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TRAUMA, HEALING AND COMMUNITY IN TONI MORRISON'S *BELOVED* AND *HOME*

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To my family, for being
with me in the most
difficult moments.

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Where there is no grave, we
are condemned to go on
mourning.
- Ruth Kluger, *Still Alive*

Abstract

This dissertation examines Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *Home* from the perspective of trauma studies. I argue that the experience of slavery acts upon the characters in a way that leaves them mentally deranged and physically vulnerable even when they have not faced bondage directly. Besides individual trauma there is also cultural trauma that affects the protagonists' lives and relations, perpetuating the unspeakable pains of severe emotional and mental distress through generations. This dissertation takes a close look at what happens psychologically to an individual when one is traumatized and how the protagonists achieve healing through the community of women. This approach mainly draws on Gabriele Schwab's discussion about how violent legacies are difficult to recount or even to remember because usually one represses or buries these contents in an unreachable psychic crypt. A person who refuses to mourn a loss by disavowing it, keeps it inside by burying it in a psychic tomb. Although appearing to be dead, this loss is psychically alive and returns as a ghost to haunt the victim. Flashbacks, nightmares and compulsive repetitions are some of the consequences of this seemingly alien force that makes these intrusive memories somehow unbearable and, therefore, unspeakable. In this sense, this research discloses how discourse is affected by the traumatic experience. I also regard the way characters find atonement by finally breaking the crypt, having access to their history and putting it into words by telling their story. I conclude that this dissertation moves beyond in the study of trauma literature, for it shows that mourning over individual and collective trauma allows healing to take place in both works through the community of women, enabling the characters to reconsider the wounds of a shameful past in manners that can exorcize the ghosts of trauma.

Keywords: trauma stories; mourning; healing; community of women; cryptonymy.

Resumo

Esta dissertação examina *Beloved* e *Home*, de Toni Morrison, através da perspectiva dos estudos sobre trauma. Propõe-se que a experiência da escravidão age sobre os personagens, deixando-os mentalmente perturbados e fisicamente vulneráveis, mesmo quando eles não enfrentaram a escravatura diretamente. Além do trauma individual, há o trauma cultural que afeta as relações e vidas dos protagonistas, perpetuando o aspecto indizível de uma severa angústia emocional e mental através de gerações. Esta dissertação examina o que acontece psicologicamente ao indivíduo quando traumatizado e como os protagonistas alcançam a cura por meio da comunidade feminina. Esta abordagem segue principalmente a discussão apontada por Gabriele Schwab sobre como legados violentos são difíceis de contar e até mesmo lembrar, pois usualmente as pessoas os reprimem ou os enterram em criptas psíquicas inacessíveis. Uma pessoa que se recusa a prantear e enlutar uma perda ao negá-la, a mantém dentro de si, enterrando-a em uma tumba psíquica. Apesar de parecer morta, a perda está psiquicamente viva e retorna como um fantasma para assombrar a vítima. Flashbacks, pesadelos e repetições compulsivas são algumas das consequências desta aparente força forasteira que faz com que essas memórias intrusas sejam intoleráveis e, portanto, indizíveis. Nesse sentido, esta pesquisa revela como o discurso dos protagonistas é afetado pelo trauma. Também aponto como os personagens atingem a cura rompendo as paredes da cripta, acessando suas histórias e as colocando em palavras ao contá-las. Concluo que esta dissertação executa um movimento para além do estudo do trauma na literatura, pois mostra que enlutar os traumas individual e coletivo permite que a cura aconteça em ambos os romances através da comunidade feminina, fazendo com que os personagens reconsiderem as feridas de um passado indigno, de maneira a exorcizar os fantasmas do trauma.

Palavras-chave: histórias de trauma luto; cura; comunidade feminina; criptonímia.

Contents

Introduction

In 2015 I reread some of Morrison's works and I could trace a parallel between *Beloved* and *Home* in what concerns trauma studies. Although there is a large body of scholarship on trauma in Morrison's works, there is a gap in the study of how the experience of trauma affects the characters' discourse. It is noticeable that remembering, recounting and accepting individual and collective trauma help heal characters' psychological and physical wounds, offering them a possibility to come to terms with the traumatic past in manners that they can finally re-signify it.

Hence, this study focuses on *Beloved* and *Home*. In this research, I compare and analyze the similarities and differences regarding the internalization of traumatic experiences in both central characters in the two novels, so as to understand the characters' inability to mourn over their losses and its consequences in discourse. I also point out the importance of how the community of women is specifically involved in restoring the protagonists' mental and physical health through healing rituals. This work is part of a growing body of careful investigation that helps to understand better these processes and contributes to future research on similar topics.

Slavery in America began when the first African slaves were brought to the North American colony of Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619, to aid in the production of such lucrative crops as tobacco. In the early 17th century, European settlers in North America turned to African slaves as a cheaper, more plentiful labor source than indentured servants who were mostly poorer Europeans. After 1619, when a Dutch ship brought twenty Africans ashore to Virginia, slavery spread throughout the American colonies. Though it is impossible to give accurate figures, some historians have estimated that six to seven million slaves were imported to the New World during the

18th century alone, depriving the African continent of some of its healthiest and ablest men and women. Slavery was practiced throughout the American colonies in the 17th and 18th centuries, and African American slaves helped build the economic foundations of the new nation, as Hugh Thomas states in Book Two of *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade: 1440-1870.*

By the mid-19th century, America's westward expansion, along with a growing abolition movement in the North, would provoke a great debate over slavery that would tear the nation apart in the bloody American Civil War. Though the Union victory freed the nation's four million slaves, the legacy of slavery continued to influence American history, from the tumultuous years of Reconstruction to the civil rights movement that emerged in the 1960's, a century after emancipation.

Slaves in the antebellum South constituted about one-third of the southern population. Most of them lived on large farms or small plantations and many masters owned less than fifty slaves. Slave owners sought to make their slaves completely dependent on them, and a system of restrictive codes governed life among the slaves. They were prohibited from learning to read and write, and their behavior and movement were restricted. Many masters took sexual liberties with slave women, and rewarded obedient slave behavior with favors, while rebellious slaves were brutally punished. A strict hierarchy among slaves helped keep them divided and less likely to plot against their masters. Slave marriages had no legal basis, but slaves did marry and raise large families; most slave owners encouraged this practice, but nonetheless did not hesitate to divide slave families by sale or removal.

The power relationships of slavery corrupted many whites who had authority over slaves. Masters and overseers resorted to physical punishments to impose their

wills. Slaves were punished by whipping, shackling, hanging, beating, burning, mutilation, branding, rape and imprisonment. Punishment was most often meted in response to disobedience or perceived infractions, but abuse was carried out to reassert the dominance of the master or overseer over the slaves.

Researchers in the last decades have turned their attention to the legacy of this history, since uncountable slaves experienced individual psychological and physical trauma. On the one hand, we have Gene Andrew Jarret, Bernard W. Bell and Henry Louis Gates Junior who have been studying the history of literature by African descendants in the United States and altogether examining the longstanding negotiations of African American writers with racial representation. On the other, we have Ron Eyerman, Cathy Caruth and Anne Whitehead who have contributed in a large extent to a deeper understanding of the conceptual issues surrounding trauma as a literary subject. Also, Ana M. Luszczynska and Jean Wyatt have examined the dynamics of feminist communities while K. Zauditu-Selassie has studied African spiritual traditions in Toni Morrison's works, supplying the ongoing debate with comprehensive concepts of African deities, ancestry, spiritual archetypes, mythic trope, and lyrical prose representing African spiritual continuities. Although their publications have provided the academic field with a better understanding of the above mentioned subjects, I perceived a hiatus in the juxtaposition of trauma, healing processes and community, and how these elements relate to each other, thereby permitting the characters' relief and full restoration from a harmful, disturbing past.

As stated by Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History:*

> . . . .In Freud's text, the term *trauma* is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind. But what seems to be suggested by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is that the wound of mind – the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world, - is not, like the wound of body, a simple and healable event (3-4, italics in original).

In addition to individual trauma, there is also cultural trauma, which means loss of identity and does not necessarily need to be felt or experienced by everyone in a community. This tear in the social fabric causes enduring effects that cannot be easily dismissed and become ingrained in collective memory.

According to Evelyn J. Schreiber in *Race, Trauma and Home in the Novels of Toni Morrison*, "trauma and recovery are complicated, layered processes for all individuals because both personal and cultural memory reactivate past experiences stored in bodily circuits" (42). Indeed, the tragedy of slavery can be seen as a collective memory, a way of remembrance that provoked the formation of the African American identity in the post-Civil War period. Slavery has always been traumatic in retrospect, mediated through recollection and reflection and, therefore, unites all African Americans, whether or not they were slaves or have any knowledge or feeling related to Africa.

Collective memory, as stated by Maurice Halbwachs, in *On Collective Memory,* can be defined as recollections of a shared past that are retained by the members of a group that experienced them and passed them on. It is collective because it is supra-individual, an individual memory that is conceived in relation to a determined group (6). The individual identity is negotiated within this collective shared past because memory

is not located inside the individuals only but in the discourse of people talking together about the past.

Moreover, in accord with Cathy Caruth, in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History,* it is not the experience itself that produces the traumatic effect, but rather the remembrance of it (17). Trauma links the past to present through representations and since individuals experiencing trauma are possessed by the past, they tend to repeat it compulsively as if it were present. Therefore, a traumatic tear evokes the need to create new foundations, which includes reinterpreting the past as a means toward reconciling present or future needs. There are various ways to try and solve such a problem but all of them involve identity and memory processes.

The core experiences resulting from psychological and physical trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others. Recovery, therefore, is based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections. This can only take place within the context of relationships and it cannot occur in isolation. Judith Herman, in *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror,* comments:

> In these renewed connections with other people, the survivor recreates the psychological faculties that were damaged or deformed by the traumatic experience. These faculties include the basic capacities for trust, autonomy, initiative, competence, identity and intimacy. Just as these capabilities are originally formed in relationships with other people, they must be reformed in such relationships. (133)

In this case, the transformative power of collective rituals may provide traumatized slaves or former slaves with tools to reconstruct and transform individual consciousness

as well as social relations, even for those who have not experienced slavery directly. Rituals point to the necessity of psychological cleansing from the past, and also allow individuals to confront painful memories safely and rest from them.

It is worth of remarking that due to the characters' trauma, their psyche cannot process loss. Therefore, their refusal to mourn results in the creation of a psychic crypt where they bury violent histories, causing a "traumatic designification of language to ward off intolerable pain," according to Gabriele Schwab in *Hunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (4). She claims that violent histories leave individuals so deeply disturbed they cannot describe the traumatic experience with words. The denial of this unbearable loss brings back from the psychic crypt ghosts of trauma that haunt the victim and the next generations as well, for the silences and gaps in language are tacitly transmitted over generations. This incapacity of mourning makes a traumatized individual foreclose mourning by burying the dead in the crypt. These inhabitants from the crypt are silences, "defunct words relieved of their communicative function" (4). They express trauma related to the unconscious for they are words buried alive. Yet, somehow, they can be tracked down and that is my attempt concerning this research. Sethe, Frank and Cee's traumatic memories are traceable in their silences and gaps like raw scars. I expose these lacunae and I also demonstrate how healing is deeply attached to storytelling and community rituals. It is only when the protagonists are aware of this unthought knowledge that trauma is finally accessible, allowing them to translate into language an experience registered in the unconscious. In a sense, narrative becomes the way these losses are marked and mourned, causing characters to finally come to terms with their traumatic past.

Toni Morrison's literary works are useful for the examination of trauma and healing processes because they explore, in diverse ways, the way the human psyche is

subjected to physical and psychological trauma in every instance of the characters' evolution, since they are individuals experiencing disfiguring moments, facing abominable situations that are impossible to tolerate. Slavery and racism are examples that demonstrate the bestiality of a certain type of aggression whose consequences are not limited to and do not end with the occurrence of a traumatic event.

Beloved is a conscious act toward healing a painful wound: a studied memorial to the great social wrong of the enslavements. It is set in 1873 and tells the story of the former slave Sethe, severely traumatized by the loss of her child, whom she kills with a chain saw. The emphasis of the work is laid on the issue of infanticide, a psychologically disfiguring moment for both mother and child. Sethe wants to save her children from a fate she considers worse than death, to remove them from the clutches of slavery:

> . . . .anybody white 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. . . . And though she and others lived through and got over it, she could never let it happen to her own. The best things she was, was her children. Whites might dirty her all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing - the part of her that was clean. (295-296)

So grotesque are the experiences suffered by the characters and so vulnerable do they feel, that for them, the act of remembering is risky, shameful and dangerous. In addition, Sethe is haunted by the memory of killing her child. All her life, she struggles trying to keep the past at bay. Here, Sethe's daughter, Denver, listens to her mother talking about the indestructible nature of the past: "". . . .if you go there - you who was

never there - if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there, waiting for you . Even though it's all over - over and done with - it's going to always be there waiting for you"' (44). According to Sethe, past traumas continue to reenact themselves indefinitely, so she pictures the past as a physical presence, something that is there and fills a space. The force of the past is evident even in the difficulty Sethe has speaking about it. She stutters, backtracks, and repeats herself as though mere words cannot do her subject matter justice. Even in this passage, as she warns Denver against the inescapability of the past, Sethe enacts and illustrates the very phenomenon she describes. She repeats her warning several times in a manner that demonstrates the recurrence of ideas and her inability to leave past thoughts behind.

Sethe's killing of her child affects her and the rest of the community and so, all the characters discover themselves within a communal framework. Sethe only begins to heal when she accepts her action and takes responsibility for it by recognizing why it happened and by understanding it in a framework larger than the one of individual concern. Therefore, Beloved must be remembered to be forgotten and reincarnated to be given proper burial.

In "The Ghosts of Slavery: Historical Recovery in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*", Linda Krumholz addresses Morrison's conceptualization of American history through the acts and consciousness of former African American slaves. She also believes that the ultimate goal of the novel is to subvert their shame of slavery in the collective memory of African Americans and convert it into a source of recovery and healing (399). This healing occurs on both psychological, personal, as well as on national and historical levels. Krumholz argues that *Beloved* is a healing ritual, while the character of Beloved is the forgotten spirit from the past that must be loved though unlovable and

elusive (399). Sethe, the central character, describes the relationship between the individual and historical trauma:

> "If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place – the picture of it – stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there, inside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened." (43)

Sethe's process of healing and of learning how to live with the past is a model for readers who must confront their past as part of their own, a collective past that lives right here, where all people live.

Furthermore, in *Beloved,* Morrison uses rituals as models for the healing process, such as dance, song, story and other activities. They function as representations that are spiritually and communally endowed with the power to shape the relations in the world. They also imply a pedagogy and epistemology in which knowledge is collectively and spiritually asserted. In the final part in which the women of the community aid Sethe in casting out Beloved, the central character experiences a repetition of the trauma but with a difference: now Sethe and the community understand that Beloved is a disruption necessary for healing.

Furthermore, in *Home,* Toni Morrison manages to capture how many African Americans experienced the 1950's, a period often idealized in the country's historical imagination, but not without its social complexities and blatant racial abuses. It tells the story of Frank Money, a Korean War veteran, after he is discharged from the army. After watching his two best friends die in front of him, and being responsible for killing numerous people, including a young Korean girl, Frank develops Post-Traumatic Stress

Disorder (PTSD) and has to return to his hometown in Lotus, Georgia, in order to save his younger sister Cee who is suffering from an unknown illness that is threatening to kill her.

Unlike *Beloved,* where the protagonist is a woman, in *Home,* the author has decided to focus primarily on a male central character, and the book delves deep into typically masculine experiences, such as the horrors of the war, their injurious psychological effects, bonds of male friendship and brotherly responsibilities. The weight of the past is exponentially multiplied when the victims have been exposed to traumatic bigotry and injustice at home and extreme violence and losses abroad. Churchwell, in her review of *Home,* states that "Morrison returns to the 50's, an era she remembers, to mine the traumatic possibilities of the Korean War and of biological experiments on African Americans" (Churchwell).

The most evident sign that *Home* can also be considered a trauma story, like *Beloved,* are the recurrent visits the protagonist receives of ghosts from his past, which he has been trying to forget – mostly by drinking heavily, but who insistently return to disturb his piece of mind:

> So, as often the case when he was alone and sober, whatever the surroundings, he saw a boy pushing his entrails back in, holding them in his palms like a fortune teller's globe shattering with bad news; or he heard a boy with only the bottom half of his face intact, the lips calling mama. And he was stepping over them, around them, to stay alive, to keep his own face from dissolving, his own colorful guts under that oh-oh-thin sheet of flesh. Against the black and white of the winter

> landscape, blood red took center stage. They never went away, these pictures. (20)

The fact that Frank lost his two best friends does not help him much in terms of being able to assimilate the memories of war. This is closely related to his incapacity to build other connections with the world and to reorient his existence:

> Sometimes, long after he'd been discharged, he would see Stuff's profile in a car stopped in traffic until the heart jump of sorrow announced his mistake. Abrupt, unregulated memories put a watery shine in his eyes. For months, only alcohol dispersed his best friends, the hovering dead he could no longer hear, talk to or laugh with. (99)

Frank struggles with the symptoms and seems to be trapped for he cannot escape the inevitability of awful memories.

When Frank is being tortured by horrifying flashbacks and terrible hallucinations of his experiences in Korea, he receives a letter from a friend of his sister, telling him to '"come fast. She be dead if you tarry"' (100). He, again, felt responsibility toward his sister who has always been ". . . *.a shadow for most of my life, a presence marking its own absence or maybe mine*" (103, italics in original). She used to be protected by Frank and now on her own and with a deficient education, Cee becomes an easy prey for a wicked doctor who uses her in his experiments. Frank rescues his sister who is near death, but her physical integrity will never be restored.

Frank's traumatic memories of the war and his sister's grave physical and psychological injuries emerge as a continuation of the sense of alienation and emotional deprivation they endured as children in Lotus. Due to the cruelty of an extremely resentful step grandmother and scenes of racial violence, both are left with a profound

scar on their psyche and they have difficulties digesting the memories they keep from childhood: "*You never lived there so you don't know what it was like. Any kid who had a mind would lose it. . . .Only my sister in trouble could force me to even think about going in that direction*" (84, italics in original).

Although the past shows itself as terrible and traumatic as in *Beloved*, the ideas of home and community seem to offer Morrison's characters here a certain protection against trauma. The grieving processes of individual and collective traumatic memories experienced by both Frank and Cee may be resolved or at least attenuated by healing rituals of the home community.

Before Frank and Cee return to Lotus to have Cee healed by the local community of women, they both have been extremely damaged and adrift for some time. Nonetheless, like in *Beloved*, the scars of the past are healed by and through the community. After a few months in the care of Ethel Fordham and the other women with seen-it-all-eyes, Cee is turned into a very different person: "Cee was different. Two months surrounded by country women who loved meant change to her. The women handled sickness as though it were an affront, an illegal, invading braggart who needed whipping" (121). Cee is healed of her serious illness by many rituals and also becomes an independent and strong woman. Both Frank and Cee realize that the overprotective behavior towards the sister had done little favor to her, and now she is ready to face the future on her own.

Frank shows signs of recovery before he arrives in Lotus. Despite his reluctance to return to the South, as he gets closer to the region, he realizes that there are certain things there such as the weather, the food and the pace of life that he identifies with:

> Waving occasionally at passing neighbors or those doing chores on their porches, he could not believe how much he had once hated this place. Now it seemed both fresh and ancient, safe and demanding. Frank tried to sort out what else was troubling him and what to do about it. (132)

After accomplishing the mission of saving his sister, now he can deal with his own ghosts in a more comforting, well-known environment.

In the end of the novel, Frank convinces his sister to go back with him to the farm where they had originally witnessed the burial of a black man when they were children. They dig up the body – itself a symbol of uncovering memories, like Beloved, the memory of the infanticide manifested in a girl – and wrap it in the quilt Cee had made. With this unearthing and reburial of a terrible remembrance from the past, they finally come to face their childhood traumas. By reclaiming their personal secrets, they are able to reclaim Lotus as their literal and physical home. Through their willingness to confront their past, they can find the true home within them, in the memories they share.

Therefore, this research studies, by means of comparative methods, the similarities and the differences regarding the internalization of traumatic experiences in both central characters of *Beloved* and *Home*. I demonstrate how remembering, recounting, listening to and accepting individual and collective trauma allows healing to take place in both works. I also talk about the role communal and spiritual rituals play in the healing processes and how they give back dignity to people from whom it has been unceremoniously stripped. This research attempts to shed further light on studies on the representations of psychological and physical trauma, their effects upon the individual and the collective members of a community and how the healing processes happen in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *Home*.

This dissertation is divided into two chapters, besides this introduction and a conclusion. In chapter one, I start by presenting the relation between history, memory and forgetting. The fact that people are unable to remember all life experiences in detail is a natural mechanism of the mind, since full archiving is not possible. Yet, in the case of trauma, there is a lack of assimilation concerning the event and the victim has problems recollecting it. Therefore, the testimony of trauma can become an unsayable incident, since the traumatized individual cannot organize such a memory and express it using words. In *Beloved* and *Home,* the process of incorporation does not happen completely in the characters' psyche, making trauma return in the form of symptoms, such as dreams, flashbacks and hallucinations. This metamorphic reappearance haunts the victims until they can engage in storytelling and give account of the traumatic story. I demonstrate how the protagonists in the two novels create a psychic crypt where their traumatic memories reside. They cannot have access to it until they are able to narrate their traumatic experiences. I also show how traumatic memoirs such as slavery were excluded from the hegemonic historical discourse and how important it is to recover these once silenced voices in order to widen the boundaries of the homogenous view related to the official history of the rise of the United States.

In chapter two my concerns are directed towards the experience of healing the protagonists undergo. I show how trauma can be traceable in the characters' speech and how they can break the psychic crypt using language in order to find atonement. I also demonstrate the importance the communities of women have in both novels, adding to the discussion the concepts of motherhood and sisterhood, so relevant to the womanly agenda. The townswomen play an important role in *Beloved* and *Home*, since without them the characters' redemption could never be achieved. Because of their healing rituals knowledge, as opposed to the patriarchal traditional medicine, they can provide

to themselves and to the protagonists acceptance and reconciliation with traumatic memories. They can finally give the ghosts a proper burial and come to terms with a traumatic past.

In this manner, this dissertation attempts to contribute to the study of trauma in literature for it points out the representation of psychological and physical trauma, their effects upon the individual and the collective members of a community and how the healing processes happen in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *Home*.

Chapter One

Trauma, Language and the Crypt in *Beloved* and *Home*

None find peace in silence,
even when it is their choice
to remain silent.

The not telling of the story
serves as a perpetuation of
its tyranny.
- Dori Laub, "Truth
and Testimony: The
Process and the
Struggle"

1.1 Introduction

According to the American Psychiatric Association, when an individual goes through an overwhelming event or series of events in which there is a delayed response in the form of repeated hallucinations, dreams, thoughts, and distressing behaviors stemming from the event, usually beginning during or after the experience, that is an indication that the person is suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). It is also important to point out that the reception of the experience is crucial to consolidate trauma and not the nature of the event itself. Usually, an event which was not fully assimilated at the time, but only later, possesses the individual completely in an endless chain of symptoms repetitions (Caruth 3). The signs of such a disorder have been understood in many different ways in various bodies of knowledge. Besides psychiatry and psychoanalysis, also sociology, history and literature have attempted to help explain the phenomenon. In the case of trauma, it seems that listening to the silences in discourse caused by traumatic experiences is a common search of all these fields.

Critics and readers generally agree that Morrison's *Beloved* and *Home* are trauma stories, as the lives of Sethe, Frank and Cee Money, the protagonists of both

novels, are imbued with mental and physical distress. They suffer from the psychic and bodily wounds inflicted by white supremacy, the devastating effects of slavery, racism, and terrible war memories. Because of such experiences and the way they have been assimilated, the novels' characters find themselves unable to put them into words. Since Sethe, Frank and Cee Money have problems narrating their story, it makes healing even more difficult. It is noticeable the characters' struggle when they try to move on with their lives, but simply cannot because the symptoms of trauma haunt them day and night, leaving them on the edge of craziness and mental derangement.

In this chapter, I discuss how the protagonists in *Beloved* and *Home* create inside them a crypt in which they place dreadful traumatic reminiscences. Because they are not able to express these destructive memories, they build a psychic tomb where their remembrances live within like corpses. In order to establish a theoretical basis for this notion of cryptic memory, I resort to Gabriele Schwab's "Writing against Memory and Forgetting", a text in which she discusses the importance of remembering in order to mourn and give traumatic memories a safe place to rest. In addition, she explores the psychic life of violent histories as translated and recreated in literary texts. The foundation of her argument is built upon *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, a work by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok in which they research the intergenerational transmission of phantoms created by trauma. According to their theories, the construction of a crypt takes place when a loss, a segment of an ever so significantly lived reality — untellable and, therefore, inaccessible to the gradual assimilative work of mourning — cannot be admitted as a loss. The crypt is thus a psychic place, a space in which the lost object is swallowed and preserved (Schwab 45).

Since the theory of the crypt is based on Freud's work "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", a text in which he points out the interplay between unconscious and

conscious forces within individual psyches, I also revisit this text and its interpretation by Jacques Lacan in his *Écrits*, for Lacan links the idea of memory to discourse. Along with trauma and psychic crypts, I also discuss the representation of memory and forgetting in *Beloved* and *Home*, as both novels show how the several decades of forced servitude and subordination have led the black community to develop a sense of collective identity and collective memory. To better understand these cultural processes and their correlation with trauma, I resort, especially, to Ron Eyerman's *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity*, a work in which he explores the formation of African American identity from the perspective of the theory of cultural trauma.

1.2 History, Memory and Forgetting

In chapter two of *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma*, Gabriele Schwab states that "we tell or write stories in order to defeat death" (41). She refers, obviously, not to physical death or the death of the body, but to the death caused by forgetting. According to her, narratives are important to both build and preserve memory. It is through narrative that people transmit their experiences, legacies and heritage. As such, producing narratives can be seen as a weapon against forgetting because it maintains alive both personal and collective memory. This relation between memory and discourse has been discussed by Sigmund Freud and, especially, by the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, who in the *Écrits* undertakes the task of rewriting Freud's work in a way that places the human subject in society and in relationship with language.

In "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", Freud states that there is an early point in the infant's development in which it cannot have a clear distinction between itself and

the external world. At this pre-Oedipal stage, the infant lacks a center and it has a symbiotic relationship with its mother as if their identities would merge. According to Freud's theory, the process of the infant's construction of subjectivity begins when the individual reaches the so-called Oedipus complex stage. In this phase, the early two-way relationship between the infant and the mother opens up into a triangle consisting of the child and both parents. This entry of the father brings anxiety to the child, since the parent of the same sex is now to be considered a rival in its affections for the parent of the opposite sex. The incestuous desire towards the mother is thus repressed, thereby splitting the human subject that emerges from the Oedipus complex. In this case, there is a split between the conscious life of the ego and the unconscious repressed desire. The identity of the child is then constituted by relations of difference and similarity to the other subjects around it (478). In Freud's view, it is at this stage that the child has to negotiate the painful passage through the Oedipus complex.

Although for both psychoanalysts the constitution of the subjects begins when the children find themselves sexually different from their parents, Lacan believes that it is in the same period the children make their debut in the world of discourse. In his view, the constitution of the subject is deeply attached to the children's entry into the language universe, the symbolic world. The construction of subjectivity depends on the passage from the "imaginary" – the absolute I, in which the children comprehend the objects and the world around them as an extension of them - to the "symbolic" stage in which there is an external structure different from the self, organized by the laws of society and language (16). It is now, through differentiation and through language, that children build to themselves a subject and an identity.

Analogously, the process of collective identity formation is only possible due to the subject's integration with language. In other words, identity formation depends on

the inscription of individuals' experiences into historical narratives in a way that memory is located within the discourse of people talking together about the past. As seen before, children's first discovery related to sexual differentiation happens approximately at the same time they discover language, according to Lacan. Unconsciously, children learn they must have their own place in the family, which is defined by sexual differentiation, by exclusion, for they cannot occupy their parents' places, and by absence, for they have to resign to the mother's body. When they learn that one sign has meaning because it is different from the other signs, they also learn the sign predicates the absence of the object it means. Because of that, children's identity as subjects is constituted by their relations of differentiation and similarity with the others around (Lacan 2). Therefore, the individual entrance into discourse is essential for the construction of subjectivity, memory, and history for individual's identity is always negotiated with collectivity. That is to say, biographical memory and discourse are rooted in a collective history.

But even when narrating, the process of forgetting is still present. Actually, forgetting has the power to interfere in any attempt of telling stories about the past. There is no way for human beings to remember everything that has happened to them, as no person has the psychic capacity of fully recollecting all experiences in life. As Schwab affirms, this is a desirable aspect of the human mind because the confrontation with a hard reality would be mentally unhealthy. According to her, all stories reside somewhere in between memory and forgetting (41).

As mentioned before, the same way children have to resign themselves to the fact that they never have any direct access to reality, that is, the prohibited body of the mother, they have been banished from the full, imaginary possession world of the language. Now, instead of being able to possess anything in its fullness, the children

will simply move from one signifier to another. The problem here is that one signifier implies another and then another in an infinite chain. Lacan states that all desires result from a lack, due to this endless movement of human language. That is why the process of forgetting happens beyond the psychological level as well. When entering language, subjects are unable to find rest in a single object, in the final meaning, because they are severed from what Lacan calls the real, an inaccessible realm which is always outside the symbolic order and beyond the reach of signification (2). Evidently, any story about the past contains forgetting, for the discourse itself does not allow one to reach or access the experiences in their entirety. And if meaning is just an approximation, so are narratives. Since they are representations of the past registered in language, stories and naturally, discourse are inevitably constituted by forgetting.

Nevertheless, the fact that we cannot fight against forgetting does not mean we should let go of trying to recover some experiences that were left out of historical narratives. Much of this forgetfulness is not merely a consequence of the intrinsic hiatus that permeates every discourse. Many narratives are conveniently silenced due to violent histories that include colonial invasions, slavery, totalitarianism, dictatorships, wars and genocide. For this reason, Schwab states: “There is no life without trauma. There is no history without trauma” (42). Indeed, there is no history of a nation that did not go through violent colonization practices. Schwab reiterates: “People have always silenced violent histories because some of them, collective and personal, are so violent we would not be able to live our daily lives if we did not at least temporarily silence them” (46). The issue is that the majority of these violent events have been omitted or re-signified in order to fit an official historical narrative and, therefore, invasions are described as achievements, the extermination of people and their culture as civilization missions.

Since the 80's there has been an attempt to revise national histories and make evident what has been suppressed in those discourses. Post-colonialists, feminists and other groups have been involved in the task of recovering and giving voice to the ones at the margins of the nation. A great amount of these narratives produced far from the center bring life to an ancient silence that points out to the enormous volume of forgetting in order to consolidate national identity. Furthermore, it has become possible to access, through the perspective of the defeated, silenced and forgotten, histories perversely assimilated into the national historiography.

Indeed, the narratives of Sethe, Paul D, Stamp Paid and Baby Suggs in Morrison's *Beloved* and of Frank and Cee Money in *Home* illustrate the devastation of their lives and psyches, and the struggle to heal them, by focusing on the more subtle psychological discourses that have perhaps eluded the historical narrative. Morrison's works expose the unsaid of the narratives, the psychic subtexts that lie within and beneath the historical facts. The author also locates healing and resolution as processes that must happen both individually and collectively, in order to be successful in either sphere.

These interventions are called, according to Homi K. Bhabha, counter-narratives. In *The Location of the Culture*, he states that these narratives are apprehensions of the double and the split, that is, they lead us to question the homogeneous and horizontal view associated with the nation's imagined community. In other words, they introduce a more holistic, representative vision of society that "could be only represented in a discourse that was *at the same time* obsessively fixed upon, and uncertain of, the boundaries of society, and the margins of the text" (144, italics in original). According to him, these narratives have the power to reintroduce cultural difference into the body of the nation. They are different from the hegemonic,

pedagogic national discourse and, therefore, they disturb and re-signify the totality of the nation.

The discovery or recovery of these voices has contributed to the process of historical revision in what concerns the presence and importance of different minority groups in the rise of the nations. It is now known that the building of modern nations was guided by a model inherited from the European metropolises. Its consolidation was not possible without a violent process of suppression of the other - any trace of difference could jeopardize the project of building a national identity. In other words, to make the nation's project viable, it was necessary to erase and forget the violent events that are in its genesis in order to forge a homogeneous national identity. As such, narratives like Morrison's have the power to destabilize the pedagogic national discourse by bringing in cultural difference and the temporality of the in-between. As Bhabha affirms: "Counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries - both actual and conceptual - disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities" (149). In this case, we are confronted with the nation split in itself, articulating the heterogeneity of its population.

In what concerns American history, for instance, the recovery of the so-called neo-slave narratives has provided readers with another perspective, frequently omitted from the national discourse, for these novels push the limits of the old model, known as conventional slave narratives. While the neo-slave narratives fill in key gaps of the hegemonic discourse, they also provoke some sort of resistance when trying to be a part of it. Nevertheless, they contribute to highlight the memories of the past, in an attempt to recover the silent content intrinsic in official narratives. Yet, because of their

denunciation aspects, they face adversity and opposition, thereby producing their own silences as well.

By utilizing and reconstituting the tropes of the slave narrative genre, Morrison deliberately seeks to give voice to those aspects of the experience of slavery that have been rendered unspoken, unspeakable and unacknowledged in the traditional slave narratives and national discourses. As she states in a 1994 interview with Angels Carabi in *Belles Lettres*,

> With *Beloved*, I am trying to insert this memory that was unbearable and unspeakable into the literature. . . . There are certain things that are repressed because they are unthinkable and the only way to come free of that is to go back and deal with them. . . . So it's a kind of healing experience. (38)

This unbearable memory must be given voice and acknowledgement, or else it will rise up, unbidden, as an angry ghost never at rest. Although charged with the responsibility of recording and transmitting the experience of slavery, those who created historical narratives of enslavement understood the censure they faced if they strayed into territory that they perceived their readers would deem unthinkable and, therefore, unspeakable. These unspeakable aspects include discourses that would have been offensive and off putting to the white, bourgeois audience to whom the traditional slave narrative was addressed as a form of moral instruction and propaganda. While it remains untold and, therefore, not listened to and not read, a person's traumatized history imposes a damaging silence to his or her and others' historical narratives, thereby opening gaps in history and avoiding justice to be restored. If on one hand, there is a resistance to

integrate these histories into narratives, on the other, integration is crucial to overcome trauma.

Therefore, Morrison's *Beloved* and *Home* seem to be written against the limitations of conventional historiography, for the novels address the unspoken and the unspeakable. The author journeys to sites of memory, a concept popularized by Pierre Nora in *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past,* which means sites where there is an interplay between memory and history; where remembrances of collective memory are condensed and expressed (6). Through memory and imagination, the characters' traces and remains, as well as their unwritten interior struggles, are reconstructed. The protagonists learn to speak the unspeakable in order to transform residual memories of the past into narrative memory. To reclaim themselves, the characters must reconfigure the master's narrative and the official historical discourse into a counter-narrative by way of an act of reconstitutive "rememory," as Morrison refers to in *Beloved* (43). Through this fundamentally psychoanalytic process of remembering, repeating, and working through, private memory becomes the basis for a reconstructed collective history, as the personal past becomes historical present.

1.3 Trauma: a past presence

As seen before, counter-narratives that fight authoritative versions of the past are also limited by language and many times these voices utter incommunicable experiences. Such encounters that often produce a degree of unutterability are popularly referred as traumas. Cathy Caruth states in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, that the American Psychiatrist Association officially acknowledged Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as a pathology in 1980 as a reference to responses to both human and natural catastrophes. Moreover, she mentions that in the years after Vietnam, sociology,

psychoanalysis and psychiatry took a renewed interest in trauma (3). But actually, the centrality and complexity of trauma was firstly addressed in more depth by Freud in the twentieth century. “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” and *Moses and Monotheism* were written around the time of World War I and World War II and inevitably link trauma to historical violence.

In “Beyond the Pleasure Principle”, Freud first associated the traumatic neurosis with the Oedipus Complex, thereby placing traumatic experiences at the core of an individual’s subjectivity. Jacques Lacan did the same in his interpretation of Freud’s works. Lacan demonstrates that trauma is what escapes the symbolic stage, in the sense that it does not belong to language and is somehow lost in the imaginary. What Lacan calls real is a content impossible to imagine and integrate into the symbolic order. As mentioned before, entering discourse is what makes children separate themselves from the real. Yet, language is not entirely within the individual’s control. Although Freud did not treat the matter in linguistic terms when he states the difficulty of a traumatized individual in interpreting and giving meaning to past experiences, he implicitly associates trauma to what is outside language. The same feature is present in the lacanian real which is originally outside discourse.

In *Moses and Monotheism,* Freud’s studies were based on veterans’ reports, as he called war neurosis the repetitive intrusion of nightmares and relivings of battlefield events. Freud observed that those experiences were a neurotic pathology, but whose symptoms seemed to reflect nothing but unmediated occurrence of violent events. He thus compares these symptoms to accident neurosis because the events which happened in the battlefield can be similar to the nightmares of an accident. He states:

> Dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright. This astonishes people far too little. . . . Anyone who accepts it as something self-evident that their dreams should put them back at night into the situation that caused them to fall ill has misunderstood the nature of dreams. (13)

According to Caruth, Freud was surprised because, in this case, the symptoms could not be interpreted "as a distortion of reality, nor as the lending of unconscious meaning to a reality it wishes to ignore, nor as the repression of what once was wished" (5). Indeed, the literality of the returned dream, mirroring the exact same event that caused the accident neurosis had nothing to do with any wish or unconscious meaning: it was simply the pure, nonsymbolic recurrence of a traumatic event.

Since trauma is not only an effect of destruction, but an enigma of survival, victims have the need to narrate their own experiences and along with this there is the matter of the truth about the traumatic memory. Freud discussed this issue in *Moses and Monotheism,* in which he states that the victim has the impression of leaving the traumatic experience unharmed:

> It may happen that someone gets away, apparently unharmed, from the spot where he has suffered a shocking accident, for instance a train collision. In the course of the following weeks, however, he develops a series of grave psychical and motor symptoms, which can be ascribed only to his shock or whatever else happened at the time of the accident. He has developed a "traumatic neurosis." This appears quite incomprehensible and is therefore a novel fact. The time that elapsed

> between the accident and the first appearance of the symptoms is called the "incubation period," a transparent allusion to the pathology of infectious disease. . . . It is the feature one might term *latency*. (84, italics in original)

Indeed, this is a way of suppressing the memory, an immediate need, produced mostly by shock. Cathy Caruth affirms that it is as if the person was never present at the moment the experience occurred or was unconscious the whole time the action took place (17).

As discussed thus far, between the experience and the manifestation of symptoms there is a period of latency in which the remembrance of the event will be somehow forgotten. However, after some time, this same remembrance comes back and manifests itself in indirect ways. There is a literal return of the events against the will of the one it inhabits. Unlike the symptoms of a normal neurosis, whose painful manifestations can be understood ultimately in terms of the attempted avoidance of an unpleasant conflict, the painful repetition of the flashback can only be understood as the absolute inability of the mind to avoid an unpleasant event that has not been given psychic meaning in any way. Taking this literal return of the past as a model for repetitive behavior in general, Freud argues, in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", that it is traumatic repetition, rather than the meaningful distortions of neurosis, that defines the individual (255).

Vis-a-vis Freud's observations, the traumatic or deep memory manifests itself through literal representations. According to Charlotte Delbo, a French writer, known by the haunting memoirs of her time as a prisoner in Auschwitz, the memory of trauma corresponds to the deep memory which is activated in its literality and makes it difficult

for one to narrate it because it is usually related to the senses. It manifests as an effect, not structured in language and, as a result, there is a failure in trying to organize the memory into words. Therefore, it is only possible to arrange it in symbols and icons like sensations, behavior reenactment, nightmares and flashbacks. This memory activates the senses associated with the traumatic experience in its presentness, as an experience of the present (3). In contrast to deep memory, there is the external memory, which is the one connected to rational processes, that is, the intellectual memory. The main function of it is to make life experiences intelligible for it has its own explanatory biographical aspects. But in the deep or the traumatic memory, the experience is reactivated in its literality, thereby making the possibility of narrating it almost nonexistent because its recognition is difficult. By remaining faithful to the event, this memory continues to be inarticulated, unfinished and lost among other remembrances. It manifests itself as an effect unable to be structured in language terms. Therefore, it is a memory that can only be recognized due to its symptoms. It activates the senses related to the traumatic experience in its presentness, namely, as an experience of the present (Delbo 4).

Precisely because the traumatic memory is hard to assimilate, the victim is usually distrustful about its truth. According to Cathy Caruth, the memory of a trauma brings up a crisis of truth in a way that makes one's historical knowledge entirely suspicious:

> The survivor's uncertainty is not a simple amnesia; for the event returns, as Freud points out insistently and against their will. Nor is it a matter of indirect access to an event, since the hallucinations are generally of events all too accessible in their horrible truth. It is not, that is, having too little or indirect access to an experience that places its truth in question, in this case, but paradoxically enough, its very overwhelming

> immediacy, that produces its belated uncertainty. . . . Such a crisis of truth extends beyond the question of individual cure and asks how we in this era can have access to our own historical experience, to a history that is in its immediacy a crisis to whose truth there is no simple access. (6)

It is like one had never been present at the moment the action happened, like he or she had been unconscious during the entire period the action was in progress. As I have mentioned before, the return of the traumatic memory is an indicator that it remains as an unknown, not assimilated content - it is like it has never existed indeed.

Since PTSD brings up the raw truth of a traumatic incident, and it is considered a pathology of history itself, I argue that Morrison's *Home* thematizes what has been said about the literality that marks the symptoms of a traumatized individual. In other words, *Home* deals with the chronic trauma of its protagonist, who experiments an inexplicable void within, since his life's traumatic events are beyond his understanding and knowledge. *Home* tells the story of Frank Money, a Korean War veteran, who after going through terrible war experiences, has to go back to his hometown Lotus, in the state of Georgia, a year after returning from the Asian country. He actually hates the place and only goes back because his sister Cee is in great danger in Atlanta. After getting married and being abandoned by her husband, Cee finds a job at doctor Beau's house as his assistant. What she did not know was that she would become a guinea pig for eugenic experiments the doctor would perform on her. After being mentally and physically injured with her life at risk, a friend of hers sends a letter to her brother. Immediately, Franks sets off for Atlanta. But before, Frank Money has to flee from the hospital where he had been sedated for two days after being officially dismissed from the army. Frank had a traumatizing childhood and now, as an adult, has to deal with the grief and pain caused by terrifying war experiences. He had lost friends, shot a girl so as

not to rape her and killed many others. After some time, he still appears to be unwell and yet, when discharged, the doctors "had been thoughtful and kind, telling him the craziness would leave in time. They knew all about it, but assured him it would pass. Just stay away from alcohol, they said. Which he didn't. Couldn't" (17). Due to these traumatizing events, Frank develops post-traumatic stress disorder. Even so, he embarks on a journey back home to save his sister and, in the process, to save himself.

In *Home*, this aspect of trauma surfaces when Frank is headed to Georgia to help his sister. As he sits in the last seat of a train destined for Atlanta, he looks outside the window and the landscape makes him think about what it would be like to live in one of those houses he saw; he could imagine nothing at all:

> So, as was often the case, when he was alone and sober, whatever the surroundings, he saw a boy pushing his entrails back in, holding them in his palms like a fortune-teller's globe shattering with bad news; or he heard a boy with only the bottom half of his face intact, the lips calling mama. And he was stepping over them, around them, to stay alive, to keep his own face from dissolving, his own colorful guts under the oh-so-thin sheet of flash. They never went away, these pictures. (20)

Instead of picturing a life inside one of the houses, as he intended initially, he ends up, involuntarily, hallucinating over war scenes. These experiences resemble a terrifying dream. Although nightmares are usually typical of dreams, in the case of Frank, these disturbances hit him also when he is awake. He cannot distinguish between wakefulness and sleep, as the passage below shows:

> The taste of Scotch on the train, two beers hours later - he'd had no problem limiting himself. Sleep came fairly soon, with only one image of

> fingered feet - or was it toe-tipped hands? But after a few hours of dreamlessness, he woke to the sound of a click like the squeeze of a trigger from a gun minus ammo. Frank sat up. Nothing stirred. Then he saw the outline of the small man, the one from the train, his wide-brimmed hat unmistakable in the frame of light at the window. Frank reached for the bedside lamp. Its glow revealed the same little man in the pale blue zoot suit.
>
> "Hey! Who the hell are you? What do you want?" Frank rose from the bed and moved toward the figure. After three steps the zoot-suited man disappeared. (33)

If we compare this last passage to the one before it, we notice that there is almost no difference between them in terms of feelings of intense fear, horror and distress. Frank's traumatic experiences during sleep and while he is vigilant mingle with each other, causing the protagonist to be always confused about its temporality. Because of such a bewilderment, Frank seems unable to situate himself in space and time. Although he is not in battlefield anymore, he feels like he is transported there involuntarily. He experiences shock and displacement every time he dreams about war or has an alleged perception of being in Korea. This symptomatic delayed response experienced by Frank was one of Freud's concerns. He affirms that psychic trauma does not happen in correspondence to the body's experience of a life threat, but it occurs in the mode of a symptom or a dream:

> People have shown far too little surprise at this phenomenon. The fact that the traumatic experience repeatedly forces itself on the patient even during sleep is assumed to be proof indeed of just how deep the

> impression is made. The patient is assumed to be, so to speak, psychically fixated on the trauma . . . .
>
> I am not aware that those suffering from traumatic neurosis are very much preoccupied in their *waking* life with memories of their misadventure. Perhaps, rather, they are at pains with *not* to think of it. (13, italics in original)

What intrigues Freud is not the reaction to horrific events but the experience of survival after they happened. When Frank leaves his girlfriend Lily in order to rescue his sister Cee in Atlanta, he chooses "not to think of this trip as a break up. A pause, he hoped" (20). When with Lily, pictures of war went away and he quit drinking. But now, on the train headed to Atlanta, he thinks back how Lily changed with time. He wonders if he had done something wrong and now, meditating on it, he admits it: "Yes, he sat on occasion for hours in the quiet - numb, unwilling to talk. Yes, he regularly lost the few jobs he'd managed to secure" (21). Although Frank tries to move on with his life, trauma prevents him from doing so. He is frequently silent and never talks about his past. His lack of reference and temporality brings problems to the relationship, making Lily irritated and unable to put up with his strange behavior any longer.

Although the healing of a traumatic neurosis involves the awareness of the traumatic experience, the symptoms do not provide damage reparation or trauma integration to Frank's life story. In fact, this content always returns in an unconscious way and so it remains, compulsively coming back and preventing the protagonist from making sense of such a remembrance. For instance, one of Frank's most grieving memories is of when he loses his friends Mike and Stuff in the battlefield. Before that, he had not been brave: "He even felt nervous after a kill" (98). But he had to beat away

black birds approaching Mike's body and helped Stuff locating his arm twenty feet away in the snow. Of course, at those moments, as a loyal friend, he did what he had to, no thinking needed. However, "it changed him. What died in his arms gave a grotesque life to his childhood" as they had known each other since they were little (98). The lack of assimilation of such events made Frank become "reckless, lunatic, firing and dodging the scattered parts of men" (98). The smell of blood that once made him sick, now gave him appetite. Months later, Frank kept thinking about it:

> "But I know them. I know them and they know me." If he heard a joke Mike would love, he would turn his head to tell it to him - then a nanosecond of embarrassment before realizing he wasn't there. And never again would he hear that loud laugh, or watch him entertain whole barracks with raunchy jokes and imitations of movie stars. Sometimes, long after he'd been discharged, he would see Stuff's profile in a car stopped in traffic until the heart jump of sorrow announced his mistake. Abrupt, unregulated memories put a watery shine in his eyes. For months only alcohol dispersed his best friends, the hovering dead he could no longer hear, talk to, or laugh with. (99)

As seen in the passage above, this repressed content comes back later with maximum strength through dreams, hallucinations, flashbacks, behavior or even actions, in cases in which there are similar scenarios to the original event. These manifestations, according to Freud, can lead the individual back to the traumatic experience. The return of the memory is, in fact, an indicator that it has been maintained as an unknown, unassimilated content, like it has never happened.

Also, in *Home*, the protagonist states to the narrator and the reader that his memory may not be a reliable one: "*Since you're set on telling my story, whatever you think and whatever you write down, know this: I really forgot about the burial. I only remembered the horses. They were so beautiful. So brutal. And they stood like men*" (5, italics in original). As mentioned before, Frank had a traumatizing childhood. The burial he cites happens to be one of the most traumatic events he has ever experienced. Yet, until he started telling his story, he had forgotten all about it.

The crisis of truth mentioned before is intrinsically related to the presentness of the traumatic memory. During Frank's journey to Georgia, he finds people that help him with a place to stay the night, with conversations and sometimes, money. In Billy and Arlene's house, for instance, Frank has a dream with a zoot-suited man, followed by a hallucination over him. Then, he ponders about it and thinks it is comic in a way and so much better than the other dreams that usually had scenes of dogs or birds eating his comrades' remains. Although he thought this last dream was light and funny, it was a different kind of dream, another one to make itself present in his life: "Damn! He didn't want some new dream ghost for company" (34). Because of the faithful way trauma presents itself to the Frank, it causes an impediment to capture it in its integrality and, therefore, it remains housed within him as a familiar foreigner. According to Cathy Caruth, "the fact that this scene or thought is not a possessed knowledge, but itself possesses, at will, the one it inhabits, often produces a deep uncertainty as to its very truth", since it continues to be an inappropriate reality and causes a feeling of uncertainty related to what happened (6).

Similar to wars and their nefarious consequences, slavery as an institution was also permeated with violence and brutality at its core, and by the philosophical imperative to dehumanize slaves so as to justify a range of atrocities necessary to keep

them in line, and thereby maintain social, political and most significantly, economic order. Deprivation, cultural suppression, physical abuse, sexual exploitation, displacement of affective ties, denial of agency and expression, witnessing of brutalities committed upon others - all of these elements act upon the human subject in ways that impact memory, language and identity. Similar to *Home*, traumatized by the manifold consequences of slavery such as displacement, isolation, oppression and violence, the protagonist's memories in *Beloved* are a constant source of re-injury, as the past insists on returning and haunting the present.

Beloved thematizes the destructive legacy of slavery as it chronicles the life of a black woman named Sethe, from her pre-Civil War days as a slave in Kentucky to her time in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1873. Although in Ohio Sethe lives as a free woman, she is still held prisoner by the traumatic memories of her past as a slave. Also, she has been ostracized from her community because, about fifteen years before, she did the unthinkable: she killed one of her own children to save them from slave catchers who had tracked her down to take them back to Kentucky.

Sethe had run away from Sweet Home, a plantation in Kentucky where she had worked as a slave and later fled to join her mother-in-law in Ohio. After a few days in freedom, Schoolteacher, Sethe's former master, arrives in Cincinnati looking for her. Since she did not want her children to go through the same hardships she had endured, she attempted to kill all of them with a saw, but ended up taking away the life of just one, the "crawling-already? baby" named Beloved (10). Later, the angry ghost of her murdered daughter plagues Sethe's home at 124 Bluestone Road, thereby filling her so-called free life with fear, loneliness, and hopelessness. Both of her sons, Howard and Buglar, run away from home due to the ghost's haunting. Some time after the infanticide, Baby Suggs, Sethe's protector and mother-in-law dies and Denver, Sethe's

youngest child, is the only one who remains at 124 Bluestone Road along with her. On the one hand, Denver experiences one of the consequences of trauma when she feels isolation at its core years after the murder of her sister. After the traumatic event involving the murder of Beloved, she has had no relationship with the community: '"I can't live here. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I can't live here. Nobody speaks to us. Nobody comes by. Boys don't like me. Girls don't either"' (17). She blames Sethe for such a fate. Sethe, on the other hand, believes she did the right thing, since in her mind, she was protecting her own from the atrocities of slavery. For her, even death is better than Sweet Home, the farm where she spent years in bondage. But now at 124 Bluestone Road their safety is only relative given that they live in a haunted house, and the "rebuked and lonely" spirit that plagues it is "spiteful and full of a baby's venom" (1). All the trauma experienced by Sethe in Sweet Home and later in Cincinnati reenacts itself in the present, revisiting her, her family and the community around them.

Having experienced all that she has, Sethe can only be frightened by her own memories of the past, and the only threats to her and the life she has built arise after she reveals these memories. This fear of her memories, of the risks in revealing these memories is absolutely consistent with the dialectic of trauma, where it is known that atrocious or intrusive memories can re-injure the subject. This phenomenon is at work in Sethe's psyche, as a random sight or sound sends her back in time and space to her own enslavement:

> Then something. The plash of water, the sight of her shoes and stockings awry on the path where she had flung them; or Here Boy lapping in the puddle near her feet, and 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 in the world. 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. (7)

For Sethe, memory becomes an arena for the atrocities of the past to continue injuring her, long after she escapes from slavery. In the passage above, she has recollections of her time as a slave, but does not remember her own boys. Traumatic memories are stronger than any other memory. In another example, when she decided to run away from Sweet Home, Sethe had been beaten and her milk had been stolen by Schoolteacher's nephews. On her way to Cincinnati, Sethe meets Amy, a white girl that happens to help the former slave. Amy finds Sethe about to deliver a baby with a whipped back, swollen knees and hurt feet. Sethe cannot walk or even crawl. Amy lifts Sethe's feet and legs and massages them. She said to Sethe: '"It's gonna hurt now,"' and as if Amy could understand Sethe's mind, she exposes the logic related to trauma: '"Anything dead coming back to life hurts"' (42). In this passage, Amy reveals, in a symbolic way, that an unassimilated traumatic experience has the power to re-injure the subject. Although it remains inside as an undead force, it is reanimated and comes back to life, causing pain and distress.

124 Bluestone Road is haunted by Beloved's ghost since the infanticide. After Paul D's arrival at the house and his romantic involvement with Sethe, he expels the ghost and for a short time the house is not under a supernatural influence. He invites Denver and Sethe to a carnival in town. There, Denver surprises herself by having a good time. People greet Sethe casually, rather than showing her the contempt she

expects. He thus helps reintegrate Sethe and Denver into the community, and makes a few acquaintances. On the way back, Sethe notices that the three shadows of Paul D, Denver, and herself overlap so as to appear to be holding hands. She interprets this as a promising sign that signals future happiness. When they approach the house, they see a fully dressed woman that had walked out of a stream and had fallen asleep beneath a mulberry tree. The woman had moved to a tree stump near the steps of 124 Bluestone Road when they found her. They took her inside and found out her name was Beloved and that she had no recollection of her past. After some time, they discovered this woman was the materialization of the baby's ghost, another symbol of the strength of trauma and its presentness. When Denver realizes she has her sister back at the house, she asks Beloved: '"You won't leave us, will you?"' and Beloved answers: '"No. Never. This is where I am"' (89). It is this insistence that maintains the traumatized individual completely alienated from a historical temporality. Sethe's family lives outside its own history and is stuck into the presentness of the traumatic effect.

Similarly, in *Home*, Lily, Frank's girlfriend for a short time, questioned Frank about the future, what he wanted to do, and he simply said: '"stay live"' (76). Lily immediately understands that even after some time has gone by, "war still haunted him" (76). Because he constantly lives the deep memory through its effects, he cannot elaborate and structure it into discourse.

All of these memories are not always volitional, and their intrusion into one's thoughts and subjectivity is a source of shame and re-injury for both Sethe and Frank Money. Sethe even calls these "rememories" (43) since they have the power to injure her again by bringing feelings of pain, loss and impotence that cannot be comforted:

> She shook her head from side to side, resigned to her rebellious brain. Why was there nothing it refused? No misery, no regret, no hateful picture to rotten to accept? Like a greedy child it snatched up everything. Just once, could it say no thank you? I don't want to know or have to remember that. (83)

Analogously, the same happens with Frank Money in *Home,* in the sense that his selective obscurantism is an adaptive strategy to beat back a shameful past. The next passage is a prelude and a justification for his confession, to the narrator and the reader, that he had killed a Korean girl in the war:

> *I have to say something to you right now. I have to tell the whole truth. I lied to you and I lied to me. I hid it from you because I hid it from me. I felt so proud grieving over my dead friends. How I loved them. How much I cared about them, missed them. My mourning was so thick it completely covered my shame.* (133, italics in original)

Then he confesses having killed the girl so as not to rape her. For both Sethe and Frank, this reluctance to engage their memories makes it impossible for the cycles of healing to complete.

Paradoxically, it is the forgetting intrinsic to trauma that makes Sethe and Frank experience the traumatic event in the present. Trauma is logically untenable, for it becomes fully evident and comprehensible belatedly when it is manifested as a displaced return. Sethe and Frank are traumatized individuals because the direct referentiality is not totally perceived when the event occurs. Trauma is characterized by its indirect reference and inaccessibility. The space created, the unconsciousness related to the traumatic experience is precisely what preserves its literality. Therefore, trauma in

itself is a paradox for it brings a great confrontation with reality, but at the same time it leads to a state of numbness towards this same reality, presenting itself belatedly, as a record yet to be made. The traumatic experience does not return after it has been forgotten; it is because forgetting is inherent that the occurrence is experienced later. It is the inability to fully witness an event, the collapse of understanding, the lack of accommodation in memory that creates this literal, nonsymbolic coming back that resists cure.

As demonstrated, *Home's* and *Beloved's* protagonists carry an intolerable history inside them, a history they are not able to fully access and which possesses them. The past reenacts itself over and over again in the characters' lives until they can narrate their stories. As further analysis will show, the moment they are able to turn trauma into stories or narratives, healing starts to take place. Yet, every story to be told needs an empathetic listener to bear witness to the victims' processes of reliving the traumatic event. The reader, the narrator and the community play such a role in Morrison's both novels. Concurrently, it is the moment the psychic tomb is finally broken and the protagonists can access their histories and trespass the isolation imposed by trauma, thereby creating a connection between the characters' and the communities' history.

1.4 The Crypt Within and the Crypt Without

Since individual and communal violent stories are usually silenced, they can form individual, collective, communal and even national crypts. The inability to mourn over traumatizing events has been studied by scholars from the theory of cryptonymy, which has been extensively elaborated by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok in *The Shell and the Kernel*. In order to develop it, the psychoanalysts have revisited *Mourning*

and Melancholia, a work in which Freud affirms that the melancholic attachment to lost objects is not restricted only to the loss of loved ones. It can include the loss of ideals, the loss of the self, and the loss of a place or community.

Abraham and Torok agree, in a certain way, that traumatic memories affect the communication ability of a person and that a devastating event can indeed cause speech or language disruptions on victims. They say that this is a memory constituted of words, buried live words. Certainly these are unsayable words, but through language they become manifest in the form of encrypted messages. Sometimes, not through a word said, but indirectly, as a text uttered in secrecy (159). As Schwab states:

> Abraham and Torok's theory of cryptonymy can thus be read as a theory of the readability of trauma's secret spaces. The crypt becomes visible, traceable, or readable not only in cryptic or hieroglyphic verbs, but in other gaps in or deformations of language: incoherencies, discontinuities, disruptions, and the disintegration of meaning or grammar or semantic and rhetorical coherence. (53)

The victims create a burial space within where they place the traumatic memory that is lost, but at the same time kept inside like a living corpse. The crypt is a melancholic, funereal architectonic inner space, built after a traumatic loss. According to Schwab, whose work has been deeply influenced by the cryptonymy theory, crypts "appear, so to speak, as the linguistic scars of trauma and are not unlike the tombs in psychic life that bury the lost person or object but refuse to acknowledge the death" (4). The creation of the crypt carves in language traces of refused mourning. Thus, it is only through symptomatic reading that discourse can be deciphered and trauma becomes traceable. It

is important to listen to the silences and gaps trauma leaves in language in order to have access to the psychic crypt.

According to Abraham and Torok, traumatic loss needs to be cut off from the world, for the secret conceals a trauma whose very occurrence and devastating emotional consequences become entombed and consigned to internal silence by the one who is suffering. Traumatic silences and gaps in language are, if not mutilations and distortions of the signifying process, ambivalent attempts to conceal it. Indirectly, they express trauma otherwise shrouded in secrecy or relegated to the unconscious. Abraham and Torok state that cryptographic writing can bear the traces of transgenerational memory of something never experienced firsthand by the one carrying the secret (33).

> Normally, according to Schwab, this tomb is a familial one. That is, it is organized around family secrets shared by parents and perhaps grandparents but fearfully guarded from the children. It is through the unconscious transmission of disavowed familial dynamics that one generation affects another generation's unconscious. (4)

Indeed, Abraham and Torok state that the children or the descendants will be haunted by what is buried in the tomb, even if they do not know of its existence or contents and even if the history that produced the ghost is shrouded in silence (173).

Moreover, as a result of many individual inaccessible crypts, a communal crypt may be formed, for trauma is passed on from generation to generation. According to cryptonymy theory, the crypt is the symptom of trauma that is paradoxically kept and revealed by language. It is located in the interior of an intrapsychic tomb, also called "artificial unconscious" by Abraham and Torok (20). The act of overcoming trauma is related to the ability of deciphering the code engraved into this crypt. When decoding

and repairing are not done, the secret is transmitted to future generations in the form of ghosts from the past. “It is not so much the content of the secret or the story that is revealed but rather the imprint it has left, perhaps over generations, on affect and its expression in speech or writing,” Schwab states (53). When a lot of people go through traumatic events and the group is not able to overcome trauma, it can be transmitted to the next generation, causing what Ron Eyerman calls “cultural trauma” (2).

There is a difference between trauma that affects individuals and cultural trauma. In the case of the United States, more than four hundred years of forced labor and servitude and the subordination to the will of white people were experienced by millions of individuals. Even those who did not experienced it directly are affected by it, due to the fact that “a trauma such as this has enduring effects that cannot be easily dismissed, which will be played over again and again in individual consciousness, becoming ingrained in collective memory,” as Arthur Neal states in *National Trauma and Collective Memory: Major Events in the American Century* (2). While trauma refers necessarily to something experienced in psychoanalytic accounts, cultural trauma, according to Ron Eyerman in *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity*, “is also rooted in an event or series of events, but not necessarily in their direct experience” (3). In the same way, memory is usually conceived as individually based, but “collective memory”, as Eyerman calls it, can be defined as

> recollections of a shared past “that are retained by members of a group, large or small, 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. (5-6)

The memory which is collective is supra-individual, in the way that individual memory can be conceived in relation to a group because it is always negotiated within a collectively shared past. This is what Abraham and Torok define as the dynamic of transgenerational haunting. They link the formation of the crypt with silencing, secrecy and the phantomatic return of the past. The secret is intrapsychic and indicates internal psychic splitting and it can also be collectively deployed and shared by a people or a nation, creating involuntary repetition of cycles of violence (178).

Derrida also calls "ghost" the phantomatic return of the past (119). When discussing cultural trauma, he attests in "Foreword: *Fors:* The Anglish Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok", that the ghosts must not be jumbled with the crypt, in fact, "the crypt from which the ghost *comes back* belongs to someone else" (119, italics in original). The ghosts are effects from others' crypt, as Schwab states: "that is, the unfinished business from a previous generation" that was incorporated inside the individual (54). If the deciphering never happens, the transmission of trauma will not be interrupted, as well as the specter of "the involuntary repetition of cycles of violence" (32). Ron Eyerman has argued that the traumas originating in slavery and the Middle Passage have constituted the kernel of collective memory and identity for most African Americans. As he sees it, even if most black Americans never experienced those calamitous circumstances and communal efforts to erase them have been made, a generational transmission of cultural trauma has occurred that has perpetuated their feeling of being rejected (10).

This view of cryptic memory is greatly illustrated in *Beloved*, as Denver, who has never experienced slavery, yet suffers influenced by her mother's psychological turbulence. The dialogue below takes place when Sethe and Paul D are talking about Denver. Paul D criticizes Sethe for being overprotective with Denver. Sethe replies:

"Maybe I should leave things the way they are," she said.

"How are they?"

"We get along."

"What about inside?"

"I don't go inside." (55)

Because of this resistance and hesitation to go inside, Sethe's relations are also disturbed, like her mind. The whole family suffers from cultural trauma. When Baby Suggs, Sethe's mother-in-law, was still alive and 124 Bluestone Road was haunted by the baby's ghost, Sethe suggested they could move. Baby replied: "'What'd be the point?' asked Baby Suggs. 'Not a house in the country ain't packed to its rafters with some dead Negro's grief'" (6). Also in *Beloved*, before Sethe's and Denver's isolation from the community, Denver experiences the effects of her mother's infanticide. She and other children used to go to Lady Jones's house in order to take lessons and learn how to read and write. Although Denver has no participation in her sister's killing, she is ostracized by her mates: "She was so happy she didn't even know she was being avoided by her classmates - that they made excuses and altered their pace not to walk with her" (120). A special colleague, Nelson Lord, was the one who asked questions about her mother out of curiosity, ". . . . there was no meanness in his voice. Just curiosity. But the thing that leapt up in her when he asked it was a thing that had been lying there all along" (121). Denver never went back to Lady Jones's house and when her mother asked why not, she was not capable of answering.

As much as Sethe may wish to beat back the past, atrocities cannot remain buried. Despite her reluctance to engage her past directly, Sethe must confront the ghost

of her murdered child. Indeed, with the appearance of Beloved, in the form of a mysterious, ailing woman who simply materializes in the yard one afternoon, all the inhabitants of 124 Bluestone Road are forced to engage with the past. Materializing only after Paul D banishes it from the house, Beloved is embodied at the age she would have been, had she not died when she was just a "crawling-already? baby" (10). She is the ghost of Sethe's murdered child, but she is also an emanation of many or all the millions of people who perished in the passage or on arrival in the New World. Her individual tale, the one that should be told in order to lay her to rest, is the tale of all those millions of enslaved who died or made it to the New World.

Accordingly, in this next passage of *Beloved*, there is a dialogue between Sethe and Denver which illustrates that trauma can get passed on through generations. Sethe tells Denver that she does not pray anymore, she just talks. Denver asks about the content of those talks and Sethe replies:

> "I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place - the picture of it - stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened." (43)

Denver then asks if other people can see it. Sethe replies that '"The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there - you who never was there - if you go there and stand

in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. . . .'" (43-44). This dialogue marks the symbolism of cultural trauma. Not only Sethe, but Baby Suggs, Denver, Paul D and the black community are affected by trauma. Sethe committed infanticide for she was traumatized by the treatment received in Sweet Home and by doing that, she generated another source of trauma. It could go along in an infinite chain if the community of townswomen were not willing to help and stop the horrific process.

Gaps in language characterizing the crypt in *Beloved*'s characters can also be seen when Sethe arrives at Baby Suggs's and tells her story to Ella, a woman from the community in Cincinnati: "Ella wrapped a cloth strip tight around the baby's navel as she listened for the holes - the things fugitives did not say, the questions they did not ask. Listened too for the unnamed, unmentioned people left behind" (92). Listening to the holes is an apt description of the inconsistencies in many neo-slave narratives. These holes do not represent an absence, but rather the presence of things that cannot be spoken.

In another example, when Paul D finally hears Sethe's story about the infanticide, it leads to more fragmentation and alienation. His commitment to making a life with her is best summed up when Morrison writes: "He wanted to put his story next to hers" (299). He longs to form the connection with Sethe that he had never been able to have, had never been allowed to have, and locates mutual healing on resolving their pasts as putting their stories together. But unable to bear the pain of her narrative, he questions her resignation to her fate, exemplified by her refusal to leave the haunted house at 124 Bluestone Road. This questioning, couched in a statement so dehumanizing to Sethe that they literally cannot move forward together, leads Paul D to leave the house, thereby abandoning her to Beloved's subsequent reign of terror. This

disintegration of their newly formed household is remedied by the novel's end, but it is emblematic of the larger, direr disunity between Sethe and the black community in Cincinnati.

The anxiety of disclosure accounts for the rhetorical maneuvers and evasions that are also manifested in the circuitous fashion by which Sethe attempts to relate the story of her daughter's death to Paul D. Having previously mentioned Beloved's death, her own abortive recapture and subsequent jail time almost in an offhand manner, Sethe's explanation of why she killed one child in attempting to kill all four comes out almost torturously, for both her and Paul D. As she attempts to tell him about the murder, she nervously circles around the kitchen and around Paul D. Gradually she does close the circle enough to tell him the truth. Paul watches Sethe spin her tale:

> She was spinning. Round and round the room… Paul D sat at the table watching her drift into view and disappear behind his back, turning like a slow but steady wheel… Once in a while she rubbed her hips and as she turned but the wheel never stopped. (159)

It is a rhetorical strategy that Sethe knows is inadequate to the task of accurately explaining why she killed her child: "Sethe knew that the circle she was making around the room, him, the subject, would remain one. 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" (163). They are not spoken words, but a text that is uttered in secrecy and that appears as a ciphered message in indirect forms of language. For Sethe, re-engaging the past through her memories and her life story yields dubious rewards while demanding too much emotional risk and effort. As she says, it is hard work, beating back the past (51).

Corresponding to Abraham's and Torok's theory of cryptonymy, in the fifteenth chapter of *Home*, Frank wonders "how he has covered his guilt and shame with big-time mourning for his dead buddies" (135). Frank builds inside him a crypt and that is why he forgets certain facts, and remembers and hides the truth about others: "Day and night he had held on to that suffering because it left him off the hook, kept the Korean child hidden. Now the hook was deep inside his chest and nothing would dislodge it" (135). Frank only reveals he had killed the child one chapter before he explains the reasons why he had done it. He preferred to kill it because he could not like himself, be himself if he had surrendered to a place where a girl left him off the hook. Although he justifies his actions, he believes there is a price to pay for what he did was wrong: "*And what type of man thinks he can ever in life pay the price of that orange!*" (134, italics in original). It seems that because his sister had been injured and then needed healing, he feels at the same time tired of so much suffering and ready to be a part of a healing process together with her. When he decides to talk about the traumatizing memories of his childhood and the horrific moments experienced in the battlefield, he finally comes to terms with his past.

Also, in *Home*, Frank left Lily, his girlfriend, for "family reasons" (75). In the beginning of their relationship it had been good, but several months later, Lily started feeling annoyed with Frank's breakdown: "she came home from work and saw him sitting on the sofa staring at the floor. One sock on, the other in his hand. Neither calling his name nor leaning toward his face moved him" (75). She learned to let him be, hoping his heights would return at some point. The problem was that Frank was indifferent and did not help her to pay the bills nor with house chores. One of the most critical points of their relationship was when they went to a church convention in a high school football field. Lily and Frank were in high spirits all afternoon, chatting with

people and helping children serve food. Out of nowhere Frank bolted. He dropped his food and ran through the crowd. Lily was embarrassed, alarmed when she came back to the apartment and found it empty. She questioned: “How could he change so quickly? Laughing one second, terrified the next?” (77). She started feeling a little bit afraid that there was some sort of violence hidden in his behavior that at some point could be directed towards her. Her heart jumped when he arrived. However, she noticed he was calm, “beat up with shame” (77). Puzzled by such rampancy she asked him if it had to do with his time in Korea. “Lily had never asked about the war and he had never brought it up. Good, she thought. Better to move on” (77). So, at the first time they had such a conversation, Frank refused to talk about it and changed the subject, not answering her question: “‘Yeah, I know. It won’t happen again. Promise’” (77). As he promised, there was no other public explosion and although some time things went back to normal, they did less and less socializing. Frank could not open himself to her and was silent, leading him to become an outsider, since he never went inside. In addition, many times she came home and found him idle again, sitting on the sofa, staring at the floor and never ever helped with any house chores. Lily started feeling displeasure since his indifference and irresponsibility were clear. When Frank finally left and she casually took a purse full of money he found on the street, it seemed to her a “perfectly fair trade,” (81) where Frank Money used to be now there was real money.

Before Frank confesses he was the one who killed the Korean girl, he invented that his relief guard did it. He lies because he cannot endure such an unpleasant and undesirable event, so he assigns the authorship of the fact to another, even if it is an imaginary person. Long after it happened, when Frank remembers it, the traumatized self has difficulties in dealing with it, so the mind uses a strategy of not having to

respond to it directly: "*Thinking back on it now, I think the guard felt more than disgust. I think he felt tempted and that is what he had to kill*" (96, italics in original).

Morrison has often dealt with the unbearable weight of the past in the present; that weight is exponentially multiplied when the victim has been exposed to bigotry and injustice at home, and extreme violence and losses abroad, which is the case of Frank Money and his sister Cee, who are only able to go through the mourning process of their psychic wounds together. However, there are forces at work in the novel that seem to threaten that mourning process for they are also related to cultural trauma, mentioned previously. Besides his childhood and war traumas, Frank is reminded at various points that there are more profound, collective wounds that need to be healed by his people before a complete recovery is possible. Again, it is pastor Reverend Locke who first makes it clear to Frank that the fact that they have been fighting for their country has not substantially changed the situation of black Americans: '"Well, you not the first by a long shot. An integrated army is integrated misery. You all go fight, come back, they treat you like dogs. Change that. They treat dogs better"' (18). This crude statement proves correct a bit later when Frank comes across a black couple on a train that have been brutally beaten just for buying some coffee from a white establishment. The case of Thomas, Billy Watson's eleven-year-old son, who lost the use of his right arm because a rookie policeman shot him while he was playing on the sidewalk, is even sadder. When Frank shows his incredulity, Billy, a man who offers him hospitality, tells him that in Chicago '"Cops shoot anything they want. This here's a mob city"' (31). A few pages later, the protagonist himself experiences the bitter taste of racial humiliation when he and three other African Americans are subjected by some officers to a random frisk outside a shoe store.

These racial incidents act as reminders of a haunting prehistory of black citizens in the United States, as Durrand affirms in *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning: J.M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris and Toni Morrison*:

> The traumatic memory of slavery and the Middle Passage opens up something resembling an internal differend within Morrison's work, one that marks the gap between the subjective act of narration and the traumatic experience of racial oppression in which one is the object rather than the subject in one's history. (19)

Home oscillates between the protagonist's attempts at assimilating those traumatic episodes from his own past into his individual consciousness and the more difficult task of healing the wound of African American history which has been invariably dominated by racism.

In other words, a traumatized identity can be subjected to a variety of mental shifts that are inherently adaptive and protective, but also place the traumatized subject outside normative definitions of behavior and thought. The shock and anger of the initial assault is compounded by recurring bouts of rage, despair and impotence that are potential sites of re-injury. Once the ego is traumatized, other stimuli can function so as to become equivalent to the original stressor. Certainly Sethe and Frank can attest to the devastating, almost malicious power of their own "rememory", signaled by a painful return to the sites of their numerous violations and bereavements (43). *Beloved* and *Home* show that dissociation acts to cushion the recurring psychic blow of unresolved trauma, in which mediating strategies such as denial, distortion, dissociation, or intrusion attempt to reduce distress by reducing or augmenting information through safety-oriented responses to threat and vulnerability. Sethe and Frank respond

automatically and unconsciously to new events and information so as to protect themselves from what they have already experienced. At times, it is as if an alternate personality arises that can cope with situations that the traumatized psyche cannot. Paradoxically, these dysfunctions in the way the protagonists express themselves, can be read as symptoms pointing to a secret both kept and revealed in language. Language itself becomes haunted and haunted language uses gaps in speech to point to silenced history and refer to what is unspeakable through ellipsis, indirection and detour, or fragmentation and deformation.

1.5 Conclusion

As I have demonstrated, ghosts in *Beloved* and *Home* are metaphoric, for they are not only the ghosts of the individual victims or even of all the victims of slavery, war and their legacy, but also victims whose stories have not been told. Ghosts are metaphoric of all the unhealed wounds the survivors and their descendants still carry. Silencing these violent and shameful stories continue to affect and disrupt the lives of those involved in them and casts the traumatized subjects outside the continuity of psyche but, unintegrated and unassimilated, they eat away continuity from within. The creation of the crypt imprints in language the traces of refused mourning, since words become defuncts and they lose their communicative function.

In this way, the buried ghosts of the past come to haunt language from within, always threatening to destroy its communicative and expressive function. Frank could never narrate the burial if he had forgotten all about it, for attacks on language are attacks on memory. Sethe could never come to terms with her past until she narrated her story. Hence, in order to beat this form of death in life, this feeling of being a historical outsider of space and time, this sensation of belonging to nowhere, the protagonists

need to speak. Narrative, thus, becomes the space where the deads are marked and mourned, taking the places of graves for those who have no graves.

In the next chapter I examine how the healing processes occur through the community of women after both protagonists find atonement by giving an account of horrific moments of the past. When these ghosts are laid to rest, the protagonists and their remaining families can achieve healing, and the African American community can finally find redemption.

Chapter Two

Redemption, Healing and Community

Past lives in us, through us.
Each of us harbours the
spirits of the people who
walked the earth before we
did, and those spirits depend
on us for continuing
existence, just as we depend
on their presence to live our
lives to the fullest.
-John Edgar
Wideman, *Sent For You Yesterday*

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I approached how an unassimilated experience, known as trauma, brings a sometimes delayed response that takes the form of dreams, flashbacks, hallucinations, thoughts or behaviors stemming the event. The pathology cannot be defined by the nature of the event itself, which can be catastrophic or not, but rather by the individual's reception of it. In this case, the event is not assimilated in its full form at the time of the experience, but only belatedly, "in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it," as Cathy Caruth states in the introduction of *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (4). I have also shown how the characters in Morrison's *Beloved* and *Home* are significantly traumatized by events related to slavery, racism, the Korean War and childhood occurrences. In addition, I have demonstrated how troubled assimilation can affect language and, consequently, the act of narrating a traumatic experience, thereby making difficult the process of acknowledging it and, therefore, coming to terms with a terrible past.

In this chapter, I show how unspeakable memories become traceable in language and thus provide individuals with the chance to face them and eventually reach healing. I demonstrate how healing processes occur in Morrison's *Beloved* and *Home* through

the community of women, which, by performing a series of rituals, afford the opportunity for protagonists to understand, accept and deal with their traumas of the past. They are finally able to break into their psychic crypts. It is also important to notice that when the main characters are able to open their wounds to the community, the healing process becomes a two-way street, as healing comes for both individual and communal traumas. As Jacques Derrida, influenced by Freud's works, proposes in the "Foreword" of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy,* "the inhabitant of a crypt is always a living dead, a dead entity we are perfectly willing to keep alive, but as dead, one we are willing to keep, as long as we keep it, within us, intact in any way save as living" (21). Thus, in order to achieve complete healing Sethe, Frank and Cee Money must give a proper burial to those painful past experiences in order to finally find acceptance, become reconciled with bygone events and, consequently, with the community.

For the purpose of understanding how the traumatized subject reconnects to a community, it is paramount that we realize that disconnections are endemic to all who were touched by slavery somehow, since it was fueled by violence and dehumanization. Sethe's, Frank's and Cee's experiences are microcosmic representations of an intricate and overweening commercial and imperial endeavor that thoroughly changed the New World's culture.

Therefore, in this chapter I also examine the intersections of displacement, trauma and motherhood in *Beloved,* as the main character is deeply affected by the slave trade of black women. I establish a relation between these issues and the healing rituals performed by women to women in the novel. A new dimension of mothering surfaces in the shape of a strong connection in sisterhood, especially when the novel reaches its end. Here, the community of women lends their hearts in order to rescue Sethe and her

daughter from the ghost and the trauma of infanticide. Such a revival of a communal experience allows both community and protagonist to find atonement. It becomes clear how the restoration of the characters' psyche is done through access to discourse and language, which helps to relieve their emotional distress and make psychological recovery possible.

2.2 Women for Women: motherhood, sisterhood and healing

The abduction and sale of Africans in the Transatlantic slave trade displaced millions of people from their families and homes. The problem continued when they arrived in the New World, as they could be displaced at any time, in spite of any bonds of blood or affection they might have formed. The legal arrangements of slavery turned their lives into a pattern of displacement and dispersal, making these practices the very foundation of slavery. When tracing such disconnections, *Beloved* shows how slavery deeply impacts kinship and ancestry structures via family constellation, thereby triggering devastating effects on black identity and subjectivity. Indeed, the effects of trauma caused by the atrocities of slavery are manifested in Sethe's and, consequently, Denver's isolation, in Paul D's wandering feet, in Baby Sugg's bitterness over the nastiness of life, and in the absence of Halle and his two sons; these detachments have calamitous consequences for both individual characters and the community as a whole. Because in *Beloved* the protagonist is a woman, I would like to focus on the conditions of female slaves in the context of the novel, in order to show how the discourses of motherhood and ancestry are affected by the traumatizing experiences of displacement and dispersal these women underwent so as to accommodate managerial and economic needs.

Women slaves were the wealth of the United States due to their reproductive capabilities, exchange and use value through productive labor and support services. The

internal African slave trade was concentrated mostly on women, who were ripped from their families and were essentially kinless, cut off from support or inheritance. Of course, their children followed their conditions into enslavement, for the offspring of the female did not belong to her. After the Transatlantic trade was abolished, American slavery was dependent on natural increase of slave population in which the reproductive capabilities of slaves were calculated as part of the wealth they generated. American planters were so engaged in making sure slave women were prolific that the United States were more successful in producing slaves by the natural increase than any other slave-employing society in the Americas, as Hugh Thomas explains in *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade: 1440 - 1870* (570). As a result, women were further objectified and their children subsumed to the enslaved labor market as units of production, and in a domino effect, became victims of their own displacements and violations as well.

These ways of reproduction and mothering are very salient in *Beloved*. Paul D is the one who articulates the mechanisms of this reproductive discourse at the heart of the novel when he ruminates about Schoolteacher's going after Sethe and her children. Even after the master considers Sweet Home men as losses, Schoolteacher cannot do the same regarding Sethe: "He [Paul D] wasn't surprised to learn that they had tracked her down in Cincinnati, because, when he thought about it, her price was greater than his; property that reproduced itself without cost" (269). It is also Sethe's love for her children and the attempt to protect them from the atrocities of slavery that makes her sent her three children to Ohio and then go on foot after them, nine months pregnant, with a whipped back. Therefore, family disruption constitutes the first trauma of enslaved life these characters face, thereby leading their enslaved children to reenact this type of separation again and again in the course of their lives.

These devastating detachments are what Baby Suggs calls the "nastiness of life," for they are reflected, macrocosmically, in the traumatized individual's isolation from the community and in a traumatized community's isolation from the rest of the society as well (4). In this next passage, the material and emotional bereavement of disrupted, enslaved motherhood is evident, as it illustrates the sexual and reproductive discourses within the slavery enterprise:

> It made sense for a lot of reasons because in all of Baby's life, as well as Sethe's own, men and women were moved around like checkers. Anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn't run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen, or seized. So Baby's eight children had six fathers. What she called the nastiness of life was the shock she received upon learning that nobody stopped playing checkers just because the pieces included her children. Halle she was able to keep the longest. Twenty years. A lifetime. Given to her, no doubt, to make up for *hearing* that her two girls, neither of whom had their adult teeth, were sold and gone and she had not been able to wave goodbye. To make up for coupling with a straw boss for four months in exchange for keeping her third child, a boy, with her - only to have him traded for lumber in the spring of the next year and to find herself pregnant by the man who promised not to and did. That child she could not love and the rest she would not. (28, italics in original)

Here, Baby's narrative centers on these lost children and the circumstances of their loss. She cannot help but go over the tiny details she remembers of her children and wonders

about the adults they have become, even after years have passed since they were sold or chased off:

> The last of her children, whom she barely glanced at when he was born because it wasn't worth the trouble to try and learn features you would never see change into adulthood anyway. Seven times she had done that: held a little foot; examined fat fingertips with her own - fingers she never saw become the male or female hands a mother would recognize anywhere. She didn't know to this day what their permanent teeth look like; or how they held their heads when they walked. . . . . Four girls, and the last time she saw them there was no hair under their arms. (163-164)

Obviously, when Baby receives her grandchildren at 124 Bluestone Road she is more than relieved. Her own experience of motherhood had been rife with violence, violation and grief and now the liberation of Halle's children offers hope, a promise that her family can be reunited in freedom. Because of that, she advises Sethe not to take this big privilege for granted: '"You lucky. You got three left. Three pulling at your skirts and just one raising hell from the other side. Be thankful, why don't you?"' (6). Of course, Sethe's past was horrific, for she had killed her own daughter and this is undeniably a tragic event. But even though her past was unusual, since all of her children were conceived consensually with her husband, she could not keep them all and prevent them from becoming slaves. Obviously, Baby Suggs did not have the same luck.

We see thus that displacement hits Sethe twice, for she is both a displaced mother and daughter. In the beginning of the novel, the reader finds out that Sethe's daughter has been dead for eighteen years, her two sons have run off due to the ghost's violence, her husband Halle has disappeared, Baby Suggs is dead and only Denver

remains. All these displacements are echoes of her own displacement from her biological mother, known as Ma'am. Although Sethe finds in Baby a surrogate mother, she can barely recollect her own mother until Beloved starts asking for stories: '"Your woman she never fix up your hair?"' and Sethe answers vaguely, '"My woman? You mean my mother? If she did, I don't remember. I didn't see her but a few times out in the field and once when she was working indigo"' (72). It is the ability to put all these into words or a sort of coherent narrative that is going to lead those involved in the path of healing.

Part of Beloved's role in the novel is to provide such a cure, especially as revealed in her intense desire to learn more and more about Sethe's life, which is fraught with stories of family traumas of dispersals. Here, trauma, language and, consequently, healing are intrinsically related, for instance, when Sethe starts telling Beloved and Denver about her own mother. Sethe finds herself surprised she wants to tell those painful stories; in fact, she finds herself liking it. The moment she finds the vocabulary to unearth the short and brief relationship with her own mother, the crypt finally becomes accessible, giving the protagonist a chance to remember more of the same event. The more she talks about it, the more she remembers it:

> It became a way to feed her. Just as Denver discovered and relied on the delightful effect sweet things had on Beloved, Sethe learned the profound satisfaction Beloved got from storytelling. It amazed Sethe (as much as it pleased Beloved) because every mention of her past life hurt. Everything in it was painful or lost. She and Baby Suggs had agreed without saying so that it was unspeakable; to Denver's inquiries Sethe gave short replies or rambling incomplete reveries. Even with Paul D, who had shared some of it and to whom she could talk with at least a

> measure of calm, the hurt was always there - like a tender place in the corner of her mouth that the bit left. (69)

It is Nan, Sethe's first surrogate mother, who tells Sethe the life story of her absent mother in different words because they spoke a different language Sethe does not remember anymore. In recollecting this memory, Sethe realizes her mother came from the sea and that she herself was not a product of sexual violence, but rather conceived by two consenting African parents: '"She threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away. Without names, she threw them. You she gave the name of the black man. She puts her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around. Never. Never. Telling you. I am telling you, small girl Sethe"' (74). Despite her alienation from her mother, Sethe is able to replicate her mother's condition, as she has children conceived in love and can claim the inheritance from her father in her name. When Nan tells Sethe her mother's story, she gives the small girl some clues related to her African ancestry.

This discourse of motherhood is so prominent in *Beloved* that in *Risking Difference: Identification, Race and Community in Contemporary Fiction and Feminism,* Jean Wyatt proposes that "Sethe defines herself as a maternal body whose connection to its offspring remains unbroken. . . ," in the sense that if on one hand her journey from Sweet Home to Ohio is depicted as an act of heroism, celebrating courage, determination for she gives birth in poor conditions - alone, in the wilderness, tired and wounded; on the other, she only attests to her existence in her children's survival (68). Her maternal identification throughout the novel is what leads Sethe to murder Beloved, for she sees her children as a part of her, fused with her. When Schoolteacher is approaching 124 Bluestone in order to recapture her, she "just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful. . . ."

(192). When talking to Sethe about the infanticide, Paul D becomes aware of it and states: "'Your love is too thick"' (193). Not being able to handle such a confession, Paul D cannot be an empathetic listener and eventually, leaves Sethe.

Accordingly, this excessive love affects the relationship between Sethe and Denver, her only remaining child. Sethe seems to be imprisoned in time, having a desire to live still in the moment she used to carry her children and nursed them. Paul D says to Sethe when the two of them are talking about Denver: "'She's grown,"' and Sethe replies, "'I don't care what she is. Grown don't mean nothing to a mother. A child is a child. They get bigger, older, but grown? What's that supposed to mean? In my heart don't mean a thing"' (54). A relationship that fails to be age-appropriate brings difficult implications to both characters.

As an illustration, it is noticeable that Denver does not fully develop until she is able to enter into language and the domain of narrative. After attending Lady Jones's classes, Denver becomes deaf and mute for two years. Her loss of hearing and mutation reproduces, according to Jean Wyatt, a ". . . .desire of the mother - that the story of the baby's murder remains unspoken, the act unnamed, the memory repressed" (69). Wyatt states that Denver's symptoms perform a literalization of Lacan's dictum ". . . . man's desire is the *désir de l'Autre* (desire of the Other)," in which the child's desire remains in a mimesis of the parent's desire (238, italics in original). Since Sethe cannot tell the story of the infanticide, it is plausible to assume that Denver's desire is for language. Her deafness and muteness stands for the unspeakable trauma of her mother and serves to keep its silence whole and unbroken.

Thus, Denver, along with Beloved, is also emblematic of such displacements of motherhood and family isolation. Her psyche is deeply affected by slavery's legacy. Even though she had never lived as a slave, her life is bound by the trauma of the

"Misery", Sethe's infanticide (209). Despite the fact she is different from the other characters of the book, for she has access to her maternal and paternal lines and has grown up together with her mother and her paternal grandmother, she suffers from isolation, loneliness and agoraphobia. Somehow, Denver fills in for her father's absence throughout the novel, on account of her father's facial features. She is often described as her father's daughter: '"Got her daddy's sweet face,"' (15) as Paul D says moments after he sets his eyes on Denver for the first time. The teenager also mirrors her father when she remains by her mother's side and has to make some sacrifices for her mother's welfare. The same way Baby was allowed to keep Halle, Sethe has been granted with the chance to keep her youngest child. These family chains give Denver the support she needs to step out of 124 Bluestone Road porch and ask for help. Because she is the only character who has had the privilege of growing up with both sides of her ancestry, she is the one who possesses the potential agency to bring healing for her family and the whole community.

In any case, Denver is forced to enter the social realm of language when she finally leaves 124 Bluestone porch in order to save her mother and sister from starvation. At first, she tries to walk down the steps, but cannot, until she hears her grandmother's voice, that says: '"You mean I never told you nothing about Carolina? About your daddy? You don't remember nothing about how come I walk the way I do and about your mother's feet, not to speak of her back? I never told you all that? Is that why you can't walk down the steps? My Jesus my. . . . Know it and go out the yard. Go on"' (287-288). This passage shows how Denver's world is damaged by trauma, but it is through language, that is, her grandmother's words, that Denver is finally free to enter the present world. In this sense, Denver moves from the identification with her mother's trauma, an imprisonment of both desire and time "to the symbolic order of language and

society" as Jean Wyatt states (74). Interestingly, she goes straight to the place where her traumatic symptoms were firstly manifested: Lady Jones's house, the woman who taught her to read and write years earlier. This confirms her desire for words, in a way that it could stop the temporal paralysis she shares with her mother.

It is also because of language, or the lack thereof, that Denver's character can be considered a metaphoric representation of all the children silenced and sold away from their fathers and mothers. When she goes to Lady Jones and asks for help, the lady thinks:

> Everybody's child was in that face: the nickel-round eyes, bold yet mistrustful; the large powerful teeth between dark sculptured lips that did not cover them. Some vulnerability lay across the bridge of the nose, above the cheeks. And then the skin. Flawless, economical - just enough of it to cover the bone and not a bit more. She must be eighteen or nineteen by now, thought Lady Jones, looking at the face young enough to be twelve. Heavy eyebrows, thick baby lashes and the unmistakable love call that shimmered around children until they learned better. (290)

Lady Jones then makes them some tea and Denver is unable to tell her how her family was doing, so the teenager asks for work and some extra, which meant food. After that, Lady Jones says: '"oh, baby"' (292) and it transformed Denver's life. Instead of giving a message of wisdom or encouragement, this simple utterance, although apparently insignificant, demonstrates love and care. The way it is said, "softly and with such kindness," (292) gives Denver a profound sense of truly being with another person.

Denver's inauguration into womanhood does not end with Jones's sweetness, for the lady spreads the news in the community. Two days later, the family starts receiving baskets of food and the process of healing begins within the community. Denver's

agitation due to the community's generosity confirms what she first felt at Jones's house. The pride and the consequent isolation her mother had passed on to her were now giving place to a state of being-with the community. She realizes her dependence on others, when she moves from her home to the home of others.

In both Morrison's novels analyzed here, the reconnection with the community is the final step in the trajectory of healing. In the case of Sethe, this restoring is even more important, but also more difficult, because the black community is also an accomplice in the infanticide. That is why Sethe's attitude towards the community is a painful one. The same way the protagonist needs redemption from Beloved's murder, so does the community. Therefore, for the healing to happen, both sides have to make a move. And the community does so.

They initially help because when Denver goes to people's houses to return the baskets and to thank, a small conversation takes place: '"No, darling. That's not my bowl. Mine's got a blue ring on it"' (293). And again because of language, this exchange of a few words, the people from the community recollect Denver's grandmother, for she provides the linkage between the present black society and its historical origins. She becomes an embodiment of ancestry, a catalyst of the cultural and the spiritual for the whole community, a leading voice that brings the community to recovery. They begin to reach atonement when they recognize what they did; when they can acknowledge their part of responsibility in the "Misery" (209):

> Maybe they were sorry for her [Denver]. Or for Sethe. Maybe they were sorry for the years of their own disdain. Maybe they were simply nice people who could hold meanness toward each other for just so long and when trouble rode bareback among them, quickly, easily they did what

> they could to trip him up. In any case, the personal pride, the arrogant claim staked out at 124 seemed to have run its course. (293-294)

In an act of compassion they understand that what has happened to one of them, has happened to them all:

> Beloved might leave. Leave before Sethe could make her realize that worse than that - far worse - was what Baby Suggs died of, what Ella knew, what Stamp Paid saw and what made Paul D tremble. That anybody white 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. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up. (295)

The community here functions as an empathetic listener who becomes aware that the other's trauma is their own as well. So, it is not only Sethe who is contaminated by the monstrosity of slavery, but everyone around. Her daughter Beloved, who was the one that got fed by her mother's telling of stories, could never play the part of such a listener, for Beloved "ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it" (295). Observing them both, Denver can understand their connection: "Sethe was trying to make up for the handsaw; Beloved was making her pay for it" (295). Sethe was narrating the same old story over and over again to Beloved, trying to make her daughter feel important, wanted. Sethe apologizes many times, spinning around the same narrative as she does not want forgiveness; she punishes herself repeatedly for what happened: "She [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" (296-297). Of course a therapeutic effect takes place

when Beloved first appears and asks for more stories, thus allowing Sethe to replace her losses through life with words and finally mourn over her traumatic experiences. In fact, in the beginning, Beloved dances and is very happy with Sethe's narratives: "she [Sethe] had felt warm satisfaction radiating from Beloved's skin when she listened to her mother talk about the old days" (87). But at the same time, she would whisper to Denver that Sethe left her behind, by herself, and that she would never leave the two women because she belonged to them and they, to her.

Before proceeding to the discussion of the final rituals of healing in the novel, it is important to go back a little and discuss how Baby Suggs, Sethe's mother-in-law, conducted preaching in the Clearing, after she was set free from slavery. The comprehension of such moments is crucial, since the reunion of thirty women in front of Sethe's house to rescue her and Denver from the baby's ghost mirrors the time members of the community spent in the Clearing listening to Baby Suggs's sermons. It is because of the remembrance of Baby Suggs and the mutual help she proposed then that the women can reunite again in reconciliation with Sethe's "Misery" (209).

Before 124 Bluestone Road was haunted by the ghost, Baby Suggs had created a healthy environment towards the place, where the black community could find comfort, relief and soothing in times of affliction. Baby knew that everyone in that community had, somehow, been affected by the monstrousness of slavery, she included. So, as a way to heal herself, she helped others by becoming an unchurched preacher and opening her heart to her people. Baby Suggs was the spiritual heart of the community; she preached a different kind of gospel. Her message was one of embodied spirituality that moved the congregation to claim their free selves. Stamp Paid said to her once, after the Misery: '"Listen here, girl', he told her, 'you can't quit the Word. It's given to you to speak. You can't quit the Word, I don't care what all happen to you"' (209). Indeed,

Baby Suggs would tell those gathered around her that they should love themselves, for they were despised by white populace. Hence, they should always stay together, value each other and have faith: “she told them that the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine” (103). So if they could not see it, they would not have it. Everyone had the time of their lives when in the Clearing:

> It started that way: laughing children, dancing men, crying women and then it got mixed up. Women stopped crying and danced; men sat down and cried; children danced, women laughed, children cried until, exhausted and riven, all and each lay about the Clearing damp and gasping for breath. In the silence that followed, Baby Suggs, holy, offered up to them her great big heart. (103)

As shown in the passage above, it was a time everybody within the community could experiment an easing of their pains. Because black people when slaves were reduced to their bodies and were not given the right to speak, it is clear the substitution of one for the other. When Sethe gets whipped by Schoolteacher’s nephews, she cannot speak about it, but the marks of the beating are in her back, labeling her a slave and leaving her a traumatized individual. Baby Suggs was aware of that during her sermons about re-empowerment of their bodies:

> ‘“Here,” she said, “in this 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. They don’t love your eyes; they’d just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with

> them, pat them together, stroke them on your face 'cause they don't love that either. *You* got to love it, *you*!"' (104)

According to Wyatt, Baby Suggs, by using language, "tries to heal at the level of the body, where the damage to subjectivity has occurred" (77). Ex-slaves need to first assert their right to their bodies, and, consequently, own back this entire physical structure, so they can shape a self and discover a voice.

Unfortunately, Sethe does not have time to claim her injured body. Twenty-eight days living with Baby Suggs and the black community cannot be considered enough time to recover from the cruelty of slavery. And unluckily, she killed her daughter right after arriving at 124 Bluestone Road. She was able to keep the past at bay for eighteen years by not speaking about it with no one and by isolating herself and Denver from the community. Through all of this time she had built a sepulcher inside to which she had never gone, putting in there phantasms, isolating them from the conscious part of the Ego, preserving them as unnamable.

As Sethe and Denver cannot break up their crypts with Beloved's help, for she is the incarnation of trauma, the community of women has to step in and gather outside Sethe's house to confront the ghost of the murdered baby. Although the townswomen have no distinct plan in mind, as they make their way towards Sethe's home for a confrontation with another worldly entity, they begin to sing, like they used to under Baby Suggs's direction in the Clearing. It creates a powerful sound that makes Sethe tremble:

> For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a

> wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash. (308)

Sethe, when listening to the singing, remembers immediately the Clearing, as the sound she hears did not emerge from a single voice, but from voices dependent on one another. This powerful vocalization shows what Denver had discovered when talking to Lady Jones for the first time and when she received baskets of food from the members of the community: the notion of interdependence, the conception of being-with other people.

It becomes clear that the remedy for racial oppression can be traced exclusively to collective affirmation. Baby Suggs's preaching lessons taught that the validation of black personhood can never come from above or from the white man. Although she believed that being submitted to whitefolks' definition remained invariable, she preached that the community should seek authenticity. Since Sethe's revision of her actions is not sufficient to heal the past, there is a need for compassion from the society in order to gain a feeling of wholeness. It is not until the community re-examines its actions, that recognition of collective identity is viable. That is why, in the end of the novel, women are reunited by the power of community, not so much by a firm understanding of what to do.

Sethe was once expelled from her black communal family because the female community, especially, rejected her in her motherhood. Women who shared the role of mothers found Sethe's act unforgivable and considered Sethe's exclusion inevitable. Ironically, the colossal role of female union in transforming the future of Sethe and Denver is crucial in the process of identity formation recovery for they act as protectors of the domestic space. Since slavery is terrible for men, but it is far more terrible for

women, they have particular sufferings of their own. Therefore, through mothering, giving birth and caring for children, women form an alliance and are able to function as spiritual leaders in society. Although they disapprove Sethe's behavior, they do not deny help to Denver. Also, they treat Denver's plea as their mother-duty to guard and provide security for her.

So great was the singing of the women that it "broke back of words" (308). In this sense, there is no message or idea to convey, but the sound is meaningful enough. The singing can only make Sethe tremble "like the baptized in its wash" and "knock the pods off chestnut trees" because it has no words (308). Therefore, it mirrors unspeakable and unnamable trauma in Sethe's chest and house. Both Sethe and the community are traumatized by the "Misery", so they are not self-established beings; they are, in fact, non-subjects and non-unified (209). That is why the singing resembles trauma and provides cleansing from the dirtiness of slavery and infanticide.

Along the novel, Sethe gives countless indications she has been dirtied by slavery. In the passage above, the singing is likened to be a baptism, promoting a sort of cleansing. Therefore, the singing has the power to break the logic of white supremacy and reasoning of the white definer. Also, when the community can let go of this definition, they can access their own traumatized psyche, which is pre-linguistic and preconscious. This transcendental, non-referential vocalization marks a new beginning for Sethe and the community, the start of being-with.

This community, once blinded by jealousy and rage, now can embrace its member and be empowered in the struggle against the devastating forces of slavery. Therefore, in order to recover and redefine identity, the revision of one's actions has to work both ways. Such a decision allows Sethe to preserve her community and, conversely, gives the community a second chance to protect its member. A restoring

behavior requires repetition but with a difference. It means the revision of the once again assigned communal role, the recognition of its uniqueness and, therefore, the revival of collective identity, marking a new era for Sethe, Denver and the community as a whole. Despite its instability, the community of women finds, in their unique strength, a way to keep the community together as a whole. It is not until Sethe is freed by and taken back into the community of women, that she can achieve authentic freedom.

2.3 A Lodestar to Lotus

As seen in the previous chapter, in *Beloved* and in *Home*, there is a necessity of remembering a traumatic past in order to heal from personal and communal psychological wounds. If the past episodes of one's life are not embraced, redemption becomes impossible. Therefore, in both novels, Morrison seems to resort to the storytelling tradition, as the path to psychic health. Traumatized victims need to tell their story so as to face the feelings attached to the ghastly memories which create havoc in their daily lives. Thus, suffering can both heal and humanize the individuals, provided that they can reorganize the painful events of the past and retell them in their own language.

Frank Money's long journey from the West Coast to Georgia can also be seen as the opportunity for him to retrieve his painful memories and to provide them with a meaning that would heal some of his psychic wounds. But initiating this mourning process is not an easy task because he has already been caught in a spiral of amnesia and despondency that makes recovery almost unthinkable. Just like Sethe in *Beloved*, he is still trapped in the maze of a past that prevents him from looking into a future that will not merely repeat that past. He seems unable to move beyond the mental condition in which he simply acts out the disorientation and violence that have taken possession

of the best part of him. Perhaps the single glimpse of hope or potential point of departure for the healing process is to be found in Frank's close relationship and strong sense of responsibility towards his sister.

So, in order to come to terms with his past, Frank has to tell his story. In *Home*, particularly, Morrison presents an angular voice in storytelling style. Even though the story is depicted through a narrator, there is a therapeutic encounter between Frank's raw, first person narrative and the reader, who becomes an empathetic, literary conscious listener, crucial for the healing process. Through this technique, the author seems to question the capacity to tell torturing adversities using an external narrator, but at the same time, when Frank recollects his childhood traumas, he has the same chance Sethe had: a chance to "rememory" trauma, to re-signify and reorganize remembrances by putting them into words (43).

The process of remembering is so painful that, frequently, the damaged soldier dares the narrator to put his tribulations into language. When Frank recalls his family expulsion from their home in Texas, he says to the narrator and to the reader: "*You don't know what heat is until you cross the border from Texas to Louisiana in the summer. You can't come up with words that can catch it. Trees give up. Turtles cook in their shells. Describe that if you know how*" (41, italics in original). On the other hand, these are the sensitive listeners that help the Korean War veteran control and put together his remembrances, for they become the true sharers of Frank's traumatic memories. As seen in *Beloved*, the presence of somebody willing to bear witness and to assist in the recovery of those memories is crucial for the victim's reconstruction of a sense of self.

Frank's restorative, cross-country odyssey goes first through a woman, who gives him the affection he lacks not to succumb to complete insanity. Lily, his

girlfriend, had a temporary medicinal influence over him for she helped to put his life together, making him want to be good enough for her: “It wasn’t just the lovemaking, entering what he called the kingdom between her legs. When he lay with the girl-weight of her arm on his chest, the nightmares folded away and he could sleep. When he woke up with her, his first thought was not the welcome sting of whiskey” (21). Frank remains sober and his nightmares stop, and yet, Lily is not enough to heal his fractured sense of self. Lily was not an empathetic listener for she “had never brought it up”, she had not talked about Frank’s trauma with him, even though she could perceive all the post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms: “yes, he sat on occasion for hours in the quiet - numb, unwilling to talk” (21). The only moment she brings it up is when Frank had a psychotic outbreak in a church convention. The damaged soldier, who is still haunted by the specter of war, has no goals or hopes and his only concern is staying alive. Frank cannot talk about either the war or the breakdown. His only words were: ‘“It won’t happen again. Promise”’ (77). After the episode, Lily deals with Frank’s indifference with disappointment silence and cannot help but think she has been shouldering a tilted man. The Korean War veteran realizes that love is not enough and departs to rescue his sister.

During Frank’s journey back home, some good samaritans, such as Reverend Locke and Billy Watson, generously offer Frank material and emotional assistance, advice or hospitality in the 1950s, an arduous time for African Americans since racial segregation was still in full swing, especially in southern states. At such time, blacks were often treated like criminals; they could be easily accused of vagrancy or routinely be subjected to a random stop-and-frisk.

The act of going back to Georgia to rescue Cee makes Frank mimic a behavior he has always had. Since their childhood, they have had to rely on their mutual love and

sheltering, inasmuch as they have been deprived of affection by their parents and grandparents. They were raised like orphans without the caring and nurturing atmosphere children need. Conversely, Frank has always made his sister feel safe. After the episode of the man who tried to abuse Cee, Frank becomes a protective and affectionate surrogate father, while Cee is the lodestar for their journey, both interior and exterior. Like a point of reference, Cee is the one who symbolically indicates the direction to her brother and, consequently, to their healing. Besides, her nickname Cee resembles the verb to see. Therefore, her character can be interpreted as a guide, a person that upsets the typical trauma escapism, advocating and contributing immensely to their progress and growth, by forcing them to actually look inside in order to become aware of their traumas. Eventually, Frank manages to rescue Cee from the villainous Dr. Beau. In this sense, the siblings' destinies are inevitably intertwined, for only together can they achieve redemption.

In like manner, Ethel and the other townswomen, who have their ancestors' wisdom, also play an important part as healing agents, for they become Cee's surrogate mothers. As seen in *Beloved*, besides the physical cure, the elder women can help and guide young girls, improving their self-image and building up their feelings of self-worth.

When Frank arrives at Miss Ethel Fordham's house, he hears singing: '"Nearer, my God, to Thee,"' a religious song, which has the function of bringing lost individuals back to the community (116). Ethel's and other females' curative practices, rooted primarily in black tradition, contrast with the patriarchal medicine that injured Cee and left Frank with nightmares and hallucinations. In spite of his severe mental disorder, the doctors that treated the Korean War veteran just sent him home, informing him that "the craziness would leave in time. They knew all about it, but assured him it would pass.

Just stay away from alcohol, they said" (18). Together with Dr. Beau, who performed on Cee his barbaric eugenic experiments, there is an opposition between the distanced, disembodied objective view of science of white culture and the black women's ancestral, more humane and close to nature approach to healing. Again, Morrison makes clear that what determines the choosing of women over men in the process of healing is that female perceptiveness is superior to men's logical thinking. As seen in *Beloved*, there is a rejection of logical approach, since it does not serve much in the restoration of a traumatized self. That is why Frank "was blocked from visiting the sickroom by every woman in the neighborhood" (119). He was banned from seeing and knowing about his sister's state, for "his maleness would worsen her condition" and Miss Ethel prohibited him to be on the porch (119).

In standard medicine techniques there is no storytelling, no attempts of putting trauma into words; there is no empathetic listener. That is why the welcoming community of women becomes a critical factor in helping Cee cope with her scarring memories. Ethel and the other black females cure Cee and mentor her in the path of self-appreciation and self-love. In their ancestral wisdom, these matriarchs know that the girl necessitates to be healed not just physically, but also mentally: "when she was allowed to sit modestly in a rocking chair, was the demanding love of Ethel Fordham, which soothed and strengthened her the most" (125). These women take care of Cee and nurse her to life, like mothers. In this sense, there is a deep contrast between the cold and loveless home they lived in when they were children and the warm and welcoming home that these women offer them:

> Surrounded by their comings, and goings, listening to their talk, their songs, following their instructions, Cee had nothing to do but pay them the attention she had never given them before. They were nothing like

> Lenore, who'd driven Salem hard, and now, suffering a minor stroke, did nothing at all. (122-123)

During her curative process, Cee gains self-assurance and self-reliance. She had been "branded early as an unlovable, barely tolerated 'gutter child"' and "had agreed with the label and believed herself worthless," but the community of spiritual healers assist her in moving beyond victimization into self-respect and self-determination, providing her with a counter-narrative of empowerment (128-129).

At the end of the story, the girl has undergone a metamorphosis from an insecure and powerless infant into a mature young woman. As a result, Cee finally realizes that Frank's devotion towards her has not strengthened her. All the women who have healed her were not silly and she wanted to be like them and never need rescue again: "meantime her brother was there with her, which was very comforting, but she didn't need him as she had before" (131). Indeed, when Cee tells Frank she can never have children, she cries and he moves toward her. She rejects his solace, pushing his hands away. Frank tells her not to cry, but Cee recognizes crying as a cathartic experience which mends psychic wounds because it helps release painful emotions and process frightful hurting memories: '"Why not? I can be miserable if I want to. You don't need to try and make it go away. It shouldn't go away. It's just as sad as it ought to be and I'm not going to hide from what's true just because it hurts"' (131). Cee breaks the crypt first when she is taken care by the community of women and now again when she tells Frank about the infertility trauma.

As a numbing, cryptonymic defense mechanism, individuals shut their hearts in order not to feel pain. And yet, keeping buried or restraining emotions are coping strategies that do not lead to redemption. However, the ability of crying, usually associated with weakness and women, brings about trauma recovery and transformation

as Frank cries too: "his eyes burned and he blinked rapidly to forestall what he had not done since he was a toddler. Not even with Mike in his arms or whispering to Stuff had his eyes burned that way. True, his vision was occasionally deceitful, but he had not cried. Not once" (132). By facing her own traumatic experience and putting it into words, Cee can help Frank do the same as well.

Frank legitimates the crypt lodged inside his chest when he hides the monstrousness of war. When reporting to the narrator and the reader the incident related to the Korean girl, Frank lies for he cannot admit such a horrible act and blames his fellow guard. He hides it and later tells his listeners: "*I have to say something to you right now. I have to tell the whole truth. I lied to you because I lied to me. I hid it from you because I hid it from me"* (133, italics in original). He finds out it is better to put such a traumatic incident into language because his sister Cee tells him she feels there is a girl waiting to be born from her. She opens up to him after she was told she could not have children anymore. Because his sister could talk about it and now was facing her problems, he felt encouraged to do the same. The child killing was crypted inside of him. The girl was dead in real life, but alive within Frank at the same time, waiting for him to step up and really tell the whole truth:

> *Maybe that little girl wasn't waiting around to be born to her. Maybe it was already dead, waiting for me to step up and say how.*
>
> *I shot the Korean girl.*
>
> *I am the one who she touched.*
>
> *I am the one who made her smile.*
>
> *I am the one she said "Yum-yum" to.*
>
> *I am the one she aroused.*
>
> *A child. A wee little girl.*

> *I didn't think. I didn't have to.*
>
> *Better she should die.*
>
> *How could I let her live after she took me down to a place I didn't know was in me?* (133- 134, italics in original)

After the confession, Frank tells the narrator that he or she can continue writing, but he thought it was better for the listeners to know the truth. The protagonist finally embraces his suffering and confronts his traumatic recollections. This way, both siblings are able to face the ghosts kept crypted for a long time and can liberate the traumatic phantoms and themselves through talking and telling stories.

In the end, the siblings finally come to terms with their past when they re-signify a childhood experience in which they accidentally witnessed the burial of a black men. Such an event marked their lives and now that the crypt is finally accessible and they can face the ghost of the past. It is known that "rememory's" healing effect is not only related to the remembrance of the traumatic event that initiates the haunting, but also with its reenactment (43). In the last chapter of *Home*, the primal scene of this burial is reproduced as a final redemptive act. Frank is told that the stud farm in which they watched the burial is a place that runs dogfights now. He is later informed that the place carries "more like men-treated-like-dog fights" (138). Frank finds out the corpse belonged to a man who had been murdered by his own son, Jerome. His father had insisted that he killed him so as to save his life.

Then, the opening image of horses that rose up like men: "*I really forgot about the burial. I only remembered the horses. They were so beautiful. And they stood like men*," are actually men fighting (5, italics in original). Frank remembers them as horses, which can be seen as the animalization and dehumanization of black men by a white racist supremacist society.

It is important that the protagonists reconcile with their past so that their personal and collective wounds can heal, but also to prevent the erasure of their communal identity and history. When the siblings go back to the farm they used to sneak off to, in order to give the black man a proper burial, they are able to conjure up the spirits of the blacks' racial past, which empowers them and all African Americans: ". . . .Frank placed the bone-filled quilt that was first a shroud, now a coffin" (144). This reenactment of a trauma scene symbolizes a recuperative force, so as to avoid cultural amnesia. It is necessary to remember not only as a recuperative and cathartic action, but also to reclaim African American culture, which might easily vanish, forasmuch as blacks are submitted to the white Western culture. In addition, when the siblings place the remains in Cee's quilt, they finally achieve restoration and regeneration for the quilt suggests, through scraps of cloth, the assemblage of the characters' and all blacks' past life events or memories. When Cee is recovering at Miss Ethel's house, women teach her how to quilt, symbolizing the reconstruction of a self once split and the acceptance of her predicament. Patchworking also signals a parallel between individual and collective processes of recovery; personal and cultural trauma.

Despite experiencing terrible childhood and appalling events away from home, at the end of the novel, Frank and Cee arrive and want to stay in Lotus. This trip reverses black slaves' journey to the north of the United States in search of freedom and a better life. So, in a sense, returning home and going to the south is somehow a way not to forget the legacy of slavery. The reconciliation with an ominous past allows the understanding of history. The African American past must be remembered before blacks can move on, since traumatic amnesia can only impair the victims' existences both in the present and future. There is a claim for facing the haunting ghosts, whose traces can be tracked down to the times of slavery and the Middle Passage. Although the trauma of

slavery and racism resists an easy closure, the haunting specters of the racist past must be laid to rest and ancestors must be paid homage.

Moreover, during the process of going back home, Frank, the broken soldier, shows visible signs of improvement in spite of his deep psychological wounds. Interestingly, the more he approaches Lotus, the more able he is to achieve atonement:

> Sitting on the train to Atlanta, Frank suddenly realized that those memories, powerful as they were, did not crush him anymore or throw him into paralyzing despair. He could recall every detail, every sorrow, without needing alcohol to steady him. Was this the fruit of sobriety? (100)

A once hated godforsaken town becomes familiar and pleasant to his eyes: "Waving occasionally at passing neighbors or those doing chores on their porches, he could not believe how much he had once hated this place. Now it seemed both fresh and ancient, safe and demanding" (132). The Korean War veteran is now able to get rid of his ghosts: he is aware of his unsettling recollections, but they do not crush or paralyze him anymore.

Furthermore, the name of the town the siblings have to return to refers to the flower *Nelumbo nucifera*, an aquatic plant that plays a central role in Indian religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. Usually, in those religions, the Lotus flowers are associated with divine beauty and purity. It normally grows in water and it needs a nutrient-rich loamy soil. Because of that, the growing and unfolding of petals is frequently involved with the concept of the expansion of the soul for the growth of its pure beauty from the mud of its origin holds a benign spiritual promise. While it is growing from the mud, it remains unstained and pure. That is why the lotus flower is a symbol of purity of the body, speech, and mind as while rooted in the mud, its flowers

blossom on long stalks as if floating above the muddy waters of attachment and desire. It is also symbolic of detachment as drops of water easily slide off its petals.

Such symbolism can be associated with the siblings' journey back home to a town called Lotus. At the end of the narrative, there is a return to the first scene, where the novel begins. Evidently, the novel ends in a full circle of Frank and Cee's circular journeys of renewal, for they experience a change, signaling the awakening of a new man and woman. After being born and growing old in muddy waters, a symbol of childhood and life traumas, the siblings end their journey coming back to the same place of origin, where it all started. Only when they are able to return to Lotus and face the loamy soil of traumatic experiences once again, they find atonement and can blossom as newborn human beings. Instead of remaining in escapism and silence, feeding the phantoms inside the crypt, they break it through language, upsetting the traumatic pattern, making relief possible through the thriving of new petals. Thus, the narrative makes a call to both characters to self-reshape, to restore their balance and become active agents capable to transform themselves. When they return to Lotus and to its community, the process has been completed, the circle of trauma has been closed. Moreover, through Frank and Cee Money, a light is shed on African Americans' ability to recuperate after the traumatic life events in their healing journeys towards self-realization and wholeness.

In chapter seventeen, the reader and the narrator encounter Frank's voice one last time. After Cee and Frank have buried the remains under a sweet bay tree "split down the middle, beheaded, undead - spreading its arms, one to the right, one to the left," (144) Frank stares at it saying:

> *It looked so strong.*
>
> *So beautiful.*

Hurt down in the middle.

But alive and well. (147, italics in original)

Revealing a true metaphor of trauma and healing, the tree illustrates the regeneration of a traumatized self. The process of coming to terms with the past is difficult and like the tree, it leaves an ineradicable void inside: Cee's damaged womb and Frank's hook in the chest. But also, resembling the tree, finding atonement after such traumatic events is to be hurt in the middle, but healed and changed.

2.4 Conclusion

Both novels suggest that the self only exists as a part of an interdependent network of community members rather than an individualistic unit. Actually, the individual's existence within a greater unit is vital for the development of collective identity. As has been noted, in Morrison's *Beloved* and *Home*, the community succeeds in embracing its members, offering acceptance and safety. By doing so, the black society shapes the protagonists' identities through revision of communal actions which brings self-recognition and self-knowledge for both characters and the community.

Sethe's, Denver's, Frank's and Cee's journey in search of identity is grounded in mutual reliance between them and the community in a way that personal growth is intrinsically related to a group of people. The development of a single member's self-confidence is accompanied and spiritually supported by others. Although there are times when the social group may fail to play its role by being passive or unsympathetic towards its members, common paths lead later to mutual understanding and unity.

The present chapter has portrayed roads to personal and collective recognition. The protagonists strive to reconcile with their history for they are traumatized individuals making the gradual process of going inside and breaking the crypt. It

requires going back to revisit and "rememory" traumatic experiences in a way to face a horrific past of dehumanization and deprivation (43).

Gaining collective freedom when rememorizing ancestral heritage through a spiritual quest is equally important on the individual level. Unquestionably, both works present communal and individual path to healing as intrinsically related and intertwined. The characters' and the community's restoration allows them to reenact their actions but with a change, for there is a distinguishable predominance of reciprocal support so both community and individuals can revisit their past with safety. This compassion and mutual help contributes to the feeling of wholeness in a way that the formation of a personal identity would not be possible if it were not portrayed in a communal frame.

Also, I have demonstrated that in both works the process of healing happens when the characters are able to put their traumatic experiences into words. When they are able to tell their stories and narrate what happened to them, healing becomes possible. As shown, coming to terms with the past involves storytelling and for that to happen, the characters' must be able to access a psychic crypt where they lodged the phantoms and the ghosts of traumatic memories and experiences. In Morrison's *Beloved* and *Home*, the crypt is broken into only through discourse. It is only when the protagonists can talk about bad experiences and tell their story that the healing process happens.

In both novels, the process of traumatic storytelling implies as well an empathetic listener, who recognizes that one's story is the story of all. In this sense, this empathetic response lies within the community that embraces their traumatized members, offering shelter, physical and mental restoration. This way, both individual and community can come to terms with a traumatic past. Although it is unchangeable, both are able to understand how they are shaped by it when confronting it with honesty

and compassion. This confrontation is, of course, different: it does not happen only because of past resolutions, but it happens because individual and community have challenges for the future. Therefore, to remember those who are gone, to tell their stories and bring them forward is to honor their history, which have shaped the world as we know it. Restoring and recuperating those stories and languages permit the reclamation of an integrated community with all its members, keeping away the shattering effects of trauma.

Final Remarks

What is a crypt? No crypt
presents itself. The grounds
[lieux] are so disposed as to
disguise and to hide:
something, always a body in
some way. But also to
disguise the act of hiding
and to hide the disguise: the
crypt hides as it holds.
-Jacques Derrida,
"Foreword: *Fors:*
The Anglish Words
of Nicolas Abraham
and Maria Torok"

After experiencing traumatic horrific events, Sethe, Frank and Cee Money unconsciously create within a crypt where they lodge psychologically painful occurrences. These memories are accommodated therein because protagonists cannot fully possess the traumatic experience at the time it occurred and, therefore, they do not have a complete understanding of what has happened to them. As a mechanism of psychological defense, the minds of Sethe, Frank and Cee do not assimilate the entire content of shocking experiences. The problem is, as I have demonstrated throughout my discussion, that later, this content returns with maximum strength in the forms of dreams, flashbacks and hallucinations, disturbing both protagonists and preventing a total restoration of the psyche.

Both novels also show that trauma is detectable in the silences and gaps left out in language. It is imperative that Sethe, Frank and Cee open up and engage in storytelling so that healing can be achieved. When they struggle in silence, phantoms of the past come to haunt their present lives, preventing them from moving on, for they are stuck in the time of the traumatic experience. Because of that, they frequently lose their sense of temporality. Due to this insistent past presence of trauma, Sethe, Frank and Cee

plunge in behavioral repetitions of traumatic experiences. They inevitably end up passing on the legacy of their trauma to people around them, even without saying a word about it.

The novels suggest that the more silent the characters are, the worse is their relationship with others. Sethe, Frank and Cee isolate themselves in quietness and have trouble relating to other people. Due to lack of contact, everyone around is affected by their inaccessible narratives. As shown throughout this dissertation, the protagonists' crypts work through linguistic mechanisms that hide the footprints of traumatic events of the past. Sethe's, Frank's and Cee's crypts represent cases of suffering unspoken. Because they are remote and unapproachable, their discourses related to traumatic experiences spread tacit behavioral patterns that affect their families, acquaintances and the community around.

According to the theory of cryptonymy, in order to come to terms with trauma, Sethe, Frank and Cee must uncover the phantom of the past and expose its secrets. They achieve it when they narrate their stories. In *Home*, there is the use of metafiction, since the reader gets to know Frank's story through him and a narrator. In *Beloved*, Sethe opens up to Paul D, Denver and Beloved. In both novels, the process of healing reaches its final point with the help of the community of women, whose rituals help protagonists bring the traumatic experience back into the order of knowledge. During their healing processes, Sethe, Frank and Cee can finally put their past into words which pave the way for the community to also enter their realms of memory and find atonement.

This dissertation contributes, in several fronts, to the study of the relationship between literature and trauma studies. As discussed in chapter one on the issue of memory and forgetting, I argue about the importance of narratives like Morrison's *Beloved* and *Home* because they shed light on the important question of hegemonic

national historiographies. By bringing once marginalized voices to the center, Morrison exposes these conveniently silenced histories, thus providing a heterogeneous, but more holistic perspective about the rise of nations such as the United States.

That is why, in this line of reasoning, I also point out the presentness of trauma in the lives of Sethe, Frank and Cee and demonstrate to what extent their psyches are affected by it. One of the consequences of this trauma presence is that protagonists have difficulty narrating their past traumatic experiences. Because they cannot assimilate the traumatic occurrences in their entirety, they lodge inside horrific events and their related words. The results are silenced, incommunicable historical narratives. Chapter one also shows how Sethe's and Frank's relations with others are disturbed. Transgenerational and cultural trauma are present in both novels. I point out that the individual crypt mirrors the collective one because collective memory is supra-individual, causing protagonists and communities to share a traumatic collective past in *Beloved* and *Home.*

In chapter two my concerns are directed towards the process of healing. First, I have prioritized the discourse of motherhood in *Beloved* for the slave trade of women and the familial disconnections the institution of slavery forced upon them can be related to the process of healing performed by women. I have commented that such family disruptions heat Baby Suggs and Sethe who recognize themselves as maternal bodies whose connections to their offspring remain intact.

Secondly, I have demonstrated how Denver, Sethe's only remaining daughter, inaugurates her entrance into womanhood through language and at the same time is able to ask for help. The remembrance of her grandmother's words is what gives Denver enough strength to step outside the 124 Bluestone Road and go to Lady Jones's house. In addition, it is when the community remembers Baby Suggs's preaching and the free communal times in the Clearing that mutual understanding and compassion allow a

strong connection in sisterhood, especially in the end of the novel, when the townswomen reunite in front of 124 Bluestone Road in order to rescue Sethe and Denver from Beloved's ghost. It is only through individual and communal revision that Sethe and the community could reach atonement and come to terms with a horrific past.

In chapter two, I also discussed that Frank's journey to Lotus can be seen as a healing passage from devastating memories of war and a traumatic childhood to recovery at home. During the trip, Frank finds people that help him, providing counsel, courteous and generous reception. He also meets Lily, with whom he spends some time, but is unable to open up. Frank is still damaged and has hallucinations and bad dreams. Lily does not ask him any questions about his past and he is silent most of the time, making their relationship difficult. There is one time Frank has a breakdown and Lily makes herself available to talk to him about it. Frank, on the other hand, does not access the crypt and is not inclined to speak. Although it is noticeable an amelioration in Frank's traumatic symptoms when he is with Lily, he could not put his severe mental and emotional distress memories into words and, eventually, their relationship ends.

He left Lily and went to rescue his injured sister, taking her to their hometown. This is the time when the community of women plays a very important role in helping Cee heal. Through a series of rituals, quiltering, talking, providing physical and emotional assistance, townswomen are able to aid and improve Cee's body and mental health. Because Cee is now an autonomous, independent woman, she can help her brother find atonement through language as well. When she is able to open up to her brother, talk to him, experiment suffering and put it into words, she inspires Frank to do the same. They both cry, letting go of the living corpses that once lived in their chest.

In the end of the novel, both siblings reenact a traumatic childhood scene, re-signifying it, for now they can experience suffering from a safe place. They buried the

corpse of a black man under a sweet bay tree, giving it a dignified, respectful burial. By doing this, they are able to "rememory" not only their traumatic past as individuals, but they reconcile with all African Americans' horrific past by paying homage to a person that came before them, an ancestor (43).

Both novels present the process of individual healing exclusively attached to a communal framework. Healing is only possible when both individual and community can understand each other, when both can play the role of an empathetic listener. In this sense, this empathetic response lies within the community that embraces its traumatized member, offering shelter, physical and mental restoration. This way, Sethe, Frank, Cee and the community can come to terms with a traumatic past. Although the past is unchangeable, they are able to understand how they are shaped by it when confronting it with honesty and compassion. This confrontation is, of course, different: it does not happen only because of past resolutions, but it happens because Sethe, Frank, Cee and the community have challenges for the future.

Coming to terms with the past involves storytelling. For that to happen, the protagonists must be able to access a psychic crypt where they lodged the phantoms and the ghosts of traumatic memories and experiences. In Morrison's *Beloved* and *Home*, the crypt is broken into only through discourse. It is only when Sethe, Frank and Cee can talk about bad experiences and tell their story that the healing process happens.

When the author writes at the end of *Beloved*: "it was not a story to pass on" (323), it marks the story of a personal, communal crypt. This breakdown of language forces a listening to the silence, an acknowledging of the gaps in language in order to come to terms with individual and collective trauma. As seen in the present work, to remember those who are gone, to tell their stories and bring them forward is to honor their history which shaped the world as we know it. Morrison's *Beloved* and *Home*

break through silence and trauma attacks on language, so as to reintegrate conflicted stories into a communal and political space.

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