



UNIVERSITETET I AGDER

# Like Stripes on a Chokecherry Tree

Representations of Trauma and Consolidation of History in Neo-slave Narratives.

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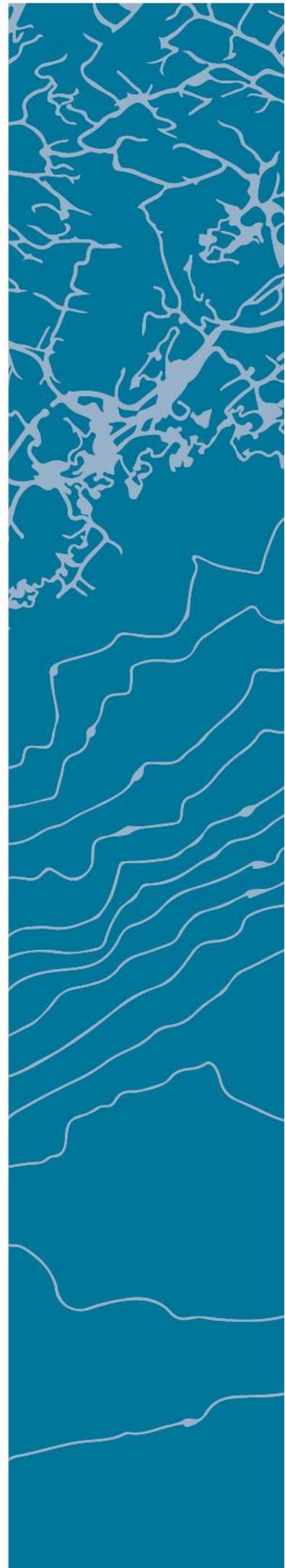
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## Abstract

Literature has long been utilised to provide commentary on social and political injustices, give voice to discriminated peoples, and provide context in relation to social and cultural history. The aim of this thesis was to analyse the representations of trauma and slavery in the novels *Kindred* by Octavia E. Butler and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison in order to determine to what extent these novels aid the consolidation of the trauma and history of slavery with contemporary understanding. This was achieved using the historical context of slavery alongside a trauma theoretical framework including, but not limited to, primary and secondary trauma, cultural trauma, prosthetic memory.

This thesis found that the author's initial motivation for writing their novel, in both cases, played a role in the type of trauma which was presented in each novel. This thesis has also found that differences in style, genre, narratology had a significant effect on each novel's ability to bridge the gap between past and present.

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## Introduction

For centuries literature has been used by authors from all walks of life as a platform upon which commentaries, criticisms and challenges of social, political, and historical practices might be voiced. Scholars of both literature and history are able to, through the application of the theoretical framework of their fields, scrutinise works of literature in order to uncover social and political climates and contemporary attitudes towards issues such as race, gender, culture and identity. The development of African American literature as a literary genre provides scholars with a unique opportunity to observe the development of the culture and identity of a historically subjugated people. Over the last one hundred years, readers have witnessed a shift away from traditional slave narratives to commentaries on social and racial inequality, and back again to the re-claiming of the slave narrative in the form of the neo-slave narrative. African American authors of the latter half of the twentieth century have used this subgenre of African American literature in order to not only give voice to, question, and re-claim their own cultural history, but also to educate and aid understanding of the traumatic nature of this history to a broader audience.

It is the aim of this thesis to investigate and analyse two neo-slave narratives written by African American authors in the latter half of the twentieth century. The analysis and discussion of these novels will determine in what way the representation of trauma and traumatic events in these novels aid the consolidation of the history and the trauma of slavery with contemporary understanding. This will be achieved with the guidance of key elements of trauma theory and an understanding of significant historical aspects of slavery as an institution and will be anchored in the close reading of concrete examples from the novels.

Due to the scope of this thesis, it is important to first address the need to differentiate between *slave narratives* and *neo-slave narratives* as literary genres, before presenting the novels that have been chosen. Vastly popular and widely published as abolitionist propaganda, slave narratives are historical documents written between the 18<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century by fugitive and former slaves served the primary function of demonstrating the truth behind slavery, life on plantations and eventual escape. These narratives, with

a few exceptions, are autobiographical in nature and served to give a voice to slaves and ultimately contributed to the abolishment of slavery. Neo-slave narratives, as the term suggests, are slave narratives written by a new generation of authors who themselves have not experienced slavery. Unlike 'traditional' slave narratives, which are autobiographical, neo-slave narratives are instead entirely fictional or are loosely inspired by a true story.

### Introducing the novels.

Of the numerous neo-slave narratives that haven't been written in the past decades, the two which have been chosen offer unique perspectives in terms of the areas of interest of this thesis. Firstly, *Kindred* by Octavia E. Butler written in 1979, merges the genre of the slave narrative with fantasy and science fiction in order to superimpose a contemporary black woman into the antebellum south during the height of slavery where upon she is subjected to a range of trials and tribulations in order to ensure the continuation of her family line. It is these trials and tribulations, and the resulting trauma associated with them that will become the focus of the *Kindred* analysis chapter.

The second novel of interest, *Beloved* written by Toni Morrison in 1986, also merges the genre of slave narrative with elements of fantasy and the supernatural. Unlike *Kindred*, however, it does not seek to superimpose the ideals of a contemporary black woman onto slavery era America, but rather serves as a detailed exploration of the trauma, told from multiple points of view, experienced by a fugitive slave and her family following escape and emancipation. It must be noted that while *Kindred* does not have any specific ties to a particular real person, Morrison's *Beloved* is loosely based on the true story of Margaret Garner (Morrison, *On Beloved*, 2020).

### Theoretical Framework

Having introduced the novels, it is now important to explore and define the development of trauma as a field within psychology and as a field within literary criticism. The definition of trauma as a field will seek to define the characteristics of a traumatic event, the resulting psychological condition which may arise following such

an event, as well as the differing effects a traumatic event may have on both individuals and a broader collective community. This introductory chapter will also explore trauma literary theorists such as Cathy Caruth, Kai Erikson, Jeffrey C. Alexander and Ron Eyerman in order to sufficiently link the psychological effects of trauma and their representations in the novels. This will serve as the theoretical framework upon which the close reading and analysis of the novels as well as the discussion chapter will be based. In addition to this, it will also be crucial to establish the historical context for the novels, such as a slave's life on a plantation, the logistics of escape, political agendas, among others.

The motivation to include such an extensive introduction in this thesis is to establish a baseline of knowledge concerning the areas of interest in order to more accurately analyse the events brought to attention, as well as serve as a point of reference for the following chapters.

### Defining Trauma.

In order to fully appreciate the representation of traumatic events in literature and their subsequent consequences, it is important to first understand what exactly constitutes a traumatic event. According to the Royal College of Psychiatrists, what constitutes a traumatic event can stem from a range of sources, such as: "serious accidents, bereavement, violent personal assaults, military combat, natural and man-made disasters and terrorist attacks.", among others (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2016). It is not surprising that as a result of these events, that victims exhibit one or several symptoms as a consequence, which may be mild to debilitating in severity in the time following the event. This is not to say that every victim presents such symptoms immediately following a traumatic event or even at all, yet the fact that a definition and categorisation of such symptoms has been established in recent decades shows the prevalence for it.

The term Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) first came into use in the United States of America during the 1970s as a result to the need of psychiatrists to classify and diagnose stress symptoms found in Vietnam War veterans. However, PTSD was not officially recognised as a legitimate mental disorder until 1980 by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). Despite its official acceptance by the APA in 1980, this is

not to suggest that prominent psychiatrists and psychoanalysts had not recognised the necessity for treatment of such symptoms in their patients in the decades leading up to 1980. On the contrary, prominent minds in the field of psychoanalysis were debating the most appropriate treatment methods for patients with stress symptoms as a result of active combat as early as the First World War (Luckhurst, 2008).

Stress symptoms in individuals as a direct result of active combat had prior to this period been accredited to blanket mental disorders related to hysteria and were widely rejected by military institutions as examples of weakness of character and constitution or cowardice. Upon the development of more mechanised and less personalised warfare, this meaning that soldiers rarely met their enemy face-to-face on the battlefield, instances of stress-like symptoms in soldiers returning from the frontline were on a rapid incline. It was observed that these symptoms often manifested in a very physical manner, often in the absence of actual physical trauma or injury, indicating that it was a matter of mental trauma. Despite this, victims of this mental trauma still faced incredible difficulty in finding validation in regards to their disability.

While the focus so far being on PTSD as it is related to active combat, this is far from the leading cause of PTSD in sufferers, especially outside of times of active conflict. Victims of interpersonal assault are also likely to develop symptoms of PTSD. It has been suggested that this is due to the fact that interpersonal assault is, in theory, 'outside of the normal range of human experience' (Brown, 1995). In her paper *Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma*, Laura Brown discusses the assumptions raised towards victims of interpersonal violence, particularly violence of a sexual nature. She indicates that there is an assumption made within the justice system concerning victims of repetitive sexual violence, that given that the violence is repetitive, that it somehow is no longer 'outside of the normal range' for that victim (Brown, 1995, p.101). She continues to argue that there is discrimination in the treatment of PTSD sufferers based on the type of violence or traumatic event they experienced, " the "self-defeating" woman who's been in a battering relationship is treated quite differently (and less well) than is the survivor of a train-wreck, even when the presenting symptoms are similar." (Brown, 1995, p.102). Interestingly, Brown proposes that victims of violence of a sexual nature such as incest, rape and spousal abuse, at least at the time of the paper's publication, suffered instances of victim blame

or being labeled as a 'willing victim'. By 'willing victim', Brown is referring to victims of repetitive violence who, in theory, had opportunity to escape said violence yet in fear of the repercussions of doing so, did not. One cannot overlook that fact that this sort of discrimination and blasé attitude towards the suffering of the victims is similar to the experience of combat veterans before PTSD was more widely accepted as a mental disorder.

It has been established that a traumatic event is one that is sudden, for which the victim is unprepared for, and 'outside' the range of normal human experience. Yet there is evidence to speak to the prospect of some elements and symptoms of PTSD present in individuals who have never experienced a traumatic event, but rather have assumption that it may happen at any time. On this matter, Brown refers to her colleague, Maria Root, who suggests that "for all woman living in a culture where there is a high base rate of sexual assault and where such behavior is considered normal and erotic by men, as it is in North American culture, is an exposure to insidious trauma." (Brown, 1995, p.107). To better serve the subject matter of this thesis, this principle could be reformulated and follow as such; 'for all slaves living in a culture where there is a high base rate of physical violence and where such behaviour is considered normal, is an exposure to insidious trauma'.

Another aspect of trauma theory from a psychoanalytic perspective is that of belated presentation of symptoms and repression of the memory of a traumatic event. On this particular subject, Freud is one of the many contributors with his methods of treating patients that experience trauma and present with belated symptoms later in life. In his paper *Remembering, repeating and working-through*, Freud criticises previous assumptions towards the treatment of repressed memory, focusing specifically on a psychoanalyst's presumption that their task was complete once the patient was made aware that they possessed repressed memories, as opposed to guiding said patient through the process of resolving them. He writes:

Finally, there was evolved the consistent technique used today, in which the analyst gives up the attempt to bring a particular moment or problem into focus. He contents himself with studying whatever is present for the time being on the surface of the patient's mind, and he employs the art of interpretation mainly for the purpose of

recognizing the resistances which appear there, and making them conscious to the patient. (Freud, 1958, p.147).

In highlighting this technique used by other psychoanalysts at the time, Freud indicates that this was not the best way to treat such patients. Although he does not refer to these repressed memories as implicitly traumatic, he does imply that due to the problematic symptoms that arise later in life in his patients, that these memories may be of a traumatic nature. He further speculates that there is a difference between conscious and non-conscious memories, particularly in relation to one's childhood, "In these processes it particularly often happens that something is 'remembered' which could never have been 'forgotten' because it was never at any time noticed- was never conscious." (Freud, 1958, p.149). Here Freud clearly defines a difference between repressed memories as a tactic of self-preservation, to be dealt with when one is mentally capable and memories that at the time of formation held no significant meaning, such as very early childhood memories which are later understood.

Perhaps the most critical point in Freud's paper is the statement that it is only *after* observing the patient's symptoms or 'repetitions' that the analyst has a comprehensive enough view to proceed further with treatment rather than the previous tendency. He writes "We have only made it clear to ourselves that the patient's state of being ill cannot cease with the beginning of his analysis, and that we must treat his illness, not as an event of the past, but as a present-day force." (Freud, 1958, p.151). This attitude towards following through with a patient's treatment has undoubtedly contributed to the psychoanalytic practices that many are familiar with today.

Having, to a degree, established what may be considered a traumatic event, its consequent effects and a brief history of the treatment of such effects, it is now important to explore the role trauma and traumatic events have within the field literature and critical analysis. It cannot be left unsaid that this topic has long been subject to debate between prominent figures in the literary world. Perhaps one of the key opponents to the marriage of literature and traumatic events is the critical theorist, Theodor Adorno. Though his primary focus was on Auschwitz and other Second World War atrocities, he described the writing of lyric poetry in the aftermath of Auschwitz as 'barbaric' (Bond & Craps, 2020, p.47). According to authors Lucy Bond and Stef Craps,

however, Adorno is by no means indicating that traumatic events have no place within literature entirely, but rather that it is the 'transfiguration' and 'stylisation' that he was opposed to, "Atrocities such as the Holocaust must not be given meaning and transformed into images and artworks from which aesthetic pleasure can be derived, as this would 'do an injustice to the victims'" (Bond & Craps, 2020, p.47). In drawing a distinction between literature that is stylised and which evokes aesthetic pleasure and that which does not, the authors indicate that literature which is largely based on trauma or a traumatic event, such as the Holocaust, must not be consumed by readers for enjoyment purposes alone, nor produced with the intention of purely making a profit as is the case with other genres of literature. On the contrary, it appears that trauma literature ought to be produced with the intention of informing readers of the reality of an event, as a mode of relating to the reader the experience had by the author or as some sort of moral or ethical lesson to future readers.

Despite the fact that the moral dilemma concerning the place of representations of trauma in literature has been a topic of debate as early as the Second World War, trauma as a concept within literary studies did not emerge until the 1990s. It was during this time that scholar Cathy Caruth established herself as one of the key figures and pioneers of the field. In her introduction to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Caruth proposes that it is not, in fact, the traumatic event itself that triggers or is the cause of symptoms of PTSD, but it is rather the memory associated with the event which the sufferer is repeatedly exposed to that is the cause (Caruth, 1995, p.4). She also proposes a form of secondary trauma experienced by individuals who come into close contact with primary victims of trauma, and, having been exposed to the event through the primary victim become traumatized themselves. The main argument Caruth proposes, and which will be explored in more depth later, is that given that there is evidence of secondary sufferers who did not experience the event first hand, there is not always a direct link between traumatisation and an event. "One can live through what is held to be a traumatizing event without being traumatised, and one can be traumatized (manifest post-traumatic symptoms) without living through such an event." (Bond & Craps, 2020, p. 57).

Caruth also draws heavily on the works of Freud in terms of how victims of trauma process and consolidate the event with their memory of it. Freud was forced to reevaluate his position on repression of traumatic events after witnessing soldiers of the First World War experiencing nightmares after returning from the battlefield. This contradicted his previous belief that the manifestation of stress symptoms was the result of a trauma experience which had since been forgotten and was later manifesting as what he would later coin as repetitive compulsion. As Bond and Craps quote in their book, "It is not a case, according to Caruth, of repression, of an experience being registered, forgotten, and then returning; rather, there is 'an inherent latency within the experience itself.' (Bond & Craps, 2020, p.58). Caruth proposes, therefore, that traumatic events in and of themselves can be so debilitating that the sufferer is mentally incapable of comprehending, processing and consolidating the event until a later time. Further, Caruth recognises the need for a form of speech which will allow for the understanding of trauma, while at the same time, also allow for the incomprehensibility that trauma presents to be demonstrated.

For Caruth, it is inadequate to simply transform the trauma into a narrative memory of the past, as this "may lose both the precision and the force that characterizes traumatic recall" (Bonds & Craps, 2020, p.58). It is here that Caruth believes that literature may be of use in communicating trauma, as well as serving as a platform for the ethical duty of bearing witness to trauma. Literature and literary language, in Caruth's opinion, is unique in its ability to communicate and represent that which 'resists ordinary memory' (Bond & Craps, 2020, p.59). Not only does Caruth suggest that presenting trauma through literature would serve as a method towards simple understanding, but it would also function as a means of creating bonds between individuals, communities and cultures, as they bear witness to the event and develop an understanding of the event through literature.

Thus far, the focus of this introduction has predominantly been directed towards how traumatic events are experienced by individual victims. There is, however, something to say for how traumatic events and ordeals are experienced by a larger group or community, as will become evident in the analysis and discussion chapters. In his chapter *Notes on Trauma and Community*, Kai Erikson proposes that;

By collective trauma, on the other hand, I mean a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with "trauma". (Caruth, 1995, p.187).

Although Erikson is primarily concerned with how larger communities are affected by natural and man-made disasters, it is not a stretch of the imagination to apply the same principles to other forms of group traumas. These group traumas may include the imprisonment and abuse of Jews during the Second World War, the lesser discussed internment of Japanese Americans during the same period, but most relevantly, institutional slavery. Erikson writes; "The fault lines usually open to divide the people affected by the event from the people spared, [...] Those not touched try to distance themselves from those touched, almost as if they are escaping something spoiled, something contaminated, something polluted" (Caruth, 1995, p.189). The fault lines Erikson alludes to are indicative of humanity's natural aversion to disturbance, in essence, the separation of 'us' and 'them'. In distinguishing between groups of 'us' versus groups of 'them' it is not surprising that these groups then tend to withdraw from the community as a whole and to turn to each other for support in the wake of a traumatic event. This then provides an opportunity for the development of a culture unique to the withdrawn group, based on the common experience, this is a concept that will be addressed later in the chapter. "The point to be made here is not that calamity serves to strengthen the bonds linking people together -- it does not, most of the time -- but that shared experience becomes almost like a common culture, a source of kinship" (Caruth, 1995, p.190). This common culture or kinship between victims in the wake of similar sources of trauma will become apparent as the two literary works to be analysed in this thesis are explored. In addition to this, it will also be important to access how particular characters are eventually affected by the loss of this newfound kinship.

Working forward from Caruth's idea of a common culture in the wake of trauma, Jeffrey C. Alexander developed a theory of *Cultural Trauma*, which encompasses a group's collective consciousness following a traumatic event and which influences and changes the future identity of the collective. By this he means a culture developed by trauma

with which members of the same group use to identify themselves. He writes in his chapter *Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma* that “It is by constructing cultural traumas that social groups, national societies, and sometimes even entire civilizations not only cognitively identify the existence and source of human suffering but ‘take on board’ some significant responsibility for it.” (Alexander, 2004, p.1). He points out that there is some fallacy in the formation of cultural traumas as identity forming in that the trauma that the individuals within the culture identify with can become so encompassing that they may fail to recognise or overtly reject the trauma of others. Alexander suggests that this rejection “diffuse(s) their own responsibility for the suffering but often project the responsibility for their own suffering on these others. In other words, by refusing to participate in what I will describe as the process of trauma creation, social groups restrict solidarity, leaving others to suffer alone” (Alexander, 2004, p.1).

It is important to pinpoint what it is that forms a cultural trauma on a social level. Alexander explains that any given society can experience far-reaching disruptions which in and of themselves are not traumatic, such as the failure of societal institutions like school systems, governmental and economic systems. As the the failure of these social systems are not intrinsically traumatic, there must be some sort of transformation in the perception of these crises which make them traumatic. Alexander offers this explanation; “Trauma is not the result of a group experiencing pain, It is a result of this acute discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity’s sense of its own identity.” (Alexander, 2004, p.10). He explains further that the representation of social failures and subsequent pain are taken on as a fundamental threat to the collective’s sense of identity by the collective’s actors and as such integrate this pain into the collective’s cultural identity which in turn creates the cultural trauma.

Working off of Alexander’s theory of the formation of a cultural trauma, Ron Eyerman discusses the formation of African American Identity in his chapter *Cultural Trauma; Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity*. Eyerman speculates that it is not the act of slavery itself which is especially traumatic in terms of a collective experience, but rather how slavery is remembered by the collective. He writes “slavery was traumatic in retrospect, and formed a “primal scene” that could, potentially, unite all “African Americans” in the United States, whether or not they had themselves been slaves or had any knowledge of or feeling for Africa.” (Eyerman, 2004, p.60). It is critical

to point out that such a thing as an African American identity as it is known today, did not exist while slavery was still a legal institution, but rather came into fruition in the decades after its abolishment through the memories of former slaves. A distinction must be made here between those who directly experienced slavery, as individual experiences were surely traumatic, and the collective experiencing life in the wake of slavery. Eyerman writes further that “cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion.” (Eyerman, 2004, p.61). It can be argued that slavery is a cultural trauma, given the fact that the semblance of cohesion that black people had managed to achieve while they were enslaved was taken away when slavery was abolished, leaving them to form new identities and a new culture as free Americans, a prospect few had any experience with.

Moving on from cultural trauma, it is important to define a few other key elements within trauma theory which will be explored in the following chapters that describe the nature of certain types of secondary trauma. Firstly, *Postmemory*, a theory developed by Marianne Hirsch, describes the relationship that children of victims of a traumatic event have with the event itself. She proposes, as the term implies, that exposure to an event through the child’s parents can trigger the formation of memories of the event, despite the child not having lived through it. As Hirsch suggests, such a transference of memory between parent and a child born after an event, photography and other media coverage may aid the formation of these memories as they provide a visual insight to the trauma that narration and retelling cannot (Luckhurst, 2008, p.149).

From *Postmemory*, an additional type of memory formation was developed by Alison Landsberg, to account for the exposure to traumatic events by peoples not victimised or directly related to a victim of a traumatic event. *Prosthetic memory* is concerned with the availability of an individual’s or group’s previously private memory of trauma to a broader audience through the exposure of mass media, which allows them the ability to have an experience of the event. While Landsberg is not suggesting that the experience of these events through media is necessarily traumatizing, she does suggest that the exposure to these memories may serve to shape the readers perception

of the event and perhaps influence how the individual views potential political ties to the event (Bond & Craps, 2020, p.88).

### Historical Context

Having lightly delved into the realm of what trauma is as an event or experience, and the consequences of traumatic experiences both on the individual and collective level, it is now important to turn towards the historical context of this thesis. Though fictional, the two works of interest in this thesis, *Kindred* by Octavia Butler and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, have the enslavement of African Americans as the background in terms of plot. As both of the authors of these works conducted their own research into the history of slavery in the United States of America, in order to maintain some semblance of authenticity in their writing, it would therefore be necessary for this thesis to do so as well (Kenan, 1991 & Morrison, *On Beloved*, 2020). The two books this thesis will focus on a range of topics related to slavery in the United States of America, from the political aspect of ownership, escape from said ownership and the nature of punishment during slavery. As well as this, the works also explore the relationships between a master and slave in a plantation setting and family units and dynamics.

The subjugation of African Americans during the period of slavery was heavily influenced and driven by the political agendas of white men in positions of power and the economy. Even after the Civil War of 1861-1865 and the consequent abolition of slavery, it is still argued by some political scientists that there are lasting effects of the politics of slavery to be found in contemporary Southern politics. In their article *The Political Legacy of American Slavery*, Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen argue that the white populations of counties in Southern states that had a higher amount of slaves in the past, tend to have more conservative political inclinations in the present (Acharya, Blackwell, & Sen, 2016, p.621). They argue that the primary motivation for the laws concerning and restricting the freedom and movements of African Americans following their emancipation, was primarily a countermeasure to the sudden “increasing wages, labour costs and threatening the viability of the Southern plantation economy” (Acharya, Blackwell, & Sen, 2016, p.622). On paper, emancipated African Americans could tentatively expect to enjoy the same rights as any other American citizen. In

practice however, states in the Antebellum South were quick to enact so-called 'Black Codes' immediately following the Civil War, which required freed slaves to maintain a place of employment, often for extremely low wages, and often living in slave like conditions, or risk being imprisoned on charges of vagrancy. By the 1890s, thirty years following the end of the Civil War, Southern political officials began to enact policies of racial segregation and partook in voting interference of African Americans (Boyer, 2012, p.59).

Prior to the emancipation of African American slaves in 1865, an abundance of slaves partook in actions of quiet resistance, this included working more slowly and damaging tools and taking the punishment for doing so in order to disrupt the day-to-day workings and productivity of plantations. Many slaves were encouraged by the notion of freedom, however, to attempt to escape their bond illegally. The primary locations fugitive slaves escaped to, were the far more lenient Northern states, with crossing the border into Canada as the ultimate goal. In order to do this, fugitive slaves took advantage of a series of safe-houses and river crossings with the aid of returning freed slaves and sympathetic whites and abolitionists, the knowledge of which had been mostly spread through word of mouth. This network is most famously known as the 'The Underground Railroad' with the assistance of Harriet Tubman. Though slave owners punished fugitive slaves severely for their escape attempts, it would prove that they were far from discouraged (Boyer, 2012, p.47).

In an attempt to understand why slaves took such a risk, it is important to understand how 'The Underground Railroad' came to be and what policies were put into place to ensure a slave's safety upon reaching the Northern states and Canada. According to their book *The Underground Railroad: Next Stop Toronto!* Authors Shadd, Cooper and Frost indicate that a piece of legislature passed by the Upper Canadian parliament in 1793 banning the importation of slaves into the area could be the starting point of the movement of fugitive slaves into Canada, thus triggering the necessity of a network safe houses and crossing points along the way that would later become known as 'The Underground Railroad'. The locations of these safehouses and crossing points were largely spread by means of word of mouth, and were identifiable with markers such as lanterns and quilts left hanging outside on the porch, which indicated a friendly reception. The sympathetic white owners of these houses would, at their own risk,

house and feed fugitive slaves until it was safe for them to move on. Though this Act did not immediately free slaves upon arrival, it did, however, allow for the children of escaped slave to gain their freedom upon reaching the age of 25 (Shadd, Cooper, & Frost, 2002, p.17). Although many slaves had already been escaping from the South to seek freedom in the North, the number of slaves fleeing exploded in 1850 with the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act, which required by law that any suspected slave unable to prove their freedom, found in the Northern states be apprehended and returned to their masters (Shadd, Cooper, & Frost, 2002, p.21).

Having established how slaves escaped their lives of bondage, it is natural to explore the circumstances they sought to escape from. While it is obvious that the main factor of escape was gaining freedom, the conditions under which slaves were forced to live could also be considered a major catalyst to this desire. In his book *Black Southerners 1619-1869*, John B. Boles draws an interesting contrast between slaves and poor white farmers. He writes that their living conditions were not all that dissimilar, and yet, makes the distinction that while poor white farmers had the luxury to travel west and reestablish themselves in better conditions, slaves, of course, did not enjoy this luxury (Boles, 2015, p.88). He writes further that the living conditions slaves only minutely improved with the wealth of their masters. Clothing was often limited to one set of clothing for winter and one for summer, though children were usually not given clothing until the age of six or seven. Living quarters were primitive, from 'lean tos' to shodily built, basic log cabins shared by one or two families. Food, of course, was equally inadequate. Although Boles emphasizes that unless in extreme situations, the quantity of food was not lacking, but rather the nutritional value, which in turn caused a range health issues and must have affected the productivity of the farming enterprise (Boles, 2015, p.88).

Legally, as Boles writes, the traditional family unit was a non-entity in the slave community. He claims that this was due in part, to the emasculating nature of ownership, but also to the fear of slave sales and the consequential breakage of family bonds (Boles, 2015, p.90). It can be reasoned then, why there are so many accounts of escaped and freed slaves returning to their place of ownership to retrieve and break free their family members, of which Harriet Tubman is the most famous example

(Shadd, Cooper, & Frost, 2002). As there was no legal definition of a black family unit during the time of slavery, Boles argues that slaves often turned to symbolic actions such as growing and making food together to reinforce their ideas of familial relationships. This ascertainment has been corroborated by other historians and researchers. Historian Emily West, writes in her article *Tensions, Tempers and Temptations: Marital Discord Among Slaves in Antebellum South Carolina*, that the exploration into the marital and familial life of slaves has been neglected. She speculates that this may in part be as a consequence of a limited variety of primary sources, the lack of interest of documenting such relationships at the time, except for cases involving extreme violence and death, and the preoccupation of previous historians with maintaining the illusion of a patriarchal family unit structure. She does assert however that relationships between slaves were not just for pragmatic purposes, “Romantic love and ties of affection were put before all other considerations when it came to choosing a partner, despite the stresses imposed by living under the peculiar institution and the interference of masters in the lives of their slaves” (West, 2004, p.2). By ‘interference’, West is referring to the tendency of slave masters to force unions between their slaves in order to promote procreation, and in turn, to increase the value and assets of their plantations as a form of long term investment.

Regardless of the living conditions explained above, there is evidence to suggest that enslaved black family units still strived to meet what was considered as ‘proper’ in terms of gender roles as a symbolic gesture to freedom: “They [slaves] were expected to fulfill certain duties and obligations: slave women were expected to be domesticated, while men were obliged to act as protectors and providers” (West, 2004, p.4). She explains further that slaves often clung to these ideals specifically because of the nature of slavery and that the practice of ownership directly undermined them. “It was masters, not husbands, who provided food, shelter and clothing for slave families. Likewise, slave women were expected by owners to engage in hard physical labour, which undermined contemporary notions of femininity” (West, 2004, p.4). This point, in addition to a further exploration of the inner workings of slave households will become a relevant point of discussion in later chapters.

## Outline

In the introductory chapter of this thesis, the baseline of knowledge concerning the historical context of the novels and the theoretical framework of trauma for the thesis going forward was established. The following chapters are comprised of an analysis of *Kindred* and *Beloved* respectively, followed by a discussion chapter and conclusion.

Each of the analysis chapters will introduce the novels in more detail before examining particular events that are relevant to the theoretical framework and historical context provided during the introduction, as well as the close-reading and analysis of the behaviour of the characters affected by said events.

The discussion chapter will follow with a comparison of key elements from the analysis of the two novels. In addition to this, the discussion chapter will consider which elements of the novels contribute to the consolidation of knowledge of African American history with contemporary readers. The discussion chapter will also explore the impact the novels might have on readers in regard to intrusive imagery, cultural trauma and prosthetic memory, among others.

Finally, the conclusion chapter will be included in which the original thesis statement will be revisited, and the findings of this thesis will be presented. The conclusion will also function as an arena to voice possible questions which require further consideration and research.

## Chapter 2 – Kindred

The focus of the following chapter will be the analysis of Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred*, written in 1979. This will be presented through many of the elements of trauma theory presented in the introduction such as; primary and secondary trauma, and memory and repression. While Morrison's *Beloved* is a neo-slave narrative set entirely in the past, which will be discussed in the following chapter, Butler's *Kindred*, on the other hand integrates the use of time travel to superimpose a, at the time of publication, modern woman of colour and her white husband, into 19<sup>th</sup> century plantation life. This factor implicates an additional layer of depth to the experiences of the main characters as they navigate 19<sup>th</sup> century America in the Antebellum South, while at the same time reconciling these experiences with their contemporary ideals and values. This analysis of *Kindred* will be conducted through concrete examples of individual traumatic events, the effects these events have on key characters, as well as the character's roles in the novel as a whole. The analysis will also take into consideration the author's own motivations for writing this novel, as well as the novel's form and how this aspect might affect the reader.

“So my characters who are often black and female, behave as though they have no limitation, and they don't run around saying ‘look at me, I'm black, I'm female I have no limitations.’ They just behave this way and do what they need to do.” (Butler, 2000).

There is perhaps no quote from author Octavia E. Butler which more adequately describes the main character of her novel, *Kindred*. Dana, a lower class African American writer living in 1976 California, is abruptly pulled from her life by an unknown force and thrust into situations in which she must give life-saving assistance to a young red-haired boy, Rufus. She quickly realises that she is not only being pulled through time, a period between 1815 and until Rufus's death, but also through space to the Antebellum South during the height of the slavery era. Her husband, Kevin, disbelieving at first, is also pulled to the past and inadvertently left there for a period of five years, as direct physical contact with Dana is required for him to return to the present. Dana, who is pulled to the past more frequently as her charge is subjected to more life-threatening events, is the source of much confusion, fear, and eventually comfort to the surrounding inhabitants of the Weylin plantation as she tries to fit into the everyday workings of the

plantation while she waits to be transported back to the present (1976). It is during these stints to the past that Dana forms a dysfunctional, platonic relationship with her 'master' and incidental ancestor, Rufus, a relationship which is the source of much hardship and frustration for the main character, and which will be one of the primary examples discussed in this chapter.

Prior to taking a closer look at the events and characters themselves, it is important to explain how the plot of the novel is narrated, given its additional layer of time travel. The majority of the novel is told chronologically by a first-person narrator, Dana, with the addition of occasional instances of analepsis as she remembers events in her life which occur prior to the beginning of the novels plot. The term analepsis is as form of anachronism used to describe events which are told later than their chronological place in the narrative, often in the form of flashbacks (Cuddon, 2014, p.31). These instances of analepsis serve to provide readers a deeper understanding of how the relatively untraditional relationship between Dana and her husband, Kevin, came to be, as they are a biracial couple. These flashbacks which will later contribute to increasing tension between the pair as they become more immersed in the past. Analepsis also serves to develop the character's personalities as they were prior to the novels events, in contrast to the augmented and restrained personalities they have to assume when they are trapped in the past.

In terms of the time travel itself, it becomes clear quite early in the novel that these events are occurring chronologically, with some time passing between each event, given that they are connected to and triggered by a single character. After a few trips into the past, Dana realises that when her ancestor, Rufus, is in a life-threatening situation, Dana is pulled back to assist him, and is only able to travel back to the present when she herself feels endangered and her life is threatened. What is interesting, however, is that while days, months and years may pass between each time Dana is pulled back from Rufus's perspective, mere minutes, hours, and days pass for Dana in her present time. This only serves to make the experience more stressful for Dana, as she is given little time to recover from her own life-threatening experiences before she is again pulled into the past. An additional stress factor is later added as she integrates herself into life on the plantation and is unable to properly explain her sudden appearances and disappearances.

The novel has an interestingly distinct structure, as it is divided into titled parts which themselves contain numbered chapters. It is the internal structure of these chaptered parts which is of particular interest here. Each part of the novel opens with Dana in the present time, either narrating an event of the past, or having just returned from the present. In the parts where she had just returned from the past, she spends time recovering and preparing for the next trip. Then, when she is pulled back, Dana must re-orient herself both physically and mentally to save Rufus, as she never appears in the same place, though she always appears on or in the surrounding area of the Weylin plantation. As she travels back each time, she becomes increasingly aware that the amount of time she spends there is prolonged the more comfortable she becomes in the era, which in turn leads her to take drastic, reactionary measures in order to return to her own time. It appears as though each part increases in length to reflect Dana's situation as she creates more of a place for herself in the past, until the novel moves towards the climax and the parts shorten once again. This shortening of the final parts coincides with the growing rift between Rufus and Dana in the narrative as he matures and comes into his role as a slave-owner and Dana realises the futility of trying to persuade a 'man of his time' to adopt more of her contemporary ideals. This pattern of lengthening and shortening of the parts of the book functions, in essence, to give readers an increased awareness of the pacing of the novel, as well as enhancing the feeling of abruptness when the time travel occurs.

### Alice – primary trauma and belated response

Having explained some of the technical aspects of the novel, it is now time to turn towards the traumatic events presented in the novel. Although the following event is not the first chronologically in the novel, it is the event that is by far the most severe in terms of consequences and repercussions. For the sake of context, it is first important to summarise who the characters involved are, their relationships to each other in the past, and their relation to the main character, Dana. The event in question centres around Alice, the daughter of a free black woman who was raised in a cabin in the area surrounding the Weylin plantation. She was a childhood friend and later, the romantic interest of Rufus, though it must be noted that this interest was a one-sided infatuation on Rufus's part. Alice marries one of the Weylin slaves, Issac, and with the assistance of Dana, plots to help him escape following a confrontation with Rufus. However, they are

soon caught. In retaliation, Rufus sells Issac to a trader after having been beaten and mutilated by having his ears severed. Alice is purchased by Rufus as she forfeited her status of by aiding a fugitive slave. It should be noted for context, that prior to Dana's appearance, Rufus had attempted to sexually assault Alice, which led to the confrontation between Rufus and Issac. This also adds to the trauma Alice experiences, as well as serving as the reasoning behind her future reluctance to begin a sexual relationship with Rufus in the future. It appears that it was during the events of Alice's capture that she became traumatised. She is brought back to the Weylin plantation where Dana is expected to nurse her back to health, having been severely beaten herself. By this point in the novel, it has been established that Alice is the mother of Dana's direct ancestor Hagar.

While Alice's physical injuries caused by whippings, beatings, and an attack by dogs, heal relatively quickly and without issue, it is the mental injuries which are a larger cause for concern. Unsurprisingly, Alice requires a lot of hands-on care as she recovers physically, though it is once she is healed that the extent of her mental injuries become clear.

"Alice became part of my work – an important part. [...] We had to move Alice from Rufus's bed for his comfort as well as hers, because for a while, Alice was a very young child again, incontinent, barely aware of us unless we hurt her or fed her. And she did have to be fed – spoonful by spoonful." (Butler, 2014, p.167).

Up until this point in the novel, Dana had been using her rudimentary knowledge of modern medicine and bacteria to treat and nurse Rufus back to health following his accidents and was now expected to do the same for Alice's much more extreme injuries. It soon becomes clear that Alice not only repressed the memories of the event itself and the subsequent fate of her husband Issac, as is expected of someone who is subjected to a severe traumatic event, but also appears to lose the ability to function as an adult and carry out everyday tasks. A possible explanation for this reaction could be *Age Regression*. The US National Library of Medicine describes age regression as a defensive coping mechanism in which the individual regresses to an earlier stage of mental development in which they feel more safe (Lokko & Stern, 2015). According to Lokko and Stern, age regression can be triggered by a number of causes, of which trauma is one, which would seem to be the case for Alice. What is interesting, is that Alice's

regression extends to the fundamental knowledge that she was born free and that she was not a slave prior this incident. This knowledge of her own identity remains repressed until such a time that she is mentally capable to process the reality of her situation. This occurs when Alice accompanies Dana to the cook house, where she begins to ask questions about who she is. “Finally, ‘There’s so much...I want to know everything, but I don’t know where to start. Why am I a slave?’” (Butler, 2014, p. 178). In terms of trauma theory, one would perhaps connect Alice’s period of age regression to Caruth’s theory of belatedness. As stated in the introductory chapter of this thesis, belatedness is a term within trauma theory developed by Cathy Caruth that builds upon Freud’s understandings of trauma, memory, and repression. She claims that following a traumatic event, memories are often forgotten only to later, belatedly, return. What separates Caruth from Freud who had a similar opinion, is that according to Caruth, the memories of a traumatic event are not intentionally repressed, rather, they were never processed by the conscious mind in the first place. Given that Alice experiences an extended period of time in which she not only has no memory of the event itself, but further, has little memory of who she was as a person prior to the traumatic event, is indicative that a trigger was needed in order for Alice to consolidate her memories of the event to her current situation. This is often the case for victims of trauma who have repressed memories of the event.

As previously stated, Alice was born free and as such did not experience much of the physical trauma that her enslaved counterparts would have, nor would she have the experience of being subject to the whims of one’s master as a slave would. However, this is not to say that she was not subject to primary trauma through the witnessing of events. It is during Dana’s second trip to the past where readers first encounter Alice. Having escaped the Weylin plantation and been directed towards the cabin that Alice and her mother live in by Rufus, Dana comes upon the cabin at the same time that patrollers discover Alice’s father, a slave, without a pass. Alice, her mother, and Dana are all witness to the subsequent whipping before Alice’s father is taken away. As Dana is understandably very affected by the scene, having never witnessed such an event first-hand previously, it can be assumed that Alice is at least to some degree, also affected as this would most likely not have been an every-day occurrence for her.

I could literally smell his sweat, hear every ragged breath, every cry, every cut of the whip. I could see his body jerking, convulsing, straining against the rope as his screaming went on and on. My stomach heaved, and I had to forced myself to stay where I was and keep quiet. Why didn't they stop! (Butler, 2014, p.33).

Given the evidence for Alice previously experiencing a traumatic event, the argument that Alice experiences a period of age regression does not quite add up. It would be intriguing if Alice did regress to a younger mental age, precisely due to the fact that she in reality also witnessed significant trauma during her formative years and would therefore have trauma associated with that age. Yet at the same time, it could be argued that the whipping of her father might have been an isolated enough event that did not have a lasting effect on her mentally. It could further be argued that given the historical context of the novel and the casual abuse experienced by black people, both free and bound, at the time, is reason enough to assume that this event might not have had large enough of an impact on Alice to cause such associations. Whereas Dana, who had until that point, no frame of reference for such violence other than that depicted on television, would be expected to experience far more lasting effects.

I had seen people beaten on television and in the movies. I had seen the too-red blood substitute streaked across their backs and heard their well rehearsed screams. But I hadn't lain nearby and smelled their sweat or heard them pleading and praying, shamed before their families and themselves (Butler, 2014, p.33).

As the narrative continues following the event, Alice becomes more aware of her surroundings, she becomes eager to make sense of her situation. Being fully healed physically, Alice joins Dana in her duties in the plantation's cookhouse, but it was during this time that Alice began questioning her place on the plantation, as she presumably noticed that she was being treated differently to the other slaves. It is at this point, during a conversation with Dana, that Alice appears to experience a series of flashbacks, and she remembers who she is, what her status as a free and married woman used to be, and consequently, the fate of her husband.

As *Kindred* is narrated from Dana's point of view, reader's knowledge of Alice working through and forward from these revelations is limited to the interactions between the two. It must be noted that due to the circumstances of Dana's intermittent appearances in the past, there is not much of a description of Alice's personality as an

adult prior to the traumatic event, and thus it is difficult to judge how her personality may have changed following her remembrance. However, it can be noted that while the two appear to get along relatively well in the period following Alice's recovery, she does seem to hold some resentment towards Dana when undesirable topics are broached, for example, Rufus's interest in Alice, and Dana's place as their negotiator.

### Dana and Rufus

Out of all of the relationships in *Kindred*, that between Dana and Rufus can be described as the most complex and nuanced. Throughout the novel, the pair engage in powerplay, gentle persuasions and manipulation, mutual respect, betrayal and eventually murder. To reiterate their roles in the novel, Rufus at the beginning of the plot is the coddled, only son of a Maryland based slave and plantation owner. As he grows up he assumes more of the responsibilities as the heir of the plantation before assuming his role as owner upon the death of his father. Throughout his childhood and adolescence he finds himself in situations that he cannot save himself from, at which point his direct descendent, Dana, appears to aid him. Dana is, as previously stated, an African American writer living in 1976 California with her white husband.

As Dana spends more time in the past, she must try and find a place for herself on the plantation while at the same time, acting as something of a guide or companion for Rufus in the effort to gently persuade him into becoming a more mild-mannered slave owner in the future. Contradictorily, Dana realises that Alice, the previously discussed free woman and unwilling love interest of Rufus, is also her direct ancestor and it is the daughter Alice has with Rufus that will ensure the continuation of her family line. This means, that not only does Dana feel the moral obligation of protecting Alice from Rufus, but at the same time she must ensure that Alice does not run away before her ancestor is born. This essentially puts Dana into the position as a go-between for the pair until Alice is eventually persuaded to allow the relationship that Rufus wants, despite the previously discussed trauma experienced by Alice.

As Rufus and Dana experience more encounters with each other, they start to form a symbiotic attachment to one another. This attachment starts out as Dana becoming Rufus's mentor and teacher, before merging into Dana becoming his

confidant. Dana begins her mentorship with Rufus by establishing the sort of language she would not tolerate from him, using the fact that she continuously saves his life as leverage.

'She said I was what?' I asked.

'Just a strange nigger. She and Daddy both knew they hadn't seen you before.'

'That was a hell of a thing for her to say right after she saw me save her son's life.'

Rufus frowned. 'Why?'

I stared at him.

'What's wrong?' he asked. 'Why are you so mad?'

'Your mother always call black people niggers, Rufe?'

'Sure, except when she has company. Why not?'

His air of innocent questioning confused me. Either he really didn't know what he was saying, or he had a career waiting in Hollywood. Whichever it was, he wasn't going to go on saying it to me.

'I'm a black woman, Rufe. If you have to call me something other than my name, that's it.' (Butler, 2014, p.19-20).

The relationship between the two also functions as protection for Dana from the grislier aspects of plantation life as she is rarely punished and is often allowed to make her own work, rather than being strictly assigned to a particular place as other slaves were. This, evidently, was unusual for someone of her race at the time, as she often feels distanced from the other slaves on the plantation, who often wonder where her loyalties truly lie; "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, whining and crying after some poor white trash of a man (Kevin), black as you are. You always try to act so white. White nigger, turning against your own people!" (Butler, 2014, p.181). Of course, Dana's 'white' behavior is merely a product of her time in 1976, where slavery has long been abolished, along with segregation and the progress made by the Civil Rights Movement. Interestingly, job centres in which unemployed people, like Dana, searched for work had been described as 'slave markets', "we regulars called it the slave market. Actually, it was just the opposite of slavery. The people who ran it couldn't care less whether or not you showed up to do the work they offered. They always had more job hunters than jobs anyway." (Butler, 2014, p.51). Not only does this casual referral to slavery indicate a general misunderstanding to what slavery was, which will be addressed later. It also

gives the impression that slavery had by this point become just another part of history, rather than a significant element of African American identity.

While the relationship between Dana and Rufus serves as a form of protection for both parties concerned, as Rufus relies on Dana for his survival, and Dana relies on Rufus for her safety on the plantation, this does not mean that the two do not use this protection as a means to manipulate each other. In regards to the protection offered to Dana through her friendship with Rufus, and her status as a 'free' black woman, she is able to a degree to create her own work. That is, she is only sent to the fields by Rufus to work as a punishment when she oversteps her bounds. At the same time, Dana has the power to manipulate Rufus by means of using the fact that his continued existence is reliant on Dana's continued intervention into his life-threatening experiences. Each party is therefore at the mercy of the other. This boundary is challenged as Rufus grows from a boy into a man and comes into his role as a slave owner. Not only does he hold the 'nicer' treatment over Dana's head in order to make her more compliant, but he also actively betrays her trust. He does this assuming that the consequences towards him would be insignificant. A particular example of this is when Dana returns to the past, having left Kevin in the past during her previous trip. Five years had gone by and as such, Kevin had moved on from the Weylin plantation. In order to reunite with Kevin, Dana writes him a letter and trusts Rufus with the task of mailing it as she is unable to do so herself. It is brought to Dana's attention that Rufus had not and did not intend to send the letter, as he had formed an attachment to Dana and wanted her to stay with him.

'He (Weylin sr.) wrote to Kevin about me?'

'He did aftter...after...'

'After he learned that you hadn't sent my letters?'

His eyes widened with surprise, then slowly took on a look of understanding. 'So that's why you ran. How did you find out?'

'By being curious.' I glanced at the bed chest. 'By satisfying my curiosity.'

'You could be whipped for snooping through my things.' (Butler, 2014, p.198).

This is an intriguing passage in two ways. The first is that Rufus does not immediately apologise when he is caught breaking his promise. This speaks to not only his shock at being found out, but also says a lot about his character and how he was raised.

Throughout the entirety of the book, Rufus is portrayed as a rude, self-absorbed child, and a master manipulator in the making. As the son and heir of a plantation owner, Rufus is indeed accustomed being catered to, and being able to get his own way regardless of the lives he impacts in the process. Rufus also knows that there is little he can do to a black person that he will be punished for, which is indicative of the divide between black and white people. The second, which is also clear throughout the novel is that alongside his manipulative nature, Rufus is also inherently selfish;

‘I wanted to keep you here,’ he whispered. ‘Kevin hates this place. He would have taken you up North.’

I looked at him again and let myself understand. It was that destructive single-minded love of his. He loved me. Not the way he loved Alice, thank god. He didn’t seem to want to sleep with me. But he wanted me around – Someone to talk to, someone who would listen to him and care what he said, care about him. (Butler, 2014, p.198).

It could be argued that Rufus had himself been traumatised by the life-threatening situations he had experienced throughout his upbringing, and that his preoccupation with keeping Dana in his life as a figure of familiarity and safety served as a coping mechanism. Like Alice, readers are not privy to the inner workings of the minds of secondary characters, like Rufus and Kevin, and as such, the trauma associated with these characters must be deduced through their behaviour and actions in connection to the main narrator, Dana. This is difficult in Rufus’s case due to the preconceived notions of masculinity which prevailed both at the time, and to some degree still, and as such inhibits the kinds of emotional conversations which could reveal such trauma from taking place.

### Linking the past to the present

In addition to the use of incidents of primary trauma, Butler’s *Kindred* also seeks to create a link between the experiences of Dana’s ancestors and the modern experiences she has as a black woman living in 1970s America. It would first be beneficial to discuss the civil rights movement and the effect this may have had on Dana as an individual, before delving into her experiences of the past.

In the time between the end of the Civil War and the abolition of institutionalised slavery, and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s, black people experienced a range of discriminatory practices which stemmed from the white slave owner's need to continue to dehumanise their former slaves, and to maintain their profit margins on their plantations. This includes but is not limited to; segregated schools at all levels, barring from entering higher education, discriminatory hiring practices for all types of jobs outside of service, segregated busses, restrooms, water fountains etc, and segregated cities in which black people and other immigrants lived in less than ideal conditions (Boyer, 2012, p.114-117). The decriminalisation of interracial marriage in all American states in 1967 inevitably allowed for the fictional characters of Dana and Kevin to be a married couple, though it is exactly this union which provokes tension between the two both in the present time and in the time they are in the past together, as well as tension between Dana and the other slaves. This topic will be discussed more closely in relation to gender roles later.

Despite the work of activists such as Martin Luther King Jr. and other individuals associated with the movement, it is clear through the reaction both character's relatives have towards the announcement of Dana's marriage to Kevin that there were still prejudices between the two races. On one side of the dilemma are the wounds caused by the discriminatory practices of the past which have not yet had the chance to heal sufficiently, while on the other is the continued casual racism that many still faced. While Kevin's sister's bigotry was influenced by her own husband, Dana's uncle, who readers are told raised her, appears to take their union as a personal affront.

'He...well, he's my mother's oldest brother, and he was like a father to me even before my mother died because my father died when I was a baby. Now...it's as though I've rejected him. Or at least that's the way he feels. It bothered me, really. He was more hurt than mad'. [...] 'He wants me to marry someone like him - someone who looks like him. A black man' (Butler, 2014, p.120).

It is important for contemporary readers to keep in mind when reading a novel such as *Kindred*, the historical context of the novel. While the previous quote may be perceived by some as quite inflammatory, if one considers the time period in which the novel was written, in addition to the assumed age of Dana's uncle, it is not too far a stretch of the imagination to understand that his feelings on the matter of interracial marriage to be

based on some very real concerns. Prior to the Civil Rights Movement, lynchings were not an uncommon occurrence, especially in the Southern States. It cannot be left unsaid that the vast majority of lynching victims were black males accused of sexual contact with a white female, yet this does not negate Dana's uncle's fear of some sort of repercussion in reaction to her marrying a white man. It can be argued that by the time the novel is set, these repercussions would be far less extreme, such as social shunning from the black community, or discrimination within the white community for being black. The former is a topic which is repeatedly associated with Dana when she is in the past, as her mannerisms, education and outspokenness do not reflect that which is expected of her as a black slave.

### Kevin

So far in the course of this thesis, the focus of the discussion of trauma and traumatic events as they appear in the novels has predominantly been on the main characters of colour. It would be remiss if this thesis ignored the trauma experienced by Dana's husband, Kevin, during his trip to the past. Unlike Dana, who traveled more frequently but for shorter periods of time, Kevin was trapped in the past with no notion of if or when he would be able to return to his own time. Given that the novel is told through Dana's point of view, it is impossible for readers to understand what Kevin might have been through during the time that he and Dana were separated, other than what he himself talks about, in dialogue with Dana.

Despite this, there are a few things that could be assumed. The fact that Kevin is white already works to his favour. It provides automatic protection against racially motivated attacks, detainment and persecution which he would not have had if he had been a man of colour. He is well spoken and clearly educated, which is what allows him to procure a placement as Rufus's teacher when he and Dana travel to the past for the first time together. Like Dana, he has some knowledge of the past and what sort of environment he would be encountering thanks to their thorough research in between Dana's travels. When Dana is unable to bring Kevin back with her to the future, Kevin must endeavour to keep himself alive until such an opportunity arises. It is revealed

when Dana is eventually pulled back into the past that Kevin did not remain on the Weylin plantation, but instead travelled to the more tolerant and liberal northern states.

Alice hesitated, spoke softly to me. 'Your man went away,' she said. 'He waited a long time for you, then he left.' 'Where did he go?' 'Somewhere north. I don't know. Mister Rufe knows. You got to be careful, though. Mister Rufe gets mighty crazy sometimes.' (Butler, 2014, p.130).

Throughout the novel, Dana expresses concern of how being in the past might affect Kevin as an individual as well as the relationship they share. It could be said that there are some aspects of their relationship that Dana expresses particular consternation towards, and which might be negatively affected under long exposure to the gender roles of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These gender roles still prevailed into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and it was Dana's generation which succeeded in challenging them, as evident in Kevin and Dana working in the same factory when they met. In the novel, this clash of ideals is exemplified by Kevin trying to persuade Dana to do his typing for him, as one would ask a secretary.

I'd done it the first time, grudgingly, not telling him how much I hated typing, how I did all but the final drafts of my stories in longhand. [...] The second time he asked, though, I told him, and I refused. He was annoyed. The third time when I refused again, he was angry. He said is I couldn't do him a little favor when he asked, I could leave. (Butler, 2014, p.117).

It cannot be left unsaid that Dana has little choice but to ultimately fill this role for Rufus in the past, as she is more skilled at writing and Rufus is uninterested in learning as he has someone to do it for him. It is important to note that while not directly related to a single traumatic experience, Dana fears how Kevin's culminative experience in the past might affect his personality as well as his attitude towards gender roles and gender equality both within and outside of their relationship.

As has been mentioned previously, while slaves were legally considered property, this did not mean that they did not prescribe to the prevailing gender roles of the time. Like their masters, male slaves were the breadwinners or providers to the family within their means, while the women kept the house and raised the children outside of their other duties. As Emily West writes, "slave women were expected to be domesticated, while men were obliged to act as protectors and providers." (West, 2004,

p.4). These perceived gender roles often translated to the types of work slaves were expected to do in the main house of the plantations, rather than those who worked in the fields. In Dana's case, when she was not in the company of Rufus, she was expected to work in the cookhouse and other domestic areas, and was eventually charged with the care of the ailing Mrs. Weylin. It is commonly known that the perceived gender roles which prevailed in this time period, maintained a foothold in the general attitude towards women up until the feminist movement. In Dana's case, it is clear that Kevin, who is a few years older than Dana, still holds onto some notion of these attitudes. This 'discrimination' is clear given the fact that they met while working in the same factory, have the same occupation as authors, and so are on equal footing regardless of gender, yet it is Dana that is expected to sacrifice her books and her time to type when Kevin demands it:

Kevin did once suggest that I get rid of some of my books so that I'd fit into his place.

'You're out of your mind!' I told him.

'Just some of that book-club stuff that you don't read.'

We were at my apartment then, so I said, 'Let's go to your place and I'll help you decide which of your books you don't read. I'll even help you throw them out.' (Butler, 2014, p.116).

While she does not expect Kevin to adopt all of the notions of gender roles of the time while he is stuck in the past, she does fear that the equality that had been established between the two as a married couple might be affected. The worry that Dana has towards Kevin in terms of his experience in the past is multifaceted. While on the one hand the equality they have as spouses within their marriage might be affected, Dana is also concerned about Kevin's physical and mental wellbeing as a result of his experience and being separated from Dana for an extended period of time. Like Rufus, Kevin also has difficulty expressing how he is feeling, presumably due to his assumptions concerning masculinity:

His face was lined and grim where it wasn't hidden by the beard. He looked more than ten years older than when I had last seen him.[...] This place, this time, hadn't been any kinder to him than it had been to me. But what had that made of him? What might he be willing to do now that he would not have done before? (Butler, 2014, p.203).

Among the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are anxiety, hypervigilance, irritability and disturbed sleep. Both Dana and Kevin have experienced one or multiple symptoms of PTSD both during the past and when they return to the present. The symptoms are particularly clear in Kevin's behavior as he is the character who has spent the most continuous time in the past. When he returns to the present he is not only utterly disorientated due to the physical differences between the two time periods, and must therefore try to quickly reacquaint himself with the present time, but he also exhibits irritable behavior and frustration towards Dana, who is the only person who has some rudimentary insight to the experience he went through.

With a sudden slash of his hand, he knocked both the sharpener and the cup of pencils from his desk. [...] He stopped, glared at me as though I was some stranger who had dared to lay hands on him. 'Kevin, you can't come back all at once any more than you can leave all at once. It takes time. After a while, though, things will fall into place.' His expression did not change." (Butler, 2014, p.215).

Dana, on the other hand, exhibits some of the same symptoms as Kevin, but with more emphasis on hypervigilancy. This is something that is evident in her each time she returns to the present, but is exaerbated when she and Kevin return to the present together. She developes slight agoraphobia and is reluctant to leave the house, she developes a fear of driving and being a passenger in a car, and she always has a bag packed with essentials tied to her or easily at hand. This emphasis on preparedness is due to the fact that Dana is entirely out of control of the time travel process, and she fears that if she leaves the safety of her house, she might arrive in the past in less than ideal conditions. The circumstances are clearly different for both characters as Kevin can be secure in the knowledge that he is safe in the present so long as he is not touching Dana when she is pulled back. Dana, evidently, does not share this same security as she hints to the assumption that she won't be safe until Rufus dies or is killed.

### Dana's arm

There is little doubt that physical trauma and the response to these traumatic events has been a theme throughout the entirety of *Kindred*. However, it is important to

highlight an event which has, in comparison, the potential to cause more long-term effects than the previously discussed whippings that Dana witnessed and was subjected to. This event also has the potential to further serve as a reminder for readers, this will be discussed further in the discussion chapter. For context, this event occurs in the last chapter before the epilogue when Dana is forced to sever the link between herself and Rufus in order to return to her own time in 1976 by means of murder. This occurs at the point in the narrative in which she realises that Rufus has no intention of relinquishing his hold over Dana voluntarily, and so she is forced to take drastic measures which ultimately results in Dana's arm being severed after being trapped in a wall when she returns to the present.

Something harder and stronger than Rufus's hand clamped down on my arm, squeezing it, stiffening it, pressing into it – painlessly, at first – melting into it, meshing with it as though somehow my arm were being absorbed into something. Something cold and nonliving. Something ... paint, plaster, wood – a wall (Butler, 2014, p.291).

What is intriguing about Dana losing her arm as a consequence of killing her ancestor, Rufus, is that it will serve as a constant reminder of not only her actions, but also the experiences she had in the past, perhaps to a larger degree than the other injuries she received. This constant physical reminder alone could potentially make it extremely difficult to work through and reconcile the trauma she has been through. It has previously been stated that Dana expressed uncertainty in how she would be perceived physically by her husband and others in terms of the scars she received as a result of the whipping. A further implication of the severing of Dana's arm is the suggestion that she is intrinsically linked, literally and figuratively, to her past and her ancestors, given that a physical part of her body was left behind. This is an interesting decision made by the author, as it broaches the notion that there is and always will be a concrete link between a people and their forebearers, and that Dana, while educated about her past, perhaps did not fully comprehend this notion until she was subjected to a permanent reminder.

### Motivations

Now that the details surrounding some of the traumatic events depicted in Butler's *Kindred* have been discussed, there now remains the question of why they occurred, or

what the author's motivation might have been to write the novel. It is unusual for an author to incorporate a science fiction trope such as time travel to a genre of literature like neo-slave narratives, yet in the case of *Kindred* the two seem to merge quite effortlessly. Butler herself has said that while she does employ time travel as a means to push the narrative forward, she would not consider the novel as science fiction, but rather fantasy. She states that:

*Kindred* is fantasy. I mean literally, it is fantasy. There's no science in *Kindred*. I mean, if I was told that something was science fiction I would expect to find something dealing with science in it. [...] With *Kindred* there's no science involved. Not even the time travel. I don't use a time machine or anything like that. (Kenan, 1991, p.495-6).

It is true that in traditional works of science fiction involving time travel or another means of transportation which has yet to be invented in reality, it is expected for the author to attempt to explain the mechanics behind the machine or method which allows for the travel to occur. One such example of a novel that attempts to explain how the mechanics of time travel works, and perhaps most famously, is H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*. However, the differences between these two novels are, as Butler states, clear. While in Wells's novel there is a concrete, man-made machine which transports the Time Traveler through time, but there is no such machine in *Kindred*. What Dana does experience is a sensation of dizziness, nausea and disorientation as she is transported by an unseen and unexplained force to the past. As it is clear to Dana that it is an outside force, which seems to be intrinsically connected to who she discovers is her ancestor, she has no choice to conclude the the traveling is connected to a perceived sense of danger on both hers and Rufus's part.

In the same interview, Butler discusses how her life and by extention her mother's life might have influenced her work as an author. She acknowledges that she realised quite early on in her life that her mother was treated as if she did not exist in her work as a maid. This is not uncommon for a person who worked in service as did many women of colour in the first half of the twentieth century. At some point in her childhood, Butler also realised that while she might have been ashamed of her mother's position in society, that there was a distinct connection between their life as it was, and the history of her people within the United States of America, that of slavery.

And I think one of the reasons I wrote *Kindred* was to resolve my feelings, because after all, I ate because of what she did...*Kindred* was a kind of reaction to some of the things going on in the sixties when people were feeling ashamed of, or more strongly, angry with their parents for not having improved things faster, and I wanted to take a person from today and send that person back to slavery. (Kenan, 1991, p.496).

The anger that Butler mentions in relation to that felt by the younger generation could be attributed to them either being too far removed from or undereducated about the era of institutionalised slavery to understand how far the black community had come in their fight for equality. This could serve as a baseline of reasoning for Butler's motivation for writing the novel. She has said that she herself had similar feelings of anger and shame concerning her mother's position in society, and as such it is not too far a stretch of the imagination to suppose that *Kindred* might be intended for other likeminded individuals. Essentially, *Kindred* could be used to gain some form of perspective about the history of slavery and the formation of black culture in the wrappings of a fantasy novel. Having said that, it is important to note that while *Kindred* does incorporate many of the aspects of traditional slave narratives, as a neo-slave narrative, it has been somewhat censored.

Traditionally, slave narratives served the function as abolitionist propaganda. They did not tend to 'sugarcoat' the realities faced by black people across the United States of America, particularly in the Antebellum South, favouring more uncensored accounts of the lives of former slaves to create more of an impact. At the same time, they functioned as a point of question to patriarchal power and gender inequality (Levine & Krupat, 2013, p.761-62). Perhaps one of the positive attributes of neo-slave narratives is that unlike their traditional counterparts, they do not necessarily require the author to be white, provided the author in question conducts proper research into the topic when writing. Nor do they have to be limited to typical characteristics of a historical narrative, as is the case with *Kindred*. Further, neo-slave narratives lack the necessity to be 'sponsored' by a white person with a foreword in order to assure credibility when written by a former slave, like for example Fredrik Douglas's account (Levine & Krupat, 2013).

Having said this, Butler does admit that she needed to soften the depiction of certain aspects of a slave's experience in her narrative, "It's not pleasure reading. As a

matter of fact, one of the things I realised – [...] – was that I was not going to be able to come anywhere near presenting slavery as it was. I was going to have to do a somewhat cleaned-up version of slavery, or no one would be willing to read it.” (Kenan, 1991, p.497). This is a point which Butler cleverly manages to slip into the narrative itself, as quoted previously, when Dana is narrating the beating of Alice’s father and ruminating on how depictions of violence on television had not even come close to preparing her for experiencing it first hand. In doing so, Butler is indicating to her readers quite early on in the novel that while *Kindred* is a slave narrative, it does not necessarily correlate to the true extent of what slavery entailed, as well as giving the readers a point of reference in reality. Butler further illustrates through the narrative the difficulty faced by African Americans in learning about their ancestors who were enslaved: ‘You’ve looked,’ he said. ‘And you’ve found no records. You’ll probably never know’ (Butler, 2014, p. 295). As records historically treated slaves as property and assets belonging to a plantation owner, there was little need at the time to document such familial relations that many seek today to understand one’s personal history, as Dana quickly learns in the novel. This, however, puts into question the extent to which African Americans could be expected understand how their culture developed when the links to their ancestors have been severed and the descending generations have been systematically discriminated against.

This chapter has highlighted key traumatic events in relation to the elements of trauma theory such as primary trauma, memory and belated response to trauma. It has also focused on the main characters’ responses to the trauma they experienced. This chapter has also accepted the fact that there are limitations to the exploration of trauma represented in literature when the novel is told from a first-person point of view, as the representation of trauma in secondary characters is reliant on interactions with the narrator. Finally, this chapter has contemplated what the author’s motivations behind writing *Kindred* might have been, and has also raised the question as to the availability of information regarding black people’s ancestry and culture in the pursuit of understanding their identity.

## Chapter 3 – Beloved

In the previous chapter, some of the elements of trauma theory that were introduced in the introduction were used to analyse the reactions some of the characters had to key traumatic events in the novel *Kindred*. The following chapter will apply some of the same elements, in addition to some of the remaining aspects yet to be explored, such as postmemory and secondary trauma, in order to explore how Toni Morrison's *Beloved* represents trauma. This will be accomplished by first identifying the key traumatic event within the plot of the novel. Then, by analysing the behaviour of the main characters in regard to their response to the trauma. This chapter, like the last, will also speculate on the motivations the author might have had to write this novel and contemplate what purpose the novel serves in relation to this.

### The murder of Beloved

Of the many traumatic events in the plot of *Beloved*, perhaps the most influential and far reaching in repercussions is that of the murder of Sethe's daughter. For the purpose of context, prior to this event, Sethe had escaped her bond of slavery while heavily pregnant with her youngest daughter, Denver. Once Sethe had been reunited with her three children she had sent ahead of her to the state of Ohio, two boys and a girl, Sethe lived with her mother-in-law at the novel's main location, 124 Bluestone Road. Later, she is confronted by her previous owner, who, under the Fugitive Slave Act, had tracked Sethe and her children in order to reclaim them as slaves. Horrified at the prospect of her children being subjected to becoming a slave, Sethe acts impulsively and attempts to murder them to save them. She unfortunately succeeds in killing her oldest daughter, Beloved, but fails to kill her two sons and is stopped before she can succeed in killing her younger daughter, Denver. It must be noted that while this event takes place prior to the Civil War and the emancipation of slaves, the majority of the novel is set in 1873, after the Civil War.

It is clear that all parties involved in this event have been affected by it to some degree, as is evident as the novel progresses, the nature of these effects will be explored further on. What is intriguing, however, is the event's placement in the novel's plot and

how this affects its narratology. Rather than using this event to drive the plot in a more straightforward manner, the exact details are not revealed until midway through the novel, and this was done by a third party outside of the immediate cast of characters. Interestingly, the character of Beloved appears much earlier than do the details of her death, and even before this, the main characters believe themselves to be haunted by the spirit of Beloved prior to her appearance as a physical entity. The introduction of Beloved as a fully formed character leads readers to believe that, while clear that Beloved's death understandably had a continuous impact on Sethe's life, Sethe had no control over the circumstances of Beloved's death, though this is later revealed to not be the case. The fact that Sethe and her family believe themselves to be haunted by the ghost of the baby throughout the years between the death and the manifestation of Beloved as a physical being, opens this analysis to an interesting concept coined by French philosopher Jacques Derrida, *Hauntology*. As Dominick LaCapra explains it, hauntology is "in which the past and its "ghosts" haunt the present, often in elusive and uncanny ways" (LaCapra, 2018, p. 186). In many instances in *Beloved*, this can be applied quite literally. It can be argued that the hauntings the family were subjected to in the house more often than not were observing the physical effects of the ghost's actions, such as handprints being left behind, and shattered mirrors. In fact, the connection between the spirit and Sethe's child is not made apparent until much later in the novel. This gives the impression that the family is mere the victim of a haunted house rather than there being a direct connection. However, it must be noted that from the very beginning of the novel, the spirit is described as 'spiteful' and 'venomous' (Morrison, 2007, p.3).

As briefly described in the introduction, primary trauma as the result of an event can be classified as a victim of or witness to an event that is 'outside the range of human experience'. It is undeniable that Sethe, having committed the act of murder and attempted murder of her own children, would be traumatised by the experience. It appears though, that Sethe has made a conscious effort to repress the memories of the event itself, given that in the chapters the murder is referred to, it is not directly attributed to Sethe until much later in the narrative, "Not only did she have to live out her years in a house palsied by the baby's fury at having its throat cut," (Morrison, 2007, p. 5-6). It must also be mentioned that the murder of one's own children undeniably breaks with the morals and the value slaves tended to hold concerning family life and

the bonds and the bonds they were allowed to form by their owners. Sethe herself went to great lengths to free herself from bondage in order to provide as a mother for the children she had sent on ahead to secure their future freedom, only to contradict these values at the first sign of trouble. This is a topic that will be analysed further later in the chapter when other familial bonds are explored.

The second character which is central to this specific event, after Sethe herself, is of course her youngest daughter, Denver. At the time of the attack, readers are aware that Denver is very young, proven by the fact that immediately after the attack she is breastfed by Sethe. It is not outside the realm of reason to then assume that Denver has little to no memory of the event itself, yet her behaviour as she grows up indicates that the murder did have a significant impact on her, either unconsciously so or through the influence of her mother “ Yeah. It didn’t work did it? Did it work?” he asked. “it worked,” she said. “How? Your boys gone you don’t know where. One girl is dead, the other won’t leave the yard. How did it work?” (Morrison, 2007, p.196). Here Paul D is speaking in reference to Denver who by the time he arrived at 124 Bluestone Road, was reclusive out of fear of the unknown in outside world. It is also not insignificant that immediately following the attack, while Denver is being breastfed, readers learn that she ingests some of her dead sister’s blood,

Baby Suggs shook her head. “One at a time,” she said and traded the living for the dead, which she carried into the keeping room. When she came back, Sethe was aiming a bloody nipple into the baby’s mouth. Baby Suggs slammed her fist on the table and shouted “Clean up! Clean yourself up!” [...] So Denver took her mother’s milk right along with the blood of her sister. (Morrison, 2007, p.179).

Up until Beloved ‘replaces’ Denver as her mother’s daughter, she feels that she has a special bond with Beloved both in spiritual and as a physical entity. Denver expresses frustration both when the baby’s spirit is seemingly silent, and when Beloved starts to shift her attention towards Sethe later in the narrative. The bond between Denver and Beloved could be a figurative manifestation of the time when Denver circumstantially ingested the blood of her sister.

## Secondary trauma (in relation to the murder)

Of all the characters in *Beloved*, Paul D is perhaps the one in the most unique situation in relation to the murder of Beloved. Readers are made aware that Paul D and Sethe knew each other when they were owned as slaves together at Sweet Home, the farm they both escaped from. As the name indicates, Sweet Home was one of the more hospitable situations to be enslaved under, readers learn that life on the Sweet Home farm appeared to be more of a close-knit community rather than the traditional master/slave relationship. The fact remains that Paul D and Sethe were still slaves held against their will and as such this was motivation enough to want to escape. Sethe had been bought by the Garners to act as somewhat of a broodmare and told to choose one of the other male slaves to take as a husband. In this decision Paul D is overlooked, but there is no denying a continued attraction as well as some sense of jealousy towards Halle, the man Sethe ultimately chose.

Following their escapes, Paul D and Sethe lose track of each other but are eventually reunited in Ohio. Upon learning that Halle is no longer in the picture and presumed dead, they start a relationship where Paul D inserts himself into the household, upon discovering that there wasn't a man in the house, much to Denver's displeasure. Eventually, however, word of Paul D and Sethe's relationship spreads, as well as the appearance of Beloved, and Stamp Paid reveals the truth behind Beloved's murder. It is clear that Paul D has a difficult time consolidating the truth he learns about Sethe with the Sethe he knew back at the Sweet Home plantation. Upon confrontation, he likens her to an animal and decides to leave her:

"There could have been a way. Some other way."

"What way?"

"You got two feet, Sethe, not four," he said, and right then a forest sprang up between them; trackless and quiet." (Morrison, 2007, p.194).

It is clear that there is no way for Paul D to really experience the murder of Beloved, as did Sethe, Howard and Buglar, and Denver. However, there is something to say for the traumatic experience of a person one is close to, both physically and emotionally, turning out to be capable of such an atrocity, even if the act was committed instinctively in response to a threat and without thought. Within trauma theory, this could be

attributed to Paul D becoming secondarily traumatised through the retelling of the event. His reaction to the event does seem to support this as he removes himself from the house, despite this meaning him becoming homeless, and he appears to have difficulty consolidating what he learned with what he knew of Sethe previously.

While Denver was present during the murder of her sister and suffered an attempt on her own life at the same time, as previously mentioned, it is not clear whether she has any distinct memories of the event itself. This could mean that rather than a primary victim in the same way that Sethe and her sons are, that is having experienced the event and either having a belated response to the trauma, or developing symptoms of PTSD as a result of the memories associated to the event. Denver could instead also be treated as a victim who has been secondarily traumatised similarly to Paul D. This will be addressed later on in the chapter.

### Insidious trauma

With the idea of unexpected traumatic events in mind, it is now time to turn towards the intricacies of insidious trauma. This contrasts with the traditional idea of a single traumatic event in terms of its repetitive and continuous nature in the individual's life. As briefly mentioned in the introduction and as discussed in Laura Brown's chapter, *Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma*, in a more practical sense lawyers have argued against repetitive assaults as a legitimate form of trauma and cause of PTSD due to the fact that it can be assumed a victim becomes used to repetitive instances of physical and emotional assault and can therefore expect to be subjected to additional trauma.

But the attorney disagreed with me. How, asked this attorney, who represented the perpetrator, could my patient possibly have PTSD? After all, wasn't incest relatively common? I had myself testified only minutes earlier that as many as a third of all girls are sexually abused prior to the age of sixteen. Incest wasn't unusual, wasn't "outside the range of human experience." How could it be called a trauma? (Brown, 1995, p.101).

Although this reasoning is directed more towards achieving justice in a criminal sense, it does provoke an interesting perspective in application to the institution of slavery. Especially so if one considers the reformulation of Root's principle of insidious trauma

which was presented in the introduction, 'for all slaves living in a culture where there is a high base rate of physical violence and where such behaviour is considered normal, is an exposure to insidious trauma'. It is undeniable that it was the norm of a slave's life to expect physical punishment when their tasks were either incomplete or inadequately completed, particularly on plantations at the hand of a foreman or overseer. If argued by the same lawyers that Brown discusses in her chapter, the argument would be that a slave could not be traumatised by the physical punishments that they experienced during their time of bondage, given that the punishments were both common, repetitive, and expected. This in turn is in referral to the 'traditional' definition of trauma as an event 'outside of the range of human experience'. The lawyers would argue that physical beatings are not 'outside of the range of human experience' for these slaves.

While the novel does not explicitly state if Sethe was born into slavery or was transported from another country, it is safe to assume in the context of the novels time period and the lack of description of language barriers, that Sethe was most likely born into slavery. This indicates that her, along with her fellow slaves, entire life consisted of punishment, violence, and strife. It would be unreasonable to argue that these individuals would not be traumatised by their experiences based on the argument that they knew no other life and that it was not 'outside the range of human experience'. In fact, slavers relied on the threat and fear of violent actions to propel the success of their plantations. According to author Edward E. Baptist, "Innovation in violence, in fact, was the foundation of the widely shared pushing system. Enslaved migrants in the field quickly learned what happened if they lagged or resisted." (Baptist, 2014, p.117). The pushing system, Baptist explains, is the amount of land a 'hand' can be expected to maintain in a year.

Given a finite number of captives in their own control, entrepreneurs created a complex of labor control practices that enslaved people called "the pushing system". This system increased the number of acres each captive was supposed to cultivate. As of 1805, enslavers like Hampton figured that each 'hand' could tend and keep free of weeds five acres of cotton per year. Half a century later, that rule of thumb had increased to ten acres "to the hand" (Baptist, 2014, p.116-117).

This violence and the mere threat of such violence, of which Baptist is describing the early development of slave driven plantations, soon transformed into a means of control as well a means of punishment for other transgressions than those related to work, as was discussed in relation to the character of Alice in the chapter previous chapter. Neither was this use of violence used by just slave owners and other individuals in power on the plantation, as is the situation in Sethe's case. Early on in the novel, Sethe refers to a beautiful tree on her back:

"What tree on your back? Is something growing on your back? I don't see nothing growing on your back."

"It's there all the same."

"Who told you that?"

"Whitegirl. That's what she called it. I've never seen it and never will. But that's what she said it looked like. A chokecherry tree. Trunk, branches, and even leaves. Tiny little chokecherry leaves. But that was eighteen years ago. Could have cherries too now for all I know." (Morrison, 2007, p.18).

Needless to say, Sethe did not have a tree growing out of her back, but she is instead referring to the scars left by a whipping incident that had occurred when she was still enslaved on the Sweet Home plantation. She informs Paul D that she had been assaulted by two white boys while she was still lactating for daughter (Beloved), who then proceeded to steal her breast milk for seemingly no other reason than that they could. When Sethe told her owner who assaulted her, the boys returned and punished her for it. It appears that although Sethe prefers to refer to the whipping scars as a tree, the traumatic nature of the event itself has had a large impact on her psyche. Sethe is a character who prides herself in her role as a mother, as exemplified by her motivations to escape Sweet Home to ensure that her children grew up free and her willingness to later attempt murder to save them from a life of slavery. At the same time, it is clear that Sethe is repressing a great deal of memories in order to function normally which are then triggered by the presence of Paul D, and later Beloved. According to Freud, repression of memories and subsequent latent re-experiencing of an event is not an unexpected response to trauma. His leading theory of 'latency' and belated response describes instances in which a victim of sudden trauma may emerge from the experience seemingly unscathed, and yet some time after the event begin to present

symptoms of what is now known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. In the introduction to her book, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Caruth writes:

Yet what is truly striking about the accident victim's experience of the event and what in fact constitutes the central enigma of Freud's example, is not so much the period of forgetting that occurs after the accident, but rather the fact that the victim of the crash was never fully conscious during the accident itself. (Caruth, 1995, p.7)

What Caruth and Freud are suggesting, is that the act of repression and belated memory is not voluntary, quite the opposite in fact. While Freud does not give a clear reason for why some memories are latent in reaction to a traumatic event, Caruth implies that the memories formed during a traumatic experience are entirely unconscious, indicating that the victim was not fully aware during the event itself and as such has no active memory of it. It is only when those memories are accessed again through therapy, triggers and flashbacks that a belated response is activated and the victim remembers the event in its entirety. The significance of triggers and flashbacks was also discussed in the previous chapter. This theory is of particular interest in regards to Sethe and the mindset she appeared to have entered when she set out to kill her children to protect them from returning to slavery. With the way Morrison describes the event, it does not appear as if Sethe was fully aware of her surroundings, nor was she fully responsive after the fact. This indicates that Sethe was essentially a victim to her own subconscious and instincts by this meaning that she did not have complete control over her own actions.

Inside, two boys bled in the sawdust and dirt at the feet of a nigger woman holding a blood-soaked child to her chest with one hand and an infant by the heels in the other. She did not look at them; she simply swung the baby toward the wall planks, misses and tried to connect a second time, [...] the old nigger boy, still mewling, ran through the door behind them and snatched the baby from the arc of its mother's swing. (Morrison, 2007, p.175).

It is apparent from this quote that Sethe is not fully aware of her surroundings. She does not look at the new arrivals, nor does she seem entirely concerned that her two sons are on the floor bleeding. She is completely focused on fulfilling her task and does not appear to be show any emotion. The fact that it took another individual to physically intervene and ultimately save the life of Denver only goes to show that Sethe must have

recessed into a more baser area of her mind. This is further exemplified by the interaction between Sethe and Baby Suggs immediately following the event, which has previously been quoted in this chapter, "It's time to nurse your youngest," she said. Sethe reached up for the baby without letting the dead one go. Baby Suggs shook her head. "One at a time," she said and traded the living for the dead, which she carried into the keeping room." (Morrison, 2007, p.179). As with the previous quote, it is clear that Sethe is not completely aware, and seems to be presenting the symptoms of some sort of psychosis or shock, as she is only acting when prompted and is entirely non-verbal.

Further, it does not appear as though Sethe was outwardly affected by the event in the years following the murder. This is evident by her not only maintaining the house, caring for Baby Suggs as she neared death, raising Denver at the same time as maintaining employment at a restaurant. It is not until *Beloved* appears as a physical entity, rather than a spirit, that Sethe's memories of the event are seemingly triggered and that Sethe begins to break down. The consequence of this is that Sethe ultimately fails in her duty as the primary breadwinner of the family, as she loses her job, in order to spend more time with *Beloved*. This in turn places a further burden on Denver, which will be discussed later.

### Collective Trauma

In terms of collective trauma, the novel *Beloved* offers an interesting and sometimes double-sided depiction. Upon escape from Sweet Home, Sethe established herself in a black-friendly community in Ohio, within this community are other slaves who either escaped or bought their own freedom from their masters. It is unsurprising that the individuals in this community banded together in a sense of kinship to their shared experiences. A prime example of this is Baby Suggs, who had escaped herself and having been given a house to live in, established something of a hub of activity, becoming the centre and the grandmother figure of the community. Upon the act of murder, and especially after the death of Baby Suggs, it appears that while at the same time that Sethe pushes the community away, the community also rejects Sethe and by extension Baby Suggs in return, only to rally once again to come to the aid of Denver.

It had been a long time since anybody (good willed whitewoman, preacher, speaker or newspaperman) sat at their table, their sympathetic voices called liar by the revulsion in their eyes. For twelve years, long before Grandma Baby died, there had been no visitors of any sort and certainly no friends (Morrison, 2007, p.14).

In his chapter referred previously to in the introduction chapter, Kai Erikson discusses the affect traumatic events and experiences, particularly natural disasters, have in both dividing the community and in creating a bond between those affected. He writes that trauma of a collective nature is “a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality.” (Caruth, 1995, p.187). It can be argued that the broader community suffered a collective trauma first in terms of the institution of slavery, which created the initial bond with fellow former slaves, then secondly upon the act of murder within the community. This murder is then the event which severed the ties between the larger community and Sethe, given that the act contradicted the community’s perceived obligation to help and protect each other as well as the basic human instinct of preservation of life.

This interpretation is supported as Erikson writes further that “Those not touched try to distance themselves from those touched, almost as if they are escaping something spoiled, something contaminated, something polluted” (Caruth, 1995, p.189). Those not touched in the murder’s event would be those who belong to the same community but were not present at the event itself. These people, in following with the community’s broader opinion of Sethe’s actions proceeded to shun and isolate her, and by extension her remaining family, as if to protect themselves from something that is ‘contaminated’, as indicated in the quote above. As a result, Sethe’s world narrowed to her place of work and her home, “And now I know that if you was, you ain’t now because you came back here to me and I was right all along: there is no world outside my door” (Morrison, 2007, p. 217). Likewise, the broader community not only isolated Sethe and her daughter, but also felt a need to treat the house as taboo “Outside a driver whipped his horse into the gallop local people felt necessary when they passed 124” (Morrison, 2007, p.5).

What is interesting is that this act of shunning and isolation not only affected Sethe, but also Baby Suggs and Denver. Denver’s experience is one that will be discussed later in more detail, and so the focus here will be Baby Suggs. It has already been

mentioned that Baby Suggs and her house, prior to the murder of Beloved, functioned as something as a community central point as well as her maternal role within the community as a grandmother figure. It is important to note the familial relationship between Baby Suggs and Sethe, namely that Sethe is her daughter-in-law. This bond, rather than the bond between them and the broader community appears to have a more concrete basis, and as such, it is clear that the familial relationship supersedes the obligation to the broader community.

The dissolution of the isolation and shunning and gradual reintegration into the community is initially triggered by the character of Stamp Paid, who informs Paul D of situation surrounding the circumstances of Beloved's death. This character, like Baby Suggs, appears to hold a similar position of power within the community. His name, Stamp Paid, indicates that he played a major role in the escape of former slaves, and perhaps had a role in running the Underground Railroad. This in turn creates a debt between the former slaves and Stamp Paid, like paying a fee to send a letter in the postal system. This debt, in turn, gives Stamp Paid a great number of liberties, "Stamp Paid raised his fist to knock on the door he had never knocked on (because it was always open to or for him) and could not do it. Dispensing with that formality was all the pay he expected from Negroes in his debt" (Morrison, 2007, p.203). In terms of context for these lines, Stamp Paid had just revealed the murder of Beloved to Paul D, who in turn rejected Sethe and left. Stamp Paid realises that throughout the years following the murder and the death of Baby Suggs, Sethe and Denver had become gradually more isolated from the community, and was determined to reach out. His own pride, however, prevented him from following through. Ultimately, though, it is the community that eventually rallies around Sethe, but Denver especially and finally rids the family of Beloved. This is due not only to Denver's own actions but also to the questions raised by Stamp Paid concerning the mysterious woman at 124 Bluestone Road.

### Familial bonds and Postmemory.

So far in this chapter the events discussed has largely been related to that of a primary nature, as well as the secondary transmission of trauma and how a community might

collectively react to trauma. There has been debate, however, concerning how the effects of trauma may be inherited or transmitted to an individual who has no direct memory of it, repressed or otherwise. On the topic of secondary traumatization and transgenerational trauma, Bond and Craps write;

Felman and Laub extend the Freudian notion of transference to argue that it is not only clinicians who may undergo secondary traumatization, but also students learning of traumatic experiences, viewers or readers of trauma narratives, and lay people listening to an account of trauma narratives (Bond & Craps, 2020, p. 83).

What the authors are indicating here, is an idea which has already been touched on in Paul D's case, namely that he becomes traumatised by the verbal account of Beloved's murder, which in turn motivates him to leave Sethe. Although the authors are primarily concerned with students and other learners of traumatic events, this concept could also be related to characters in a novel and other works of literature in the same way. In the case of Denver, while it has been established that she has no active memory of the attempt on her life, or the lives of her brothers and the murder of her sister, it would be unreasonable to assume that she at any point between the time of the murder and the beginning of the novel, did not have some notion or knowledge about the event itself, either through direct or indirect means "I love my mother but I know she killed one of her own daughters, and tender as she is with me, I'm scared of her because of it." (Morrison, 2007, p.242).

Bond and Craps extend the notion of transgenerational trauma in quoting the works of Marianne Hirsch on *Postmemory*, "Postmemory describes the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right (2008: 1)." (Bond & Craps, 2020, p.85). Hirsch is suggesting, then, that it is not necessary for an individual to be alive at the time of a traumatic event, or in Denver's case to be old enough to remember it, to be subsequently traumatised by it, and the mere retelling of the event is sufficient to generate memories of the event in the individual, as well as form physical symptoms of PTSD. As previously mentioned, Denver herself was too young to be expected to form memories of the murder to which she would have a belated response in the Caruthian sense, yet, hearing the story later and experiencing the repetitive hauntings could be

sufficient to form her own memories in relation to the murder and as such become traumatised.

As noted previously, the role familial bonds play in *Beloved* is central to the plot's development. What is also clear is that some of the familial bonds presented in the novel could be perceived by readers as more valuable or precious than others, and that the family dynamic shifts as family members either die or leave the central family unit. What is intriguing is how the two sons, Howard and Buglar are dispatched as characters in the plot at the very beginning and are only mentioned by name a few times throughout the remaining narrative. This is worth mentioning as it seems contradictory to the value placed on male members of a household that was commonplace at the time of the plots setting. This decision made by the author is more so interesting given that when mentioned later in the narrative, the two boys are depicted as being troubled and affected by the attempt on their life and the subsequent hauntings, and as such, these characters could have made an excellent conduit for the representation of primary trauma in literature if further explored by the author. This is not to say that the absence of these characters inhibits a surface level analysis of the extent of their traumatising, quite the opposite:

“And she told her about Howard and Buglar: the parts of the bed that belonged to each (the top reserved for herself); that before she transferred to Baby Suggs' bed she never knew them to sleep without holding hands. She described them to Beloved slowly, [...] dwelling on their habits, the games they taught her and not the fright that drove them increasingly out of the house --- anywhere--- and finally far away.” (Morrison, 2007, p.142)

For the entire first half of the novel, the reason given for their departure, and the reason that Sethe believes to be true, is that they feared the ghost of Beloved and the repetitive hauntings drove them away. However, it is later revealed by Denver that the more likely reason may be more intricately connected to the attempt on their lives. “I guess they rather be around killing men than killing women, and there sure is something in her (Sethe) that makes it all right to kill her own.” (Morrison, 2007, p. 242). Here Denver is describing the fear she has of her mother and that she shares with her brothers, and makes the connection to them running away. It is without a doubt that Sethe's attempt on Howard and Buglars lives irreperally damaged the relationship between mother and

son, to the extent that they would rather fight in a war than stay at home. In fact, Sethe states that as a result of the fear the two boys felt towards her, they would not let her near them. "Neither Howard not Buglar would let me near them, not even to touch their hair." (Morrison, 2007, p.216). In drawing away from their mother, they ensured that they were protected from her until they were old and capable enough to survive out in the world when they inevitably ran away from the house.

With Beloved dead, the two sons running away and Baby Suggs eventually dying, Denver was placed into something of a strange position within the family unit. The family that Sethe sought to protect had essentially disappeared and so, until the appearance of Paul D and Beloved in the novel, all Sethe's motherly attention was directed towards Denver. Denver's position in the family unit shifts as each of the other members leave, causing Denver to act as something of a replacement for the missing family members, and to eventually take the helm at the head of the household towards the end of the novel as Sethe descends into madness. Professor Gabriele Schwab writes in her essay, *Replacement Children: The Transgenerational Transmission of Traumatic Loss* on the topic of children born after the death of an elder sibling acting as a replacement child in order for the parents to cope with the loss. She writes further that more often than not, the 'replacement' child is prone to feeling a sense of guilt for taking their older siblings place within the family. Schwab's focus is primarily on the children born to families suffering child loss in the years following war, rather than singular traumatic events, yet it is not difficult to draw comparisons between Denver's situation and those Schwab writes about, which is only exacerbated when Beloved returns in physical form.

Interestingly, Denver, having acted as the replacement child following the death of her sister and her brothers running away, finds the situation reversed when Beloved returns to the family as a physical being, "It was as though her mother had lost her mind [...] But different because unlike Baby Suggs, she cut Denver out completely. (Morrison, 2007, p.282). The period between when Beloved integrates herself into the family, and the novel's climax is when Denver experiences the most character growth, and seems to undergo a healing process of her own. It is during this time that Denver forces herself to overcome the fear of the outside world in order to provide food for her family when Sethe fails to do so. Schwab writes "One cannot compete with a dead child, and yet one

cannot avoid the ghostly competition handed down with parental fantasies.” (Schwab, 2009, p.281). Interestingly, Denver does not initially appear to have feelings of ill will towards Beloved, even when it is clear that she has been chosen over Denver. Yet when she realises that Beloved is becoming detrimental to the health of her mother she is left little choice but to seek aid elsewhere. “Braced and heartened by that easy encounter, she picked up speed and began to look deliberately at the neighborhood surrounding her. She was shocked to see how small the big things were” (Morrison, 2007, p.289). The passage follows Denver’s decision to venture outside of the yard for the first time on her own in at least a decade. It could be argued that a parallel might be drawn between Sethe and Denver in this case. This is in terms of the desperation felt by both characters given the situations they found themselves in. While Sethe was driven by her motherly instincts to murder and attempt to murder her children in order to protect them from a life of slavery. Denver, on the other hand, is driven by the need to protect her mother both from Beloved, but also from starvation and death to the point where she overcomes her most fundamental fear, regardless of the perceived danger this poses to her.

“I don’t know what it is, I don’t know who it is, but maybe there is something else terrible enough to make her do it again. [...] Whatever it is, it comes from outside this house, outside the yard, and it can come right on in the yard if it wants to. So I never leave this house and I watch over the yard, so it can’t happen again and my mother won’t have to kill me too.” (Morrison, 2007, p.242).

This passage contains a few serious implications to the nature of the relationship between Sethe and Denver. It is made abundantly clear that while Denver is aware that it was some force from outside the boundaries of the house which triggered Sethe’s attack on her children, she is not made aware of who or what this force was, leaving Denver to develop a fear of everything of the outside in a far fetched effort to protect her life and preserve her mothers’ sanity. This prompts the question as to what kind of discussion Sethe, or Baby Suggs may have had with Denver as she grew up to explain the death of her sister, or if all the information that Denver has about the event is gathered through more indirect means, such as overhearing conversations. This in turn further poses the question of if there had not been an open dialogue between mother and daughter, what implications does this have for how Sethe processed the event itself. As has been pointed out earlier in this chapter, it is clear that Sethe was unable to

properly comprehend the event at the time, nor did she undergo any form of counselling or therapy following the event, which is expected in the novel's historical context. At this point, it is crucial to address the state of mental health care during the time this novel was set, and the implications of superimposing modern opinions of mental health on a narrative set in the past.

### Mental health care in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America

In his article *Nineteenth Century Review of Mental Health Care for African Americans: A Legacy of Service and Policy Barriers*, Tony Lowe discusses the structure of the mental health system in both general terms in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and how this was adapted to fit the narrative of the perceived differences between races to explain mental illness in slaves. He writes that:

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the prevailing diagnostic system centered on four main syndromes, -- melancholy, mania, dementia, and idiocy; however, geography and race of clients often combined to create a different typology. [...] However, in the South an alternate taxonomy emerged that incorporated ideological thought relevant to chattel slavery within existing practice and service delivery (Lowe, 2006, p.31).

He explains further that there were two mental illnesses associated with slaves at the time, drapetomania and dysaesthesia aethiopica. The former was described as 'dissatisfaction' amongst slaves which was attributed as the cause of slave runaways, while the latter is described as a pattern of mischievous behaviour resulting in the destruction of tools and inadequately performed tasks (Lowe, 2006, p.31). Given that there was at the time, a clear distinction between illnesses that affected slaves, and those that affected white people based on presumed differences in physiology, it is not far fetched to presume that treatments for these illnesses would differ also. Lowe writes that "By the nineteenth century, a new movement concerning the delivery and organization of health care dramatically changed mental health care by propelling national efforts to develop state-funded asylums for the care of the mentally ill." (Lowe, 2006, p. 38). While there does seem to be a structure in place for the treatment of mental illnesses in general, there are other aspects to take into consideration in terms of

who had access to these treatments and what the alternatives were for those who did not.

For wealthy, white people, access to specialised treatment for the mentally ill was far more obtainable than for white people without wealth, whose only options were 'almshouses' or charitable hospitals. Individuals advocating for mental health reform and the organisation of institutions in states where they did not already exist were often white, and of the opinion that mental health reform for black people should be advocated for by black people themselves, and as such, access to treatment for black people in general, left a lot to be desired. For black people not enslaved in the North, options were limited to jails and 'almshouses' and for all intents and purposes, access was non-existent for black people living in bondage, with Lowe suggesting an opinion that slavery itself was considered an 'guard' by some against mental illness (Lowe, 2006, p. 32).

Following the murder of Beloved, Sethe and Denver (as she was still breastfeeding) were taken to jail, though the reason behind this appears to be as punishment and effort to contain Sethe from causing further harm rather than an effort to aid Sethe with her obvious mental disorder.

"I'll have to take you in. No trouble now. You've done enough to last you. Come on now."

She did not move.

"You come quiet now, hear, and I won't have to tie you up."

She stayed still and he had made up his mind to go near her and some kind of way bind her wet red hands when a shadow behind him in the doorway made him turn."

(Morrison, 2007, p.178).

What is striking, however, is how the Sheriff handles the situation given the context of the event. Stripped down, Sethe is a fugitive slave, who was caught red-handed in the act of murdering her youngest child, having already murdered one child and attempted the murder of her two others. It is far within reason that the Sheriff could have handled the given situation much more forcefully than he is depicted doing in the novel. Yet, he appears hesitant to even approach Sethe in order to bind her, and is clear that physically binding Sethe is a last resort. It is apparent that the Sheriff is aware that Sethe was not in her right mind and as such his actions reflected this fact, comparable to

how one might handle a wild animal. This is particularly interesting given how Paul D later also likens Sethe to an animal. It cannot definitively be said how this fictional character might have acted if the same acts were carried out by a white person, or by a black person who was seemingly of sound mind.

### Motivations

As in the previous chapter, it is also important for this chapter to explore what kind of motivation prompted Morrison to write *Beloved* as well as what significance this novel might have for the African American community and culture. In the forward of the novel, Morrison writes in reference to the Margaret Garner story, upon which the novel is loosely based, “So I would invent her thoughts, plumb them for a subtext that was historically true in essence, but not strictly factual in order to relate her history to contemporary issues about freedom, responsibility and women’s “place” (Morrison, 2007, p.XI). She acknowledges, like Butler did, that the factual aspects of the neo-slave narrative are not strictly accurate. However, this appears to be an intentional decision in order to allow the author to explore otherwise neglected topics concerning history which either lack concrete information or do not garner enough interest to otherwise warrant literary attention.

During the period Morrison was writing this novel, the feminist movement was in full swing and issues such as equal pay, body autonomy and choice were in the forefront. Morrison, however, wondered at the same time what freedom might have meant for slaves, particularly slave women:

To marry or not. To have children or not. Inevitably these thoughts led me to the different history of black women in this country – a history in which marriage was discouraged, impossible, or illegal; in which birthing children was required, but “having” them, being responsible for them – being, in other words, their parent – was as out of the question as freedom. (Morrison, 2007, p.X-XI).

Of course, Morrison is referring to the practice of slave owners forcing their slaves to reproduce in order to increase the value of their property. It appears then that the plot of the motivation behind *Beloved* and the novel’s plot are intimately intertwined, as the primary theme of the novel is the relationship between mother and daughter, and the lengths a mother might go to ensure the freedom of her children. In her collection of

essays, *The Source of Self Regard*, Morrison expands on this reasoning: “Suppose having children, being called a mother was the supreme act of freedom – not its opposite” (Morrison, 2020, p.282). This suggests then, that *Beloved* leans more towards a social feminist commentary surrounding the issue of the right to body autonomy and by extension, the right to be a parent, presented on a background narrative which depicts a time when women, particularly slaves did not have this choice.

In the same collection of essays, Morrison also comments on the treatment of African Americans in official history. She explains that when she was a student: “I was keenly aware of erasures and absences and silences in the written history available to me” (Morrison, 2020, p.281). She is broaching a very real concern given that prior to their emancipation, African Americans were treated and documented as if they were property. This not only makes it extremely difficult to trace one’s family, but also to build an accurate picture of what life might have been like for slaves, due to the fact that interest in documenting such things was lacking. On this topic Morrison writes further “They are spoken of and written about – objects of history, not subjects within it” (Morrison, *Rememory*, 2020, p.324). It is clear through how the characters are developed, the lack of emphasis on historical fact, and Morrison’s own admittance that the true story *Beloved* is based upon is highly embellished, that aside from commenting on motherhood and freedom, she is also giving life to the characters outside of being historical objects. It could be argued based on this information, that one of Morrison’s primary motivations for writing *Beloved* is to show contemporary readers that outside of their historical status of slaves or ex-slaves, African Americans at this time were still a people who had the same wants, needs and desires as everyone else.

This chapter had identified the key traumatic event in the novel, *Beloved*, and analysed the significance in has in relation to the representation of both primary and secondary trauma. The analysis found that there were both primarily traumatised victims as well as victims who were secondarily traumatised through the retelling of the event. This analysis also delved into the significance of familial bonds and the concept of postmemory in the members of the main family unit in the novel. Finally, this chapter presented the documented motivations the author had to write this novel, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

## Chapter 4 – Discussion

The previous two chapters identified and analysed the main traumatic events in the two novels of interest anchored in the theoretical framework that was presented in the introduction chapter. These chapters found that in addition to primary and secondary trauma, there was also evidence of collective trauma, postmemory and belated response, among others. The analysis chapters also speculated on the author's motivations for writing the novels and raised the question as to the need to differentiate between narratives representing trauma with short-term and long-term effects, in addition to how this differentiation might affect their reception by contemporary readers.

The following chapter will address the questions raised above, in addition to addressing other areas of interest which relate more to the readers of these novels than the characters within. In order to accomplish this, it will be crucial to discuss not only the novels' historical accuracy in terms of how they function as neo-slave narratives, but also what purpose these novels may serve in terms of a broader consolidation of the trauma and history of institutionalised slavery with the assumptions and knowledge that contemporary and future readers may already have. It will also be important to discuss how the theory of cultural trauma as well as the use of intrusive imagery contribute to this consolidation.

It has long been accepted that slave narratives are those bodies of work that are autobiographical in nature, written by and about former slaves, primarily in the United States of America. Although these narratives could be written in any part of the world in which slavery was present, the most referred to of this genre hail predominantly from the Antebellum South of the United States of America. These narratives in particular often served a very specific purpose in that they were written by former slaves in order to garner support for the abolitionist movement, which ultimately contributed to the abolishment of slavery following the Civil War. Given that these narratives often had a specific political agenda, graphic descriptions of punishment, injury, rape and escape, these narratives played a major role in demonstrating the inhumanity of slavery. Emphasis was laid specifically on the fact that these works were authentic, to the point

where former slaves who authored these works often had to rely on having white abolitionist sponsors to vouch for the authenticity of the account and the character of the writer (Levine & Krupat, 2013, p.938). This is not to say that fictional slave narratives did not also exist at this time, on the contrary, perhaps the most famous of the slave narratives after that of Frederick Douglas's is Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Unlike other slave narratives, which were written with the dual purpose of the disclosing the true nature of slavery as well as gaining support, Stowe's slave narrative is in contrast a fictional compilation of traits of other slave narratives used to reach the same goal. The fictional nature of the novel, however, did not inhibit its ability to garner the support of the general population, or serve the purpose it was written for. Like Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, neo-slave narratives, are also of a fictional nature yet serve a different purpose than purely as abolitionist propaganda.

As the term suggests, neo-slave narratives, in contrast to traditional slave narratives, are those which are written by authors who did not live during the time of slavery or did not directly experience slavery themselves. Rather than writing about slavery as a means to provoke a 'feel' of sympathy or outrage to the realities of slavery, neo-slave narratives instead aim to analyse and explain the psychological and social aftereffects of slavery. In a 1987 interview with Toni Morrison, she describes that the main issue she found with traditional slave narratives was that they often were hyper-focused on the institution of slavery itself, rather than the psychological effects slavery had on the characters. This is indicative of a shift in the purpose of slave narratives when they were written in the 1800s and Neo-Slave narratives written in the twentieth century. She explains that one of the motivations of writing *Beloved* was that in putting the focus back onto the character's interior life, one puts the "authority back into the hands of the slave rather than the slaveholder" (Morrison, 1987). As mentioned in the previous chapter, Morrison questioned the lack of historical documentation pertaining to the personal lives of slaves, as they were often documented as 'objects of history' rather than subjects. As *Beloved* is loosely based on a true story, the previous quote could be interpreted in the way that Morrison's purpose was to focus on her characters as complete, autonomous individuals rather than their status as former slaves.

## Accuracy of the novels and their function as Neo-Slave narratives.

Although it is clear that Morrison's *Beloved* and Butler's *Kindred* deal with a particularly difficult period of time in American history, the authors were faced with a dilemma as they developed their works of literature. This was, to what extent the novels should portray an accurate and faithful description of the realities of slavery. In working through this dilemma, the authors had two issues to contend with. Firstly, that of the often graphic nature of slavery often depicted in traditional slave narratives and secondly, how faithful they could be in terms of these graphic portrayals while at the same time producing a novel is more palatable for the general audience.

Both Morrison's and Butler's novels feature episodes of extreme violence, which were discussed in the two previous chapters, yet they both employ different styles of language to convey these instances of violence depending on the character or situation in question. Of course, this is not to suggest that one author achieves their aim more succinctly than the other, but rather that the language styles are fitting to each novels approach to the narrative. In order to demonstrate this contrast between the two authors, it is important to highlight the episodes of whipping as punishment which occur in each novel, and to examine the differences in how the characters react to their respective episode, as well as the language used by the authors to relate this event to the reader. In particular, the focus will be on when the event is discussed or narrated after the fact.

I got a tree on my back and a haint in my house, and nothing in between but the daughter I am holding in my arms. No more running – from nothing. [...]

“What tree on your back? Is something growing on your back? I don't see nothing growing on your back.”

“It's there all the same.”

“Who told you that?”

“Whitegirl. That's what she called it. I've never seen it and never will. But that's what she said it looked like. A chokecherry tree. Trunk, branches, and even leaves. Tiny little chokecherry leaves. But that was eighteen years ago. Could have cherries too now for all I know.” (Morrison, 2007, p.18)

In this excerpt, Sethe is trying to communicate the nature of the scarring on her back as a result of being whipped by her previous owner to Paul D, who was enslaved on the

same plantation as Sethe before they both fled. It is intriguing that Sethe, after eighteen years held onto the likening of the scarring to a Chokecherry tree, as it had been described to her by the white girl who aided her when she gave birth during her escape. By using the metaphor of a Chokecherry tree, Morrison accomplishes the necessity to give the readers a point of reference as to the extent and severity of the what the scarring might look like without being overtly graphic in that description. In reality, specifically in regards to Morrison's reference of the trunk, Chokecherry trees do appear to be an apt representation of what one might expect significant scarring of a whipped slave to look like (see fig. 1), particularly if one has no previous point of reference. When compared to the famous image of 'Whipped Peter', used widely for abolitionist purposes in the years leading up to the Civil War, it is clear why Morrison chose this particular tree to illustrate the depth and severity of the scarring (see fig. 2).



*Figure 1 Chokecherry Tree trunk*



*Figure 2 'Whipped Peter' - a fugitive slave*

Allowences must be made in comparing the episodes in both novels in terms of Morrison's being a description of the event year after the fact, and Butler's is a narration of the event as it happens. This in itself could be a reflection on how the characters themselves are processing the traumatic event in regards to the possible development of PTSD symptoms. As was discussed in previous chapters, each individual may be affected by a traumatic event in a number of ways, exhibiting for example many or few symptoms of PTSD. Some may have a belated response to the event, possessing little to no memory of it, which could extend over a number of years. Others still may be unaffected by the event entirely. Sethe, who has a belated response to the trauma she experienced, appears to prefer to distance herself from the true nature of her scars up until this is no longer possible when Beloved is introduced as a character and Sethe's mental health destabilises. In contrast, Dana, whose episode occurs as the novel is narrated and as such is in a considerable amount of pain as a result, had no choice but to face the trauma head on.

“My blouse was stuck to my back. It was cut to pieces really, but the pieces were stuck to me. My back was cut up pretty badly too from what I could feel. I had seen old photographs of the backs of people who had been slaves. I could remember the scars, thick and ugly. Kevin had always told me how smooth my skin was...” (Butler, 2014, p.121).

It is expected that Butler’s portrayal of her main character being whipped is differs to that of Morrison’s, yet it is interesting to examine how the two authors approach the subject. While Morrison, in keeping with her usual, embellished, style of writing, chose to use the metaphor of the tree that most would be familiar with, without being graphic, Butler on the other hand, chose to use a more straightforward manner of description. Here the audience is specifically given details as to how Dana was whipped so severely that her shirt was cut up and imbedded in the wounds. Readers are also later told that this shirt had to be soaked off in a bathtub, as the blood had started to dry. Not only this, but the main character also acknowledges that she is aware of what the implication of the whipping could mean for her future in terms of how she is perceived by her husband.

There could, perhaps, be a connection between the manner in which the authors chose to narrate these two episodes with other aspects of the novel. By this, meaning that the overarching plot of the novels has an influence on the manner in which they are narrated. In Morrison’s case, as the novel is set entirely in the past, it is natural for the style of narration to be not too dissimilar to the language style, or preconceived language styles of other works of the same time period. On the other hand, Butler’s novel is set partially in the present, and partially in the past with the crucial connection being a modern black woman being thrust into the past. The implication of this, is that it is natural for the author to instead use more direct, unembellished language in order to reflect the modernity of the narrator, and further, to enable a more direct connection between the readers and the characters. Despite the fact that Butler’s novel incorporates features of science fiction and fantasy, the maintenance of her contemporary narration style functions to make the novel more appealing to contemporary audiences.

On the note of portrayals of the more unsavory aspects of slavery, the authors, as mentioned, needed to determine how realistic their novels should be. To reiterate, these novels were not written to serve a political purpose of an abolitionist nature as other slave narratives were, and as such, it was unnecessary for them to be unduly graphic in terms of the nature of slavery. In the previously quoted interview with Octavia E. Butler, she describes the lengths to which she went when she was conducting her research for *Kindred*, which included but was not limited to visiting a previous slave plantation and, like Morrison, reading other slave narratives;

It was not fun...it's not pleasure reading. As a matter of fact, one of the things I realised when I was reading the slave narrative [...] was that I was not going to be able to come anywhere near presenting slavery as it was. I was going to have to do a somewhat cleaned up version of slavery, or no one would be willing to read it. (Kenan, 1991, p.497).

It is perhaps this admittance that differentiates neo-slave narratives from traditional slave narratives. The fallacy and incapability of modern authors to be able to accurately recreate the period of slavery may be due to the fact that there is such a disconnect. This begs the further question though, of why authors are still writing slave narratives at all. In the same interview, Butler discusses witnessing the treatment her mother endured while she was growing up and the feeling of disappointment she felt when her mother, rather than standing up for herself, said nothing. Butler indicates that this contributed to her desire to learn more about her heritage and culture, in order to understand her mother.

A potential answer to the question of why contemporary authors enter into the genre of neo-slave narratives, could be that these narratives are a direct attempt to consolidate what is known historically about slavery, with what authors and contemporary readers have experienced of the culture that developed after slavery. Given discriminatory practices perpetuated against African Americans in the decades following slavery, ranging from 'Black Codes' in the southern states to nationwide segregation laws, there is evidence to suggest that African Americans have suffered a cultural trauma due to the institution of slavery. Cultural trauma is, according to Jeffrey C. Alexander; "when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking

their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways." (Alexander, 2004, p.1). While there does appear to be a superficial link between Alexander's theory of cultural trauma and Erikson's definition of collective trauma, it can be argued that rather than a parallel to collective trauma, Alexander's theory of cultural trauma could be treated instead as an extension of collective trauma. As previously quoted, Erikson defines collective trauma as "a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality" (Erikson, 1995, p.187.). This implies that the traumatic event is experienced by the collective at the time it occurs and that the effects of the event, such as the impairment of the sense of communality, are also restricted to this collective. Whereas, as Alexander's theory of cultural trauma argues that trauma "is the result of this acute discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity's sense of its own identity." (Alexander, 2004, p.10). This implies that the resulting culture that develops in the wake of a collective traumatic event influences the following generations within that culture. In layman terms, cultural trauma can be that which defines and develops the culture itself.

In his chapter *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity*, Ron Eyerman supports the view that slavery was fundamental in the development of the African American identity and by extension, its culture. In keeping with Caruth's theory of 'belatedness', Eyerman proposes that slavery was traumatic in retrospect. However, rather than focusing solely on the formation of African American identity, Eyerman also examines the role of the generations in collective memory, which is more relevant in terms of the authors and novels of interest. He asks "If collective memory is always group based and subject to adjustment according to historically rooted needs, what are the spatial and temporal parameters that mark this process of reinterpretation?" (Eyerman, 2004, p.69). The nature of cultural trauma, that is it fundamental to the identity of a people, indicates that it is not strictly necessary for an individual to directly experience the trauma upon which their culture is formed to be affected by it. It is here where other elements of trauma theory may be brought into the discussion which are connected to that of cultural trauma.

The theory of prosthetic memory was developed by Alison Landsberg in order to account for other methods of transmission of trauma and memory outside that of familial ties and rather through the growing consumption of mass media and news coverage of major global events, and through the consumption of works of literature. Though she does not necessarily argue that the memories conveyed by these forms will always cause traumatization, she does argue that with the consumption of mass media, memories of traumatic events no longer belong solely to those who directly experienced them, but rather allow them to be acquired by unrelated individuals (Bond & Craps, 2020). On this topic, and as quoted in Bond and Craps, she writes that “Modernity’s ruptures do not belong exclusively to a particular group; that is, memories of the Holocaust do not belong only to Jews, nor do memories of slavery belong solely to African Americans (2004:2).” (Bond & Craps, 2020, p.88) It can then be argued, that neo-slave narratives such as *Beloved* and *Kindred* work in such a manner to make available the memories of and associated to slavery to readers who may not have a cultural, ethnic or familial link to slavery.

If neo-slave narratives such as *Kindred* and *Beloved* fall under the theory of prosthetic memory, and allow for the memories associated with slavery to be conveyed to otherwise unconnected individuals, the question remains of how these novels might achieve this. In the case of *Kindred*, it could be argued that it is the use of the voice of a modern character, whose morals and ideals are familiar and relatable to most contemporary readers, which bridges the gap between past and present. In the case of *Beloved*, however, the connection might not be as literal. As this novel does not have the benefit of a contemporary character to force a connection between past and present, it must be considered that it is the novel’s existence itself which is what bridges this gap. By this meaning that it is the consistent introduction of new and reimagined representations of slavery in literature and other forms of mass media that contributes to the conveyance of these memories to new audiences.

## Intrusive images and imagery

There remains the question of what it is about these novels and other forms of media that is responsible for leaving strong impressions on an otherwise unrelated individual. One explanation could be that of the formation of intrusive images through description or the use of an image by the media as synonymous with an event, such as the 'falling man' or the image of the



Figure 3 The World Trade Center - 9/11

World Trade Towers burning (see fig. 3). In his book *The Trauma Question*, Luckhurst writes that "One of the central ways in which contemporary trauma has been conceived is around the symptom of the intrusive or recurrent image, the unbidden flashback that abolishes time and reimmerses you in the visual field of the inaugurating traumatic instance." (Luckhurst, 2008, p.147). Even though the 9/11 attack was witnessed in person by a relatively small number of people, the images and news coverage in the media exposed and shared the experience to a worldwide audience. To those young enough to remember, the date 9/11 is synonymous with an image such as that pictured in fig. 3. This could extend to literature, specifically in relation to events of a particularly graphic nature such as those discussed above. In using concrete images and language, such as the Chokecherry tree in *Beloved* and Butler's description of the aftermath of Dana's whipping and the severing of her arm, an intrusive image may be formed in the reader.

## Long-term vs short-term.

While it is without a doubt that *Kindred* and *Beloved* explore the effects borne from traumatic events on the characters, there is something to be said on the type of effects represented in connection to what type of narrative is used in each novel. On the one hand, *Kindred* features events which occur chronologically, that is to say that as the events occur in the narrative, readers become aware of the effects of the trauma as the characters experience them. Readers are also not made aware of the consequences of Dana's experiences extending past the end of the narrative, other than the couple seeking some form of closure in the epilogue. In *Beloved*, however, the main traumatic

event occurs long before the narrative begins and is communicated to readers through flashbacks and re-telling by other characters that were present. This means that many of the long-term effects of the trauma, such as belatedness, symptoms of PTSD like hypervigilance, agoraphobia etc. are already in effect as the characters are introduced, and that it is the healing process which is being explored by the novel.

Connected to this, it is also important to consider the living situations that the main characters find themselves in. As previously stated, Dana is repeatedly pulled back into the past and trapped at height of slavery in the Antebellum South. Not only is this situation entirely different to what she is accustomed to as a contemporary woman, but she realises that it would be near impossible to escape the plantation without extensive preparation and her previous knowledge of the past. Thus, the lack of control and uncertainty she experiences as she navigates the past adds an additional layer of stress to the trauma.

In Sethe's, and by extension Denver's, case, the escape from the Antebellum South had already occurred and Sethe had been living as a fugitive in the more lenient northern states for several years before the narrative begins. Denver, having been born while her mother was escaping, has known no other life than being free. With this in mind, all of the main characters in this novel had a higher degree of control over their own lives, such as the ability to work for pay, having a community of like-situated individuals around them, granted with the initial fear of being re-captured. It could be argued then, that the ability to control one's surroundings, safety and every-day choices has something to say for one's ability to handle trauma and function as an individual in a broader community.

### Representation in other forms of media

Aside from the author's personal motivations for writing these novels, part of the issue concerning the disconnect between African Americans and their heritage could be that at the time these novels were written, there was a scarcity of accurate representations of slavery in both contemporary literature and other forms of visual media such as film. This is not to suggest that slavery has not been present in film entirely, but rather that

these previous representations of slavery in media have, perhaps, contributed to the perpetuation of negative stereotypes associated with slavery and African Americans. As quoted in an article written by Tom Brook, Professor Dexter Gabriel says in reference to *Gone With The Wind* (1939): “Hollywood depicted slavery where the slaves were depicted as happy, as jovial and in really demeaning stereotypes such as the Mammy or the Uncle Tom” (Brook, 2014). While traditional slave narratives account for the largest share of early representation, continued representation both in literature and in other forms of mass media are crucial to the continued understanding of this period in American history. It is the recent surge in films and television series such as *12 Years A Slave* (2014), *Underground* (2016) and most recently *The Underground Railroad* (2021), which demonstrates the continued need for representation of slavery to be adaptable and accessible to contemporary audiences. In his chapter *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity*, Eyerman writes: “Collective memory specifies the temporal parameters of past and future, where we came from and where we are going, and also why we are here now” (Eyerman, 2004, p.66). The implication of this is, is that in order for the development and continued consolidation of the African American identity and culture, it must remain present in the collective memory in the form most fitting to any given generation.

## Chapter 5 – Conclusion

Throughout the course of this thesis, it has been the primary aim to analyse and investigate the way in which neo-slave narratives promote the consolidation of the history of slavery and the trauma experienced by slaves with contemporary understanding of these topics in readers. It was also an aim of this thesis to evaluate the historical accuracy of the novels, as well as accuracy of the representations of trauma within a trauma theoretical framework. It was also the important to consider what kind of motivations and considerations authors might have made in relation to writing the neo-slave narratives, as well as the implications these types of novels might have for contemporary and future readers.

In order to achieve these aims, it was imperative to first establish a baseline understanding of what a traumatic event is and what psychological conditions might be caused by such an event. Further, it was important to outline the formation of trauma theory within literary discourse as well as the theories which emerged from trauma theory as needs arose. This called for an exploration into the history of the development of Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD) as a definitive psychological condition separate from other prevailing stress illnesses such as hysteria and shellshock at the time. Key figures, such as Freud, ruminated on the presentation of symptoms in connection to a mentally traumatic event, as well as how such symptoms may have a delayed presentation in the patient. Cathy Caruth later used this as the premise of her trauma theory of belatedness in the 1990s and was later the basis for elements of trauma theory such as postmemory, prosthetic memory and cultural trauma.

It was also crucial, given the fact that the novels analysed use slavery as their thematic background, to present a general history of this topic. The motivation for this was twofold. Firstly, as a means to provide a historical context upon which the analysis could be based, since neglecting to do so would jeopardize the understanding of the dynamics between characters as family members, both slave and otherwise, and between master and slave. And secondly, a lack of such understanding would affect the analysis of how the characters and communities in the novels reacted to different traumatic events. This further aided the discussion of how each of the novels used and

incorporated modern knowledge of slavery to expose the shortcoming of historical documentation.

The aim of the analysis chapters of *Kindred* and *Beloved* was to first identify the key traumatic events which could then be examined against the theoretical framework presented in the introduction chapter. These chapters found concrete examples of both primary and secondary trauma in both *Kindred* and *Beloved*. The primary trauma examples being the whippings and murder respectively, and the secondary being the traumatisation of Paul D and Denver in *Beloved*. The *Kindred* chapter also speculated on whether Alice was a victim of belated response or age regression in relation to the event pertaining to her character, but it was ultimately decided that it was more likely that she was experiencing a belated response to the trauma.

Through the close reading and analysis of these aforementioned events in the novels, it was revealed that they served different purposes in terms of the narratology of the novels as well as how they affected the relationships between characters. As *Kindred* features chronological narratology with the occasional episode of analepsis and is set predominantly during the height of slavery, the characters are subjected to several events which are similar in nature and which drives the plot of the novel forward. The analysis of *Kindred* also found limitations in the examination of trauma in regards to how the novel is narrated from a single first-person perspective through Dana. In terms of analysing how the traumatic events affected other characters, difficulty arises due namely to the fact that the analyses of these effects are restricted to direct interactions between them and Dana. The result of this, due to the nature of Dana's intermittent appearances in the past, is that the analysis of the representation of trauma experienced by other characters is limited to the short-term effects observed by Dana during direct interactions with the characters.

*Beloved*, in contrast, is for the most part set in the period following the Civil War and the emancipation of slaves. As such, it is the long-term effects the key traumatic event has on the characters, which took place prior to the narrative's beginning, and which is the focus of the novel. *Beloved* stands out against *Kindred*, as the narrative is told through several first-person perspectives, which allowed for a much more

comprehensive analysis of each character's reactions to the traumatic events in question. The *Beloved* chapter found that while on the surface Sethe's character seemed largely unaffected in the years following committing the act of murder, it appears that she instead had a severely belated response to the trauma. Denver, although she was too young to have memories of the event itself, developed some symptoms of PTSD such as hypervigilance and agoraphobia due to the fear she developed through the knowledge of her mother's actions and an unknown force which triggered these actions from outside of the household.

Having analysed the novels in regards to elements of trauma theory, it was the task of the discussion chapter to consider how these novels function as neo-slave narratives in order to aid the consolidation of the history of slavery with contemporary understanding. This question crucially took into consideration how the authors chose approach instances of severe traumatic events with regard to the dilemma of historical accuracy versus palatability of the scenes for the general audience, taking into account the authors experiences with researching the topic. The research into this topic determined that both authors found themselves having to censor some or the more brutal aspects of slavery for two reasons; firstly, that they considered themselves unable to adequately portray slavery as it actually was, as they did not have the first-hand experience that authors of traditional slave narratives 'benefitted' from, and secondly, that they speculated that such true portrayals would ultimately affect their novel's eventual success and acceptance. At the same time, the authors still recognised the need to write these novels in order to serve the purpose of preserving the place of slavery in the culture's collective memory.

This chapter further discussed the differences in how trauma was represented in the novels concerning their short-term and long-term effects. This aspect is intimately connected to the type of traumatic events that were represented in the novels as well as how the novels were narrated, e.g. whippings and the murder of *Beloved*. While in *Kindred*, the narrative was told chronologically and the character's instantaneous reactions to this trauma reflect this fact, *Beloved* on the other hand is a narrative that describes more of the long-term effects of trauma including belatedness and repression, as illustrated in how the main traumatic event is told primarily through flashbacks. The

long-term effects of trauma are further illustrated through how the main traumatic event has affected surrounding characters and the broader community, both at the time of the trauma itself and through the secondary traumatising of victims such as Paul D.

The discussion also revealed stylistic differences in relation to the portrayal of violent events, something which is to be expected, yet at the same time works to different effects. In Morrison's novel, the image of a Chokecherry tree was chosen for readers to relate to and to convey the extent of Sethe's whipping scars. However, Butler chose instead to allow her main character to narrate the scene as it occurred while comparing it to the violence that the character was familiar with on television with the indicated that the reality is far worse. While Morrison's stylistic choice might be considered by some to be more elegant, Butler's choice on the other hand can be perceived as more relatable in terms of familiarity. The relationship which is developed between Butler's Dana, and the readers appears to be one that is far more sustainable in terms of forging a relationship between contemporary understanding of history and history fact, precisely given that Dana's character is one that is thrust from the modern world into the past. This provides readers with a familiarity that they can relate themselves to.

It was further determined that in both novels interpersonal relationships, familial and otherwise, played an important role in how the characters coped with the trauma they experienced. Making allowances for the different environments the characters found themselves in, namely a plantation and a free community, both of the novels speak to the importance of having the support of a community or another individual who has been through the same, in order to move forward. In Sethe's case, she was ultimately rejected by the broader community to the effect that her support system was narrowed down to her immediate family, and which inevitably led to her breakdown. Dana on the other hand had the support of her peers on the plantation to help her heal physically, and the support of her husband to aid her healing mentally upon return to the present. This aspect addresses the validity of Alexander's theory of cultural trauma and the role it plays in forming a collective memory of an event which is then passed on to future generations.

As this thesis has been concerned with novels specifically on the topic of slavery, it is not definite that all of the same elements of trauma theory such as secondary traumatisation and collective and cultural trauma might translate to novels concerning other major traumatic events or periods. It would, however, be intriguing to continue such analysis on novels written in the future both concerning slavery and other events to discover whether the perception of such events changes. It has already been established that the authors of the two novels focused on in this thesis made the conscious decision to somewhat censor the events represented in their novels to make them more palatable for their audience. It would be intriguing therefore, to discover whether this decision is maintained in future neo-slave narratives, and if the cultural memory of slavery shifts to reflect this, or if there is a 'return' to more accurate representations.

As *Kindred* featured a modern character whose only frame of reference to violence came from television, it would also be interesting to conduct such an analysis on the representation of trauma and slavery in other forms of media which incorporates visual and auditory elements, such as film, serialisations, or graphic novels. Such an analysis could differentiate between adaptations of both traditional slave narratives and neo-slave narratives, of which both currently exist. The aim of such analyses could be to determine which form of media is more 'successful' in establishing prosthetic memories of trauma within the audience.

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