ones who become "wild" as animals. Stamp Paid reflects on how slavery infects and dehumanizes white people as well. Slavery, a system that is created and controlled by white people in America, also ends up turning the slaveowners into sadistic wild beasts. The more they try to dehumanize their slaves, the more they end up dehumanizing themselves and turn into "screaming baboons", as Stamp Paid describes them. The fear that white people try to escape and hide from is in fact the fear of their own barbarity, however these acts of barbarity are hidden "under their own white skin". They are in fact the ones who have created this jungle with wild animals, and not something that has naturally appeared.

The slaves lose any right to define themselves and therefore they lose their sense of self within the institution of slavery. They are constantly looked upon as the Other from the white gaze. As a supplementary detail of comparing the slaves to that of an animal, Morrison uses the adjective "wild" to depict the slaves having a certain jungle-like or untamed beast features.

Gender

Throughout the novel, the female characters are represented as independent Black women who are capable of taking care of themselves, especially during harsh conditions. In contrast to *The Bluest* Eye, gender oppression between Black men and women is not a visible problem that occurs in the novel *Beloved*, however, it is one that is visible between slaveholder and slave (Yahya 631). In the novel we are introduced to female characters that are freed from the "traditional inferiority (Kahina and Meddour 45).

The protagonist, Sethe, is a single-mother and is depicted as an independent woman. She is the one who financially provides for her family and takes responsibility for herself after her husband's abandonment. After she manages to flee from the Schoolteacher and Sweet Home and settles in at Bluestone Road 124, she starts to work at a restaurant to provide for her daughter. Getting a low-waged job at the restaurant is the first step towards her independence and to be financially independent without getting any help from others. Having endured a long and traumatic life as a Black female slave she is still able to move forward in the sense of managing a household. Sethe and her daughter have lived alone without any male presence for several years. However, Sethe can only be strong to a certain extent. Her past trauma, which she has yet to resolve will slowly eat her up. However, Sethe is a strong force of nature but stubborn enough to not accept any help nor to accept the mistakes she has made. Due to past experiences Sethe does not want to rely on any men anymore. After her husband leaves her, she does not see the point of being dependent on any men again. Sethe does not feel that men can bring her any security or influence on her life. She believes that she can do exactly the same as men. However, when she meets her old friend, Paul D, and lets him into her house, this strong will of self-reliance changes.

When Paul D notices that Sethe and Denver live alone he is surprised by the fact that she has managed to live alone without any male presence and says: "No man? You here by yourself?" (*Beloved* 11). When Sethe invites Paul D inside the house, he encounters the ghost that is in the house and gets terrified by the ghost's paranormal presence and suggests Sethe to leave the house. However, Sethe refuses to obey by saying:

> "I got a tree on my back and a haint in my house, and nothing in between but the daughter I am holding in my arms. No more running – from nothing. I will never run from another thing on this earth. I took one journey and I paid for the ticket, but let me tell you something, Paul D Garner: it cost too much! Do you hear me? It cost too much. Now sit down and eat with us or leave us be." (18)

This shows the strong position which Sethe holds. When Paul D tries to convince Sethe to leave the house, she lets him know that it is not up to Paul D to make that decision. This attitude indicates the reversal of roles between men and women. The male is no longer the head of the family and Sethe therefore, confronts the patriarchal society and assigns herself the position of the "man" of the house. Paul D respects Sethe's choice and is impressed by her standpoint and never suggests leaving the house again (Kahina and Meddour 46).

Another interesting factor to look at in *Beloved* is how Morrison presents the different gender roles between a man and a woman. She creates characters that do not follow the traditional gender norms and roles. The gender roles are reversed in the novel and it is caused by slavery and it pushes the genders to adopt opposite characteristics (Ali 1421). In *Black Feminist Thought* (2000) Collins argues that slavery was one of the reasons for destroying Black families by creating reversed gender roles for Black men and women (85), which Morrison demonstrates in *Beloved*. For example, slavery has emasculated Paul D. He is a character filled with emotion and affection; however, he struggles to define his manhood. Slavery has stolen his manhood by forbidding him to take any decisions. When he finally escapes from Sweet Home he doesn't know how to be a man, and thus walks confusedly for years. However, all motherly sensibilities, as well as femininity, is taken away from Sethe. She has to adjust to the masculine traits to make sure that her family can survive. These two characters are an example of how they take the characteristics of the opposite gender.

In the novel the women are under the oppressed patriarchy of slavery. The women struggle to manifest their subjective consciousness by striving to deal with their free self. Their psyches have had deep effects by being enslaved and therefore lack to establish themselves as human beings (Ali 1421). As Sethe points out, "freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (*Beloved* 112). One of the reasons for why it is difficult to develop a relationship with others and themselves, according to Schreiber, is because enslaved Blacks "who literally do not own themselves, intermingling of identities is particularly threatening to the sense of self" (Schreiber 7). Black people are objectified as products in the Black slave's community. It becomes impossible for the Black characters in the novel to develop their own self because they are deprived of every right to do so (Ali 1421), and when they do not even own themselves, it is impossible for them to develop a sense of identity (Schreiber 7). Sethe never succeeds in finding her true self. As discussed earlier, Sethe is a strong and independent woman who defies the traditional gender roles. Being the sole support of her family and taking up the roles as both father and mother makes her, therefore, viewed as unfeminine. She has been degraded to a beast, been compared to a man, however the only thing left of her that is considered feminine is her motherhood.

The only attribute she has to identify herself with is being a mother. However, the institution of slavery deprives Sethe, and the other Black female slaves, their womanhood by taking away their right of motherhood. Many of the Black female characters are denied both of family households and the mother instinct to nurse their children. Unlike in *The Bluest Eye* Morrison demonstrates the lack of compassion between a mother-daughter relationship and how that ends up traumatizing the child.

Whereas in *Beloved* Morrison demonstrates the psychological effect of children being forcefully taken away from their mothers. The major difference between the two mothers, Pauline and Sethe, is Sethe's strong devotion to her children. She will do everything in her power to protect her children from slavery, even if that means to kill her own child.

Black females during slavery were viewed as breeders and not affectionate mothers (Ramírez 153). They were seen as a machinery product to give birth and also be able to work on the plantation. Therefore, female slaves were a good possession for slaveholders so they could make profit off of them (Collins 86). Black female slaves were claimed to "produce children as easily as animals" (86). According to Collins, being compared to an animal who only breeds, Black females are being demeaned and not considered as a human being because "only animals can be bred against their will" (146). As Denver, Sethe's daughter, points out: "slaves not supposed to have pleasurable feelings on their own; their bodies not supposed to be like that, but they have to have as many children as they can to please whoever owned them. Still, they were not supposed to have pleasure deep down" (*Beloved* 247).

Moreover, children by slave mothers could be sold easily and taken away from their mothers, or the mothers had to work long hours on the plantation and therefore, not being able to nurse their own children and develop a mother-infant bond (Ramírez 153). When the emotional bond between mother and daughter are neglected at an early age it becomes difficult for the daughter to shape her identity and gender. Sethe lacks a defined female self. Because she didn't develop an emotional bond with her mother due to slavery, she unconsciously passes this feeling of abandonment to her daughters as well, especially Beloved (154). Sethe never gets the opportunity to really know her mother, she cannot even remember her name. The only recollection she has of her mother is the burnt mark she has on her chest. She shows Sethe her scars so Sethe can identify her as her mother. Wanting to look up to her mother and identify as her, Seth asks for the same mark not knowing what it really is. However, she gets slapped by her mother. Hitting Sethe does not mean she disliked her, but to protect her. The burnt scar showed that she was ruled by slavery. Her identity was simply a slave. When Sethe grows up she doesn't have anything in common with her mother except the big "tree" on her back. A scar from slavery. However, Sethe's main reason for escaping the plantation, named Sweet Home, was not due to the horrible, back-splitting beatings she took from her slaveowner. Horrible as it was, the pain of these incidents was less important than the demeaning and shame it symbolizes.

Sethe is being beaten for reporting the violent actions of the slaveowner's sons. However, the boys end up violating Sethe's pregnant body, and robs her of her breast milk, which was intended for

her unborn daughter. Her breast milk is the most precious and sacred thing she has left of her. She is being treated like an animal. She is traumatized severely that she cannot forget this memory, because her breast milk represents the only significant part of her that is connected to motherhood, and something that was supposed to be safe from white people. Stealing her milk belittles her worth as a mother, a woman, and a human being (Day "Identity formation").

Her children are her most valuable thing, the only part of her that has not been ruined by slavery. However, this identification becomes more of a problem as Sethe allows Beloved to have access to Sethe. Having Beloved in her presence and nearby tires out Sethe both physically and emotionally. In order for Beloved to gain energy, to be present and to not disappear she need to stay close with Sethe. While Beloved is draining out energy from her mother in order to stay alive, Sethe loses a bit of herself every day. It is therefore up to Denver to free her mother from downfall. Denver becomes aware that it is she who has to take action in order to save her mother and keep her family integrated. Denver leaves the house and challenges the outside world after being "imprisoned" for years by her mother. Denver has lived isolated during most of her youth because her mother has tried to protect her from the community that has rejected them, leading Denver to have no relations to the outside world. She does not know how to build a social life for herself due to lack of contact. Therefore, Denver finally leaves the house in order to find a job to provide for her family and do so by the help from their community, which helps Denver to grow into a self, independent and free woman. In "Memory and Mother Love in Morrison's *'Beloved'*" (1990) Barbara Mathieson writes that Denver "rediscovers what is perhaps the most successful strategy for adult development: she replaces the solitary maternal bond with a larger community of adults and opens herself to an empathetic network of fellows" (Mathieson 15-16).

Social Rejection

In Sethe's own Black community she is defined as a marginalized member. The novel provides several reasons for why Sethe has been rejected by her community, and the murder of her child is certainly one of them. In the very beginning of the story the reader already has a feeling of Sethe's social rejection from the Black community (Inglés 3). The narrator clearly emphasizes on the hostility and isolation between Sethe's home and the rest of her surroundings:

> It had been a long time since anybody […] sat at their table. […] For twelve years, long before Grandma Baby died, there had been no visitors or any sort and certainly no friends. No coloredpeople. (*Beloved* 14)

The quote refers to Sethe's murder of her daughter, Beloved, which is the primary reason for her social rejection. In chapter 19, Ella, an abolitionist, argues for why Sethe has been rejected by her community (Inglés 3). However, Stamp Paid, a member of the Black community tries to convince Ella that she was once friends with Sethe, but Ella replies; "yeah, till she showed herself. […] I ain't got no friends take handsaw to their own children" (*Beloved* 221). However, Ella does not only reject Sethe because of the killing, she also questions Sethe's escape from Sweet Home and her love for her family. Ella is completely prejudiced against Sethe and accuses her of adultery and being a liar;

> "All I know is she married Baby Suggs' boy and I ain't sure I know that. Where is he, huh? […] I ain't saying she wasn't their ma'ammy, but who's to say they was Baby Suggs' grandchildren? How she get on board and her husband didn't? And tell me this, how she have that baby in the woods by herself? Said a whitewoman come out the trees and helped her. Shoot. You believe that? A whitewoman? (220)

Her comment does not only show the disapproval of Sethe's killing, but also what Sethe represents for the community. Sethe is not the only one who has been rejected. Paul D has also, in some way, been rejected by the community when he is forced to sleep in a church after he leaves Sethe (Inglés 4). Everybody in the community has failed to show compassion towards him. One is therefore not only rejected because of murder. This leads to question whether there are any standards in order to be accepted in the community.

It may be assumed that the Black community somehow is established on a specific social pattern that could be the reason for Sethe and Paul D's social rejection. Sethe is regarded somehow as a threat to the Black community. Ella, who has a strong influence of the communal voice, strongly disapproves of Sethe's behavior. Sethe is unique and different from the other women in the community, and she challenges the social standards, which she is expected to comply with. As discussed earlier, Sethe is an independent woman who takes over the male's role. She is the head of the house and is the provider for her family. Not only does she cook, clean, and nurture, but she also builds and fixes furniture (Inglés 19). She is portrayed as a protective character ready to defend her house and the people she loves. Sethe does not qualify into the established standards. She is willing to go beyond the social standards that are imposed on her. Paul D notices Sethe's unusual behaviors and warns her that her "love is too thick" and that she should not develop strong emotional bonds

towards people, especially her own children (*Beloved* 193). Sethe develops a way of living that challenges the community's morals and principles of the "discourse of true womanhood, wifehood and motherhood" that was at the time (qtd. in Inglés 11). Moreover, she also does not restrain her sexuality. She comfortably shows great naturalness in her disclosure of sexual lust towards Paul D. Due to these different factors the community reject Sethe and puts her in an alienated situation. By rejecting both Sethe and Paul D the community unconsciously follow the standards of white culture, by punishing themselves and other unwelcomed visitors.

Shared Memory and Collective Trauma

This section will examine how *Beloved* focuses on the collective memories of trauma of slavery. The characters are continually repressing and revisiting trauma by trying to verbalize and move forward in life. Dennis Foster writes in his article "Trauma and Memory" (2000) that by verbalizing it helps the Black characters fight trauma because it is only "by telling stories, narratives that inevitably appropriate the past and help the community learn to live into their future" (Foster 746) that the characters can work through trauma. The novel examines the problematic reconstruction of both personal and communal identity and portrays the significance of remembering the past and how verbalization of trauma helps the characters to heal and build a sense of self (Schreiber 10).

The persistence of Memory

In order to recover from trauma, it is necessary for the individual to feel safe (Schreiber 8), and this is what causes Sethe to escape from Sweet Home. Sethe has finally established some sort of safe haven for her and her daughter in 124 Bluestone Road. Even though Sethe considers her home as safe, they do, however, live in a haunted house "[f]ull of a baby's venom" (*Beloved* 1). Due to the house being haunted, Sethe's sons leave the house. Their leaving deepens Denver's isolation and loneliness. Therefore, this 'safety' that Sethe has established is nothing more than isolation and violence (Austine 41). Even Paul D observes that "what she wanted for her children was exactly what was missing in 124: safety. […] this here Sethe talked about safety with a handsaw" (*Beloved* 193). Unlike everyone else Sethe is not bothered by the haunted ghost in the house. What she fears more is the past. Going through horrible incidents throughout her life, Sethe is petrified by her own memories of the past, and therefore the memories that are being revealed threaten the life that she has tried to rebuild (Austine 43). She keeps remembering her past when she sees or hears something. It takes her

back in time and space where she was once a slave. She reflects on how memories of Sweet Home impose on everyday events. With the relaxing memories erasing the negative ones:

> suddenly there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes, and although there was not a leaf on that farm that did not make her want to scream, it rolled itself out in shameless beauty. It never looked as terrible as it was and it made her wonder if Hell was a pretty place too. […] Boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores […] it shamed her – remembering the wonderful soughing trees rather than the boys. Try as she might to make it otherwise, the sycamores beat out the children every time and she could not forgive her memory for that. (*Beloved* 7)

For her, the memory of Sweet Home brings nostalgia for a place where she once had her whole family. The past can therefore reappear either as a rememory[8], as Sethe calls it, as a trauma or a nostalgic memory that protects and nourishes her (Schreiber 41). For her it becomes a strategy in order to adapt. By revisiting her rememories, it affects Sethe's processing of her present. Sethe is still haunted by her memories of her time at Sweet Home and how she killed her child, Beloved. Sethe is completely unable to separate her past from the present because she does not want to. Sethe's brain "was not interested in the future […] [she] was [l]oaded with the past and hungry for more, it left her no room to imagine, let alone plan for the next day" (*Beloved* 83). Through remembrance it will bring Sethe closer to heal herself, however, her unwillingness to do that puts her safety at risk (Austine 44).

Even though it is painful for Sethe, reengaging her memories and telling her story is essential to remembrance and healing. When Sethe tells the story of Beloved's murder to Paul D, she is taking a step towards her healing process, by reflecting on the memories she has tried to repress. After Sethe is confronted by Beloved towards the end of the novel, Sethe tries to explain and justify her actions for why she killed Beloved. She tells her life story to Beloved, but Beloved does not seem impressed at all as Sethe had hoped. Sethe hopes for forgiveness, however, it also seems like she doesn't want it;

> [Denver] had begun to notice that even when Beloved was quiet, dreamy, minding her own business, Sethe got her going again. Whispering, muttering some justification, some bit of clarifying information to Beloved to explain what it had been like, and why, and how come.

[8] Toni Morrison explores the concept of rememory – the process of returning to memories over and over again.

> It was as though Sethe didn't really want forgiveness; she wanted it refused. And Beloved helped her out (297).

Sethe's wish to be liberated from the punishment of her own memories is in dispute with her belief that she cannot and should not be freed from this penance. Sethe wants to convince herself that Beloved's return means that she is finally freed from the burden of her memories, when Beloved's return is in fact an embodiment of Sethe's pain which she has been repressing for years (Austine 45). When Sethe finally admits to herself that Beloved is in fact her daughter, she convinces herself that she is forgiven and that her daughter understands, and that she is free from her haunting memories; "I don't have to remember nothing. I don't have to explain. She [Beloved] understands it all" (*Beloved* 216). Sethe hopes for Beloved to understand why Sethe had to kill her, however, Beloved doesn't understand at all. All Beloved knows is that Sethe had killed and left her.

Paul D also buries his painful past, scared that his horrific memories will overpower the present. His past is both awful and humiliating and it has scarred and damaged him. But at the same time, it is the only past he has, and it has formed him. Paul D finds no comfort in his memories. He only finds recollections of brutality and pain. Unlike Sethe's attachment and remaining to 124 because of safety, Paul D tries to overcome and rest from remembering by being in constant motion, and remembrance and grief have been put off until he comes to 124 Bluestone Road. When Paul D and Sethe reunites they immediately tell each other of what has happened since their escape from Sweet Home, and Sethe tells him about the murder of Beloved. However, at a certain point Paul D can no longer bear to talk about their past because it is too painful for him and it brings back horrible memories: "Paul D turned away. He wanted to know more about it, but jail talk put him back in Alfred, Georgia" (*Beloved* 51). Paul D's intentions with Sethe is to create a home even though his confrontations with her makes him exposed. It is only possible for him to fully recover from his traumas by starting over with Sethe, since they both share the recollection of Sweet Home.

When Paul D settles in at 124 Bluestone Road, he fights off the ghost as well as confronting Denver. He does this in order to make 124 a home by reinstate the house in hope for a family life. However, Beloved returns, this time in a physical human body, to imperil this home and Paul D will try to claim his place next to Sethe, saving both his own life, Sethe's, and Denver's as well. However, the path to this place is blocked by psychological obstacles which they have to overcome. Paul D and Sethe need to verbalize in order to reconcile with their trauma, so they have to learn to live in the present despite their past (Schreiber 46). By acknowledging the cruel white culture, they can process

their past and move on to live a life in the present. But Sethe is too stubborn to talk about her past and stays in denial (Schreiber 47).

Moreover, Beloved is probably the character who embodies the power of memory the most and is the physical embodiment of trauma. After being forced out of the house as a ghost, she returns, but this time in a physical body at 124 because she yearns for a home in order to feel safe and loved. She comes to reclaim her lost identity and to seek a self-definition from her mother and her memory. The only identity Beloved has is basically her memories. Without memories there can be no Beloved. As a ghost, Beloved's existence relies on the memories of Sethe and her stories of Sweet Home to keep her connected to the physical world of existence and to be connected to her mother. Like Sethe's memories, Beloved has to be confronted so she can be put to rest, and so Sethe and Denver can move on in their lives and get peace. The stories she hears from Sethe buffer the trauma of her fragmented self. She desperately tries hard to hold on to her second life, however, she finds herself fading away slowly when Sethe begins to move forward: "Beloved looked at the tooth and thought, This is it. Next would be her arm, her hand, a toe. Pieces of her would drop maybe one at a time, maybe all at once. […] It is difficult keeping her head on her neck, her legs attached to her hips when she is by herself" (*Beloved* 157). While Sethe tries to avoid any memories from her past, beloved desperately tries to hold on to them.

One character that stands out from the rest is perhaps Denver. She is the only child who is still present and who has not died or run off. Denver represents the past, present, and future. When she drinks her sister's blood along with her mother's milk when she was an infant, she carries the past in her, and she becomes intrinsically connected to Beloved. Furthermore, the trauma of the white world has formed Denver's young life in a different way. Although Denver has been born into a caring family and into freedom, trauma still flows through Denver (Schreiber 48). In order for Denver to pursue a positive identity she makes use of the past to do so. She tries to escape the memory of her sister's murder and her own imprisonment with her mother by going deaf, when a boy confronts her with her mother's crimes. By blocking out these negative images, she obtains a positive sense of self from the stories her mother tells her about her birth. Denver hates "the stories her mother told that did not concern herself: "Not being in it, she hated it" (*Beloved* 74). When Denver hears the story of her birth, the stories give her a sense of belonging.

Other stories that do not concern her birth builds up Denver's sense of vulnerability. She tries to avoid the feeling of abandonment by foreclosing her mother's and Paul D's stories of Sweet Home because it "belonged to them and not to her" (15). Her mother's and Paul D's safe haven take away

Denver's safety net, because if Paul D starts to have Sethe and her memories, Denver will fear that she herself will lose that safety. Denver's survival relies on her attachment to her mother. Moreover, Denver also dislikes Paul D for fighting off her sister's ghost because it was "the only other company she had" (23). Denver starts to lose her identity due to being isolated in the house. She cries: "Nobody speaks to us. Nobody comes by. Boys don't like me. Girls don't either" (17). Denver desperately needs company otherwise she will slowly perish and end up like her mother. Denver also feels lost because she does not know her father, however, when she meets Paul D, she feels that she finds some part of her identity because he knew her father. But at the same time, she also feels separate because "even her own father's absence was not hers" (15). In her loneliness she "wished for the baby ghost" (15), because it was the only thing that kept her with company and prevented her from being lonely or going mental (Schreiber 48).

Denver has had enough of her isolation. She has kept her feelings inside for too long and her outburst is composed of all the suffering she has hidden inside of her within a house that has become a prison and she burst out crying: "I can't live here. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I can't live here" (*Beloved* 17). Sethe tries to soothe her and justify it by blaming it on the house, however, Denver tells her "It's not! […] It's us! And it's you!" (17). Sethe is both haunted and traumatized by the memory of the infanticide of her daughter and also the past of slavery, her rape, and loss of her husband. However, Denver also feels these events and inherits her mother's trauma in the form of transgenerational trauma. Denver demonstrates a constant fear that her mother will try to kill her because she has been traumatized by her mother: "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" (242). This feeling of constant fear leads her to finally break free of the haunted house and everything inside it and go out to seek help.

In the beginning of the novel, Denver is a passive figure, however, it is she who ends up rescuing her mother, even though going out and seeking help is a scary challenge for Denver. Denver is not familiar with the outside world. She has been isolated in 124 to keep herself safe from the evil lurking outside. She never leaves the house by herself, instead she always has someone to accompany her. She has been traumatized by her mother's stories and her experiences, thus being scared of the outside. For Denver, the outside world is where everything is out of control, a hungry place ready to swallow her up. She is afraid of the unknown; the exact same thing that is evil enough to turn her mother into a murderer. Denver wonders what kind of thing is evil enough to turn a mother into

killing her own child, and if there is something that is so evil, then she has no intentions of going outside in fear of being taken by the evil thing:

> 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 don't know what it is, I don't know who it is, but maybe there is something else terrible enough to make her do it again. […] 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. (*Beloved* 242)

Denver has never experienced anything outside, but she has seen what the outside can and has done to her mother. She is therefore clearly traumatized of her mother's past and the rememorizes constantly showing up. What eventually pushes Denver to step out of the house is due to her late grandmother, Baby Suggs. Denver gets an epiphany and reconnects with Baby Suggs and senses her spirit. However, Denver seeks advice from Baby Suggs spirit. She finally overcomes her fears when Baby Suggs guides her: "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."" (288). Her memory of Baby Suggs' strength and motivation gives Denver an ego support, which she needs to act in the present. Her decision to seek help is a crucial step for her psychologically, because she can finally move forward into life. She is now obliged to depend on her own memories in order to guide herself, and her memories guides her to her old schoolteacher, Lady Bishop who helps and rescue Denver from the intergenerational trauma of slavery, along with the other women from their community (Austine 55). Therefore, "Denver comes to embody the hope for a future for her family and for the whole community" (Lonien 69).

Healing Within the Community

Beloved is also a story about communal healing and rehabilitation. Even though Denver is the one who initiates the healing by going out and asks for help, it is the community of the Black women who really makes the healing process achievable. However, it requires movement on both Sethe's and the community's side to repair. It is necessary for Sethe to heal and to be saved from her memory and guilt of Beloved's murder within the context of the community, which she has been rejected from. However, the community also needs this break to be resolved in order for themselves to be redeemed (Austine 69). Before her death, Baby Suggs was the spiritual heart of the community, a spiritual healer and the preacher figure of the community. Baby Suggs gives sermons in the Clearing, a place in the woods, where she preaches against the fragmentation of the Black people, the denial of their

humanity, and about reifying their body. Her sermons reestablish a sense of self-love. She does not rely upon the Bible, however, on "her own lived experience and recovery of self in her postslavery life" (Reed 62).

The Clearing is the community's church of nature. Baby Suggs' assemble is more of an egalitarian connection in nature where she focuses on mutual salvation. Baby Suggs does not rely on Christianity; "She did not tell them to clean up their lives or to go and sin no more. She did not tell them they were the blessed of the earth. […] She told them that the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine" (*Beloved* 103). The people get salvation and inspiration through Baby Suggs' enthusiasm and her bodily language, such as laughing, dancing, singing, and weeping (DeKoven 277). The Clearing is a safe space where they can be released and love their Black body, which is hated by white Americans: "in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it […] *You* got to love it, *you!*" (*Beloved* 103-104). The Clearing is a safe haven where the past and present trauma of slavery can be confronted, and where the individual and the communal can find wholeness (Lonien 58).

Since white America has robbed them of their identity, Baby Suggs gives the Black people the exact opposite, encouraging them to bring their bodies back to life, to repair them and make them whole by loving themselves and their body. Baby Suggs reconnects with her body and she attains a self-discovery and gains freedom. She experiences some kind of a rebirth: "Suddenly she saw her hands and thought with a clarity as simple as it was dazzling, "'These hands belong to me. These *my* hands. Next she felt a knocking in her chest and discovered something else new: her own heartbeat" (*Beloved* 161). She chooses to share the joy of her rediscovery with the rest of the community. Their body parts are restored back again into a whole through the power of communal song and dance: "Saying no more, she stood up and danced with her twisted hip the rest of what her heart had to say while the others opened their mouths and gave her the music" (104). Through dance and song, the people express themselves through their individual bodies, as well as communal body. They connect through a common history of pain and loss and obtain strength of their historical roots (Lonien 60).

However, after nine years Baby Suggs becomes old and tired and the Clearing begins to crumble. Without Baby Suggs' presence and inspiration, the Clearing begins to lose its strength to heal the community (Lonien 60). However, years later when Denver steps out into the world to seek help from the community, who had turned their backs on her family, the women in the community

respond by giving out food. They do it in their memory of Baby Suggs and 124, when the house was peaceful.

With the support of the community in the end, Sethe's healing progress can finally be made. The women do not have a specific plan, however: "some brought what they could have what they believed would work. […] Others brought Christian faith – as shield and sword. Most brought a little of both. They had no idea what they would do once they got there. They just started out" (303). This one single act brings healing to Sethe and to 124. Towards the end of *Beloved*, the women come together to confront the "ghost", the unknown woman who calls herself Beloved and to prevent Sethe from killing their white benefactor, Mr. Bodwin, in a panic confusion. The appearance of Mr. Bodwin, a white man who usually helps slaves, triggers Sethe's mind into thinking that he is her former slaveowner, the Schoolteacher. Therefore, in confusion she reacts instinctively to kill him. However, the women of the community reach to stop her. It is only when the community unites again that Beloved can be laid to rest and Sethe and her family can heal again (Austine 73). Sethe's healing depends on "the discovery of restorative love in her own life" (Herman 11), which is seen in the communal exorcism of Beloved, and Sethe "will never forget, she will grieve every day. But the time comes when the trauma no longer commands the central place in her life" (11). In *The Bluest Eye,* the novel shows the readers what can happen when a member of a community is neglected and rejected. In *Beloved* the novel shows us the importance of community help and unity, in order for one to heal.

Narrative Structure

Similar to *The Bluest Eye*, *Beloved* is also a multi textual and a polyphonic novel. Morrison is well-known for her complex narrations. She challenges the concept of empathy by having alternative narrative perspectives and allows the different characters to have a voice and to be heard. Some of the characteristics that make *Beloved* such a remarkable novel is its narrative structure and Morrison's utilization of different point of views of the central events of the novel. The novel does not follow a traditional linear narrative structure, in fact, it makes the past and the present interact regularly during the narration and they are juxtaposed (Bao 2-3). The juxtaposition of past with present shows the reader that the past is alive in the present. The novel is not a linear story that is presented from the beginning to the end. It is a story that covers all of the character's past and present. The past is occasionally told in flashbacks, sometimes within a story, and at times it is plainly told as if it is happening in the present, due to Morrison's often utilization of the present tense (3). Large parts of

the story are narrated by the rememory of the characters. The present narrations are frequently interrupted by flashbacks (3). Due to the frequent changes between past and present it can become difficult to make a distinction between them. The past constantly interrupts the present narration and therefore the past cannot be forgotten because it emerges itself constantly; "it's [rememory] never going away. Even if the whole farm – every tree and grass blade of it dies. The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there […] it will happen again; it will be there […] waiting for you. […] Nothing ever dies" (*Beloved* 43-44). Morrison makes it clear to the readers that one cannot escape from the past and that the present and the past are indivisible (Bao 4).

Moreover, Morrison uses multi point of view in the narration. Having multiple voices and narrators in the story can therefore lead to what Bakhtin calls dialogism. It is possible for the reader to notice the multiple perspectives from the characters instead of only following a closed authorial monologue (Masoomi 79). The novel's narrative is not presented through a single consciousness of the author or of the main character. There are multiple truths according to the different characters in the story. They all have their own worldview, and even their perception can be challenged or influenced by each other. Morrison leaves the characters free to discuss and challenge each other and challenge the readers. The multiple voices and thoughts of the characters come together and can therefore provoke the reader. The reader can be wrong when they read a passage. If the reader gets shown one point of view the reader would perhaps believe that perspective. If you, however, present multiple perspectives to the reader, the reader would try to choose between what is true or not, they would work on different points of views and come up with one understanding that the reader then can relate to. In *Beloved* the plurality of consciousness and polyphony is also needed, similar to *The Bluest Eye*, because it grants different ideologies and different standpoint to the reader. The text could therefore be argued as a dialogic text because there is room for the narrative to be challenged by the reader.

In the novel the function of multi-voice narrative is used in order to narrate the central event – infanticide (Bao 5). The process of unlocking the incidents of 18 years ago is exposed gradually by the characters rememories. Morrison gives each main character a voice, permitting them to share their discernment and insight of the incident with the reader. The incident of the infanticide is not described in detail or thoroughly at once, however it is told progressively. The story is told or remembered through the consciousness of different characters, such as the Schoolteacher, Stamp Paid, and Sethe herself. By using different points of views on the incident the narrative controls how the reader reacts to the plot. When the incident of the infanticide is told through different characters,

the reader is also presented with different versions of the story, thus making it difficult for the reader to take an ethical stand about the incident and whether or not the reader can empathize with Sethe. Morrison manipulates the narration by carefully picking which memory to present at which time (Rindstad 17). The structure gives new perspectives on the incident and the ability to empathize with Sethe becomes more difficult throughout the novel. The story presents a fragmented structure to the reader which distances the reader from the narrative. The storyline shifts between past and present while the reader follows Sethe's flashbacks together with the characters of Paul D, Stamp Paid, Baby Suggs, and Denver. Although the characters present the same events, their memories, however, differ from each other. It is necessary for Morrison to tell the characters point of views of a shared past individually. This use of narration affects the reader's judgement and perception of Sethe and the infanticide. The different description of the traumatic incident shows the reader how unique memories are (17-18).

The first perspective of Sethe's infanticide is depicted through the Schoolteacher's point of view. After Sethe has run away from Sweet Home, the Schoolteacher finds her again after a couple of months later at 124 Bluestone Road and wants to take her back to the plantation as a slave. When the Schoolteacher approaches the shed where Sethe is with her children, the reader gets an insight through the gaze of a white man who regards Sethe as a property that breeds. The incident is portrayed through the standpoint of a heartless antagonist who consider Sethe as an animal:

> Inside, two boys bled in the sawdust and dirt at the feet of a nigger woman holding a blood-soaked child to her chest with one hand and an infant by the heels in the other. She did not look at them; she simply swung the baby towards the wall planks, missed and tried to connect a second time […] Right off it was clear, to schoolteacher especially, that there was nothing there to claim. […] Two were lying open-eyed in the sawdust; a third pumped blood down to the dress of the main one. (*Beloved* 175-176)

The Schoolteacher's view of the incident comes across as being barbaric and alien, which makes this view of the incident as "an ethical perspective that [the reader] easily repudiate" (Phelan 324). The reader has seen Sethe from the inside for so long throughout the novel, to now seeing her from an alien point of view. The reader suddenly views Sethe as someone different than what we have been used to earlier. The description of the incident is both horrible and unmerciful, and therefore the image of Sethe as being merely a victim of slavery slowly disappears for the reader. She suddenly

becomes a cold-blooded murderer. However, the reader is not being informed of why Sethe goes into the shed and kills her children. Morrison later addresses this aspect of the story when she moves to Stamp Paid's point of view of the incident.

Stamp Paid's perspective is the first emotional standpoint of the incident, which possibly makes him the most influential agent of ethics in the novel (Rindstad 19). Throughout the novel, the reader learns that Stamp Paid is the one who helps Sethe and Denver from death and hunger when they first come to 124 Bluestone Road. He is characterized as sympathetic and a caring person. Therefore, the characterization of Stamp Paid and his story of the incident leaves a crucial impression on the reader. His standpoint on the incident seems more empathetic to the reader due to his relationship to Sethe. When he describes his memory of the incident, he compares Sethe's act to the one of an animal. This depiction of Sethe makes her inferior to him, however, he does not reduce her to an animal (Phelan 325), but he does make an analogy between Sethe's actions and an animal's: "[S]natching up her children like a hawk on the wing; how her face beaked, how her hands worked like claws, how she collected them every which way" (*Beloved* 185). The comparison to a hawk clarifies why Sethe acts the way she does. She senses danger and reacts instinctively. Moreover, the animalistic behavior is once again something the reader first emotionally reacts to. However, Stamp Paid's reaction towards Sethe is out of pity and not out of sympathy. It is therefore still difficult for the reader to emphasize with her because she becomes a victim of pity (Phelan 325). Stamp Paid questions how a "pretty little slavegirl" (*Beloved* 186) like Sethe could murder her own child and this presents a complex ethical effect on the reader. The reader believes that Sethe's actions are wrong, however, instinctive, and the reader wants to be in denial. The second description of the incident is through a more sympathetic focalizer (Phelan 325).

The third revelation of the incident is through Sethe's own perspective. This is the version that the reader has been waiting on and will "provide some resolution to the tension" (Phelan 323) to the incident. When Sethe tells her story about the incident to Paul D she does not start the story of when the Schoolteacher comes and tries to take her. She starts her story of when she first arrives at 124 and the pride and love she felt back then:

> We was here. Each and every one of my babies and me too. I birthed them and I got em out and it wasn't no accident. I did that. […] me using my own head. […] it felt good. Good and right. I was big, Paul D, and deep and wide when I stretched out my arms all my children could get in between. I was *that* wide. Look like I loved I loved em more after I got here.

> Or maybe I couldn't love em proper in Kentucky because they wasn't mine to love. But when I got here, when I jumped down off that wagon – there wasn't nobody in the world I couldn't love if I wanted to. (*Beloved* 191)

When Sethe tries to explain Paul D about the incident Morrison slowly shifts to Sethe's own thoughts:

> Sethe knew that […] she could never close in, pin it down for anybody who had to ask. If they didn't get it right off – she could never explain. Because the truth was simple. […] When she saw them coming and recognized schoolteacher's hat, she heard wings. […] If she thought anything it was No. No. Nono. Nonono. Simple. She just flew. Collected every bit of life se had made […] and carried […] them […] away […] where no one could hurt them. […] "I stopped them him" she said, […] "I took and put my babies where they'd be safe." (*Beloved* 192-93)

Her version of the story is definitely stronger than the former two. Her intention was not to kill her children but to keep them from harm. Her purpose was out of motherlove, and she acted instinctively. Therefore, her perspective seems more sympathetic. However, a loving mother and infanticide do not correspond with each other. The reader is therefore once again confused about Sethe and her actions. Sethe's reason behind her action is not only because of motherly love but also based on a history of oppression, her own trauma. Moreover, Sethe leaves out the descriptions of the handsaw, the slit throat, the blood, and the swinging of the baby into the wall. This point of view makes it problematic because the reader does not know how to grasp the issue.

The character's perspectives of Sethe and the incident make it problematic to visualize what it is like to be Sethe due to the ambivalence in how she is represented. Is she like an animal as the Schoolteacher and Stamp Paid portray her? Is she a madwoman who will kill her children in their sleep, as Denver and Paul D views her? Or is she a mother of unconditional love for her children who will sacrifice them in order to save them, as Sethe believes herself to be? It is difficult to identify Sethe because the reader has seen her through different perspectives of terror, pity, sympathy, and judgement. The different perspectives demonstrate the diverseness of truth, although it is not the same truth, however, they each have their own version of it. It is therefore problematic for the reader to have empathy towards Sethe and quite impossible to put oneself in her place and feel what she has felt. Perhaps the goal is not to empathize with Sethe, but an opportunity to listen to silenced memories and examine and contemplate upon what the reader cannot relate to, because it is necessary that these

stories are heard. Moreover, it is problematic to take a moral position on the infanticide. Sethe stands in a problematic dilemma and no one can have a specific answer to how a mother can kill their own child. Morrison states in an interview that:

> the novel admits that it cannot negotiate the morality of that act, that there's no one qualified who can, except the dead child. That is why her presence, or the belief in her presence, is so important. She alone can ask that question with any hope of a meaningful answer. I personally don't know. I can't think of anything worse than to kill one's children. On the other hand, I can't think of anything worse than to turn them over to a living death. (*The World* 46)

Spectrality in the Novels of Toni Morrison

Toni Morrison is prominent when it comes to discussing topics, such as race, Black experience, trauma and the search for Black identity in literature. However, what is also notable in her works is how ghosts or other forms of spectrality are present in her canon. Among her many novels, *Beloved* (1987) is probably the most obvious "ghost story" since the character Beloved is a revenant. It is certainly an overstatement to label her works as "ghost stories", but one cannot overlook the fact that her novels can be read as haunted texts (Anderson 1). When we think of ghost stories, the ghost is often used as a plot device, having the purpose of either haunting and taking revenge upon the living, or "to set right an injustice" (Deyab 13). However, in Morrison's novels, the "ghost" can be viewed as more of a symbolic figure, having symbolic or metaphorical functions in the stories. In her book *Cultural Haunting: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature* (1998), Kathleen Brogan discusses that African American writers who tend to write "ghost stories" is not necessarily from an interest in Gothic themes, however, a new type of genre in American literature that she calls "a story of cultural haunting" (2-4). She writes that: "

> Cultural ghost stories, which feature the haunting of a people by the ghosts of its own past, represent one way a group actively revises its relationship to the past. Not surprisingly, these stories tend to emerge in the aftermath of times of swift and often traumatic change, when old social bonds have been unhinged and new group identities must be formulated. (38)

One could therefore argue that Morrison uses "ghosts" as a tool for recovering the past and to connect the past with the present. They could also serve as a cultural role where the ghost is used as a way to "reexamine the past, investigate the present, and reformulate the future" (Deyab 13-14). The ghost in

her novels also serves to "recover and make social use of a poorly documented, partially erased culture" (Brogan 2). Moreover, Morrison uses the concept of "ghost" or "haunting" as a literary tool in order to discuss themes of identity, memory, trauma, and history (Anderson 2), and also as a figure who guides the other characters. What differs Toni Morrison's novels from other ghost stories is that she explores not only the individual's psyche but also of African American's historical consciousness (Brogan 5). Morrison investigates the African American history, that has either been erased, forgotten, revised, or fragmented, through spectrality. Therefore, she tries to write about the silenced history through the use of spectrality.

In her novels, the function of the specter is cultural and generational that helps the second generation to understand certain cultural events of segregation and slavery. She highlights the historical moments that are often ignored or elided. Her use of specter provides connection and identity to the characters that are subsequently "ghosted". The "ghosts" in the novels form a space that indicate issues of dispossession, neglect, and trauma, and they can also form places for memorializing and healing (Anderson 2). The spectral figures bring out an awareness of African Americans lived experience in the past situated in historical events. When writing about these recollections and experiences, Morrison focuses on how the past can haunt the presence (2).

In *Spectrality in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (2013) Melanie Anderson states that the appearance of fictional specters is usually connected under the genre magical realism[9]. She writes that magical realist texts often "recuperate the lost voices and discarded fragments […] [and] to present a world view that is radically different from ours as equally valid" (Anderson 3-4) and moreover, it is a "literary device […] which there is space for the invincible forces that move the world: dreams, legends, myths, emotion, passion, history. All these forces find a place in the absurd, unexplainable aspects of magic realism" (5). However, it would be critical to label Morrison's novels as "magical realism". Some of her characters accept magical or spiritual events, such as the presence of a ghost like Beloved, as part of the narrative world, and it would seem obvious to link the novel under this category. However, Morrison distances herself from magical realism. Morrison once stated that "[*Beloved]* is outside most of the formal constricts of the novel but you've got to call it something. Just as long as they [critics] don't call me a magical realist, as though I don't have a culture to write out of. As though that culture has no intellect" (qtd. in Anderson 6). The reason for her statement is because she chooses a ghost as a device to express and remember the African American cultural heritage, a culture that is her own. An African American journalist writes: "We African-Americans

[9] In this context, I understand magic realism as a genre that combines realistic fiction with magical elements.

grow up hearing stories of older family members being visited by spirits. These stories are both history lesson and entertainment, as much a part of our oral traditions as call and response is in the black church. Ms. Morrison's "*Beloved*" regards that tradition" (Williams). That is why when the women in *Beloved* finally hear about Sethe's situation and about Beloved being the child Sethe once had killed and who had returned from death, they are not horrified or shocked as one might be, because magic and spirits are common in their culture.

Kathleen Brogan discusses that the ghost figure in African American literature usually emerges from African culture and history. She writes that "one of the key elements of African religious thought to survive in syncretic forms of new-world religious practice in slave folklore is the belief in ancestor spirits" (Brogan 2). Although African American writers may bring out Gothic elements and traditions in their stories, they do however "filter its conventions through African folklore and spirit beliefs" (2). Therefore, Morrison does not want to be associated as a "magical realist" because for her, believing in ghosts, magic, or the supernatural is something that is a part of her cultural heritage. She says in an interview that: "I wanted to use black folklore, the magic and superstitious part of it. Black people believe in magic. Once a woman asked me, 'do you believe in ghosts?' I said, 'yes… it is part of our heritage" (qtd. in Deyab 16). She further says in an interview that she believes that her creation of a culturally realistic world cannot be portrayed without utilizing the supernatural: "Ghosts are not difficult [to write] because everybody believes in them, even those of us who don't believe in them, because we don't put our hands outside the bed when we sleep. We're convinces that there's something underneath […] you can use that remembrance that's in me, in you, in everybody" (*The World* 45-46). Her utilization of the spectral is to "deconstruct constraining and opposing ways of seeing the world, stressing the interconnectedness of memory, history, and lived experience for individuals often caught in the cracks between cultures" (Anderson 7). Moreover, the specter is often connected with memory, inheritance, and generations where the spectral figure, like Beloved, can cross borders and function as a guide for other characters. The spectral figure in *Beloved* is difficult to name because it is neither a soul nor body (10).

In contrast to the power of the spectral figure in *Beloved*, are the characters who are biologically alive, like the Breedloves and Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*, but who are "ghostly" because they are "marginalized, silenced outcasts" (Anderson 11). Anderson defines these types of characters as social ghosts (12). According to Kathleen Brogan ghosts are not only a transitional figure that can pass through walls and move between past and present, but also a metaphor for silenced characters, especially women. These "ghosted" characters indicate an "absence made present", or some sort of

living ghosts (Brogan 25). She writes that: "the ghost can give expression to the ways in which women are rendered invisible in the public sphere. […] [Women] are ghostly both because they are socially unrecognized and because they have acquired an illegitimate strength" (25). Anderson backs up this statement by saying that women who have either been abused, silenced, or outcasted are social ghosts who haunt the margins of society (Anderson 12). This definition is visible in the novel *The Bluest Eye* where some of the characters can be considered as social ghosts. Morrison's use of the social ghosts is to express the way in which the women and men are depicted as invincible in the public sphere. The Breedloves, and especially Pecola, are ghostly because they are socially unaccepted. Many of the characters in the novel are either abused or outcasted and therefore also silent. In *The Bluest Eye* Pecola is not a supernatural ghost in a Gothic horror story way, she is a human being who is ignored and neglected by others due to her social position and appearance.

Therefore, one could argue that both of Morrison's novels, *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye,* could fit under the genre of a ghost story, because Morrison shows what it means to be haunted. According to Avery Gordon he writes that: "to write stories concerning exclusions and invisibilities is to write ghost stories" (qtd. in Anderson 14). This statement helps explain the many manifestations of haunting and spectrality in Morrison's novels. The ghosts as presence and metaphor shape her novels and it plays a significant role in her writings to represent African American history in a creative way. Throughout *Beloved* there is a preponderance of socially ghosted characters who find power or peace through a spectral guide, such as Sethe and Denver. They have been abused, silenced, and practically invisible. Even though they may seem powerless in the beginning of the novel, there is a renegotiation of position once they come in contact with the spectral guide, which is Beloved. The spaces between past and present begin to become useful, and their historical wounds begin to heal and when they get in contact with the spectral guide they start to reconnect to their community, family, national and personal history (14).

Even though there is no spectral guide in *The Bluest Eye,* the novel can still be read as a haunting text. The haunting moment in the novel centers around Pecola and her family. Using the metaphor of the ghost for female invincibility that Gordan and Brogan discuss, the Breedloves, and especially Pecola, could be considered as social ghosts that struggle with racism and poverty (Anderson 20). Since there is no spectral figure in the novel, *The Bluest Eye,* to help Pecola go through her painful path, Pecola becomes the social ghost who somehow ends up guiding the MacTeer sisters. Morrison therefore creates an intertextual and dialogic relationship in her work. For example, when Pecola believes that she has acquired blue eyes in the end of the novel, she begins to live in her mind

where she is haunted by conversations that she has with her ghosted split self (25). Her mind is the only place where she can talk of the horrors she has encountered and tries then to repress it. This figure is not spectral because it does not help Pecola, on the contrary it supports her belief that she has blue eyes. Therefore, her "ghosted" split self does not help Pecola deal with her trauma and past. Instead of helping Pecola to reach out and get help from others, her "ghosted" self allows her to retreat further into herself (26). There is no healing or rejoining within her community at the end of the novel, as there is in *Beloved*.

This *is* a Story to Pass On

Through her novels, Morrison presents and gives life to an essential outlook on American reality. Most enslaved African Americans during and after the civil war never had the fortune to pass on their life stories and therefore Morrison tries to convey the experiences of slavery reimagined in her novel *Beloved.* Although all of the characters are fictious, their stories do, however, cast important light on the aftermath of slavery. The character Beloved serves as a physical presence that preserve the memory of the horrors of slavery for the entire African American community. The novel *Beloved* strive "to perform a ritual burial of the forgotten, unnamed dead" (qtd. in Anderson 75). The novel is a dedication to the "Sixty Million and more" African Americans who died in slave trade. Morrison wants to inform the readers about the Black cultural past and that it must be remembered and "digested" even centuries later (75). We as modern-day readers are faced with the impossibility of a complete understanding of slavery, because there were so many victims who were silenced by never having the chance to share their experiences.

The importance of remembering the past and the complexity of doing so, Morrison writes in the end of *Beloved* that "This is not a story to pass on" (324). However, after reading the experiences in the novel, Morrison actually seems to suggest the very contrary to her readers. The passage is important and that nevertheless the story is passed on. The memory, the collective consciousness of the slaves, and the large brutality of the white population is clear throughout the novel. In his book *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (2008), Avery Gordon writes that the story of slavery and what they have encountered in the novel positively order that this story should in matter of fact be passed on to future generations. He states that: "Morrison's call for accountability suggests that it is our responsibility to recognize where we are in this story, even if we do not want to be there" (188). It is impossible for the readers to fully understand the horrors of slavery and the slave's experiences, however, it is not an excuse to ignore this part of America's past. The memorialization that the novel accomplishes is a constitution of Beloved's "spirit work, both for the

future generations to whom the novel speaks and for readers" (Anderson 80). The novel becomes a time-shifting space that transmits cultural information (81). In an interview, Morrison said of *Beloved* that: "[t]here is a necessity for remembering the horror, but of course there's a necessity for remembering it in a manner in which it can be digested, in a manner in which the memory is not destructive. The act of writing the book, in a way, is a way of confronting it and making it possible to remember (qtd in. Darling 5). Just like the character Beloved is the presence of absent child, the novel portrays a ghost that symbolizes the presence for the lost victims of slavery and all its history. One cannot help to wonder about the significance of remembering the crucial experiences of the slaves and why this novel is great across time. Morrison does not try to change the events or the humans of the past in the novel, however, on the contrary she shows them in full light so that every event becomes expressive. Morrison creatively maintains those memories and figures from growing paler and paler and for them to not become shadows of the past.

The Bluest Eye is certainly also a novel that should not be overlooked and must also be passed on. Toni Morrison challenges her readers to resist the tenacity of racism while exploring the Black identity in America. *The Bluest Eye* is a novel that confronts the issue of beauty and the outcome of beauty standards on characters that do not meet them. The obsession of beauty has been present throughout American history and even though the novel is set in the 1940s, the novel still carries on to awe today's readers. The title "*The Bluest Eye*" stems from the protagonist's wish to possess blue eyes and whiteness is the beauty standard that the character cannot fit in with. The novel does highlight that there is no part of the character that is ugly, however, she just does not fit the social standards. The novel shows the reader the extent of how far a person is willing to abandon themselves in order to live up to the social standards. Toni Morrison makes the reader question beauty and how society pressures individuals to fit into untrue ideologies and social standards. Both *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* reveal the history of African Americans in various ways, however, thematically very much similar. It is relevant to consider what Morrison's novels contribute to a broader and social discussion and what she is attempting to inform her readers and the future generation. The intentions with these two novels is that "the past must be remembered and passed on so that the generations can continue forward informed by the past, not stuck in it" (Anderson 75).

Morrison's novels distort the narrative of history and confronts the notions of fixity and presence. Her novels present a place where "unspeakable things and thoughts, unspoken" break through (Morrison, *Unspeakable* 284). Her writing explores and uncover the historical fictions that have "formed the burden of layers of negative identities and images constructed around Black women

and men" (Madden 587). She puts her character into a series of history where they work within the limiting constructs of race, gender, class, and sexuality. Her novels express the survival and demolition of Black female and male subjects in a racist and patriarchal culture. She examines constructions of femininity, maternity, and masculinity in racist discourse. Moreover, she focuses on themes of belonging, naming, memory, and rememory in an exploration of African American cultural identity. Morrison describes one of the important themes of *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* as "how to own your own body and love someone else under historical duress where there must be agency […] How to exert individual agency under the huge umbrella of determined historical life […] refusal to be the victim" (qtd. in Madden 587). For example, *The Bluest Eye* deals with Black female's identities and choices that are limited and controlled through the internalization of unachievable standards of beauty and behavior. Morrison, therefore, uses the character of Pecola to draw attention to the horror that this internalization of self-hatred should be regarded as a routine. Morrison does not reflect sociological "reality", however, examines the processes, effect, and reproduction of constructed meanings in a Black community.

Morrison's novels are not only examples of recovering oneself in past histories, however, it is also about establishment of oneself as a new individual. Her novels interpret and recreate the past in order to create the chance of being able to build the future. Morrison has the ability to unsettle and to manifest ghosts that have been silenced for a long time:

> Everybody knew what she was called, but nobody, anywhere, knew her name. Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her, and even if they were, how can they call her if they don't know her name? Although she has claim, she is not claimed. In the place where long grass opens, the girl who waited to be loved and cry shame erupts into her separate parts, to make it easy for the chewing laughter to swallow her all away. It was not a story to pass on. (*Beloved* 323)

Conclusion

To conclude on the findings in this thesis, we should perhaps first return to the question which has formed the work throughout this thesis: how is trauma and Black female identity in relation to intersectional issues of race, gender, and class manifested in the novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison? In order to attain this, the focus was to examine and demonstrate how trauma, memory, and healing as well as Black feminism are expressed and represented in the novels. Within cultural trauma theory by different scholars, they focus on how an individual can be traumatized by several events, and how they can recover again from trauma and what factors are needed in order for the individual to recover. They discuss how trauma can be inherited and passed on from generation to generation. Moreover, Black feminist theory has been used in order to discuss Black women's lives, their thoughts, and their experiences. When discussing Black feminist thinking it was also crucial for the paper to include intersectionality theory as an analytical tool to analyze the two novels by Toni Morrison. By using intersectionality as an analytical tool, there has been obtained a larger comprehension of the complexity of intersectional issues, such as, race, gender, and class and of Black feminism as a cultural experience. The classical narrative and theories about African American men and females being oppressed is apparent in both novels. However, it was interesting to see how two different stories have the same thematic and main points, although both novels have different approaches to the issues and that the setting is in two different time periods.

It has been effective and crucial to use intersectionality as a tool in order to comprehend the complicated structures that are connected to the lives of African American females. In order to understand the experience of being an African American female in the U.S. it was crucial to focus on how different aspects, such as, social context, race, class, and gender intersect, combine, and influence people's understanding of themselves. It is important to understand that every aspect plays a role, and it is impossible to separate them and focus on them independently. The tragic events that the main characters undergo is not due to one single factor, but multiple factors, such as, their race, gender, and class. Even though Toni Morrison writes fiction she states that there is somewhat truth in her stories. Within a theoretical framework, Black feminist thinking is a collection of Black feminist standpoints that includes observations, interpretations, and experiences of Black females in America. By using Black feminist thinking for the analysis, it has helped generating a vocabulary for the analysis, such as, mammies, matriarchs, the Other, and Black womanhood. Every character in both novels represent what it feels like to be an African American in the U.S. They represent the history of slavery and what they have encountered. They represent the forgotten and the silenced.

Thus, the chosen theories and novels work as representations of personal experiences of Black females, as well as males, in order to show a notion of cultural trauma and Black feminism that is consistent with Black female and male experiences. As the elements of race, gender, class, and trauma in the novels, Toni Morrison has made readers aware of the tragedies that African Americans deal with in their lives. Her novels can contribute to move the position of Blacks, and especially Black females, from margin to center. The point of her novels is that even though the issues of racism and slavery are central, she has not disregarded other issues. Both of her novels are graphic accounts of the brutality heaped on African Americans in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Morrison does not only demonstrate how whites emasculated the Blacks, however, she also examines how the African Americans neglects their own members. In *The Bluest Eye*, the protagonist Pecola, a young Black female, is harmed by both her own Black acquaintance and the white people. Likewise, in *Beloved*, Sethe, an ex-slave, is equally neglected by both the communities: the Black and the white. The theme of violence attains artistic credo of its own, which result in several outcomes and consequences. It portrays a series of cause and effect which creates a chain of interrelated incidents.

The difference between the two novels is that of focus. In *The Bluest Eye* the focus is on the individual disintegration characterized by the Breedlove's family, whereas in *Beloved*, the focus is on the collective disintegration characterized by the slave community. The reason behind this may be that in *Beloved*, Morrison deals with slavery as an institution. Whereas in *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison portrays the time during the Great Depression, when slavery was a thing of the past. Many characters in *The Bluest Eye* are in destress, not only because of poverty, but due to the color of their skins. Moreover, the remembering of the past is necessary for the understanding of what being Black in America means and the way Black communities establish their own identity. This is perhaps, one of the greatest achievements in the novels, and they are stories that are necessary to be passed on.

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Summary

This thesis aims to demonstrate how the famous African American writer, literary critic, and Nobel Prize Laureate, Toni Morrison revisits African American history and black people's quest for identity from an African American point of view in the novels *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and *Beloved* (1987). The interpretive method of the two novels, combined with literary and theoretical approaches to fiction, shows how the writing techniques, such as non-linear narrative, multiple narrative voices, flashbacks to past, and Afro American narrative techniques enhance and intensify the significance of the relationship between past and present, as well as African American history. The analyses of the novels demonstrate how the memories or 'rememories' of the past, although traumatic, help as a healing power for black individuals who manage to revisit their tangled individual Self, collective past, and history with the purpose to establish their black identities in American society.

To initiate this thesis, the considerations are founded in the following question: how is trauma and black female identity in relation to intersectional issues of race, gender, and class manifested in the novels *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison? To answer this an exploration of different theories and concepts with the aim of examining the chosen novels. The field of cultural and literary trauma studies help to provide the thesis with theoretical constituents. This paper discusses different trauma theories, such as, cultural trauma theory by Ron Eyerman, psychoanalysis and trauma by Evelyn J. Schreiber, cultural memory by Cathy Caruth. Moreover, this examination will also be done through black feminist theory as tools for analyzing the chosen novels by Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks, where they address the power struggles that black females encounter due to their, race, gender, and class. Collins and hooks provide discussions of some of the different themes, including; mammies, matriarchs, and other controlling images, and sexist and racist oppression of black females, in order to generate a vocabulary for the analysis.

Within the analysis of the two novels, intersectionality is used as an analytical tool to focus on issues of oppression that the characters encounter, and also focus on how the novels demonstrate race, gender, and class. Furthermore, the discussion addresses Toni Morrison's use of spectrality in the novels by identifying some of her characters as two distinctive types of ghosts, namely, the spectral figure and social ghost. By using spectrality in the novels, Morrison is able to address the silenced history in America and to give a voice to those people who have been silenced, oppressed or forgotten. Both novels are similar in form, however, they are rather different narratively. Toni Morrison's creative palette of themes and techniques is wide and colorful. She masters the art of intertwining both familial influence, cyclical patterns, and the significance of community healing off

of each other in both *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved.* Although the two novels certainly stand alone, a comparison of the two enhances greatly the irrefutable work of Toni Morrison.