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**Houses packed with Grief –
Trauma and Home in three Novels
by Toni Morrison**

Schriftliche Prüfungsarbeit zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde

Vorgelegt von

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For my Parents, Hans and Hannelore Lonien

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I. PREFACE

“The reclamation of the history of black people in this country is paramount in its importance because while you can’t really blame the conqueror for writing history his own way, you can certainly debate it”

(Toni Morrison, *The Site of Memory*).

“[Stories] aren’t just entertainment.

Don’t be fooled.

.....

You don’t have anything

If you don’t have stories”

(Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*).

“What has the Beauty to do with the World? What has Beauty to do with Truth and Goodness – with the facts of the world and the right actions of men?” (DuBois 995). Also a student of Political Science and Cultural Anthropology, I have often found myself asking questions similar to W.E.B. DuBois’, questions of the relevance of art, of literature to be specific. Why study literature? Does it make a difference in the world? Is it possible to incorporate both aesthetics and politics in a work of art without compromising the strengths of either?

In Toni Morrison’s fiction, I have found a fusion that satisfies the need for beauty and political didactics alike. Rejecting the dichotomy of aesthetics versus politics, Morrison embraces both as two sides of the same coin: “For me, a novel has to be socially responsible as well as very beautiful” (Jones and Vinson 183). Her work of art delights the reader, while at the same time opening her eyes to the buried truths of subaltern lives. In writing on Toni Morrison, I find myself contributing to the understanding of her work in terms of “the saving power of the narrative, its capacity to open a door, to point out the fire and the fire escape” (Grewal x).

Leslie Marmon Silko states: „You don’t have anything if you don’t have stories“(2). For Blacks living in America this entailed for the longest time: “You don’t have a place if you don’t have a history.” Acknowledging the connection between the knowledge of one’s history and the capacity for finding a place to call home, Toni Morrison’s literary oeuvre has been primarily concerned with questions of Black history, memory and trauma. She sees her task as a writer in recovering, or as she puts it, remembering an African-American history conveniently neglected by the dominant

“conqueror” historiography. Her fiction contains powerful, emotionally stirring testimonials of trauma governing the lives of Blacks during slavery, Reconstruction, up to the present day.

The trilogy of novels I am analyzing in this dissertation is situated within that tradition of interrogating national identity and reconstructing social memory. Starting with slavery and its aftermath, moving on to the Harlem Renaissance and to the time of the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights movement, these three novels constitute a powerful re-imagining of African American place in America’s historical map. These stories of American space as locus of African American trauma go beyond entertainment, being deeply political as well as therapeutic.

When it was originally published in 1987, the first novel, *Beloved*, caused a stir for its unflinching portrayal of one slave woman’s struggle to come to terms with an unspeakably cruel, traumatic past. Morrison took an unusual approach in fictionalizing the true story of Margaret Garner, a slave woman who killed one of her children in order to protect her from being captured and delivered back to slavery. Presenting Sethe, the fictionalized Garner, as stuck in a time and place of her deepest, most debilitating traumatic experience, Morrison opens up the discourse of African American history and historiography to fashion a revisionary slave narrative. Exploring the cultural roots of Black Americans in slavery, Morrison extends African American cultural memory in the space of *Beloved* and situates African American traumatic history squarely in the history of American nation-building.

Morrison employs a decidedly spatial concept of history in *Beloved*, one that her protagonist Sethe aptly describes with her theory of rememory: “Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it’s gone, but the place – the picture of it – stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world” (38). The author’s main achievement with the concept of rememory as spatialized time is a communalization of memory, thus making it publicly accessible for commemoration and interpretation. In *Beloved*, the reader may roam landscapes of pain and trauma that had heretofore been largely neglected by historiographers and authors alike.

Violet and Joe Trace, the protagonists of *Jazz*, also find themselves caught in a cycle of historic trauma that, since hidden from sight, keeps them bound to the track of repetition of the painful past. Morrison fictionalizes the Reconstruction South as a site of the deconstruction of Black space and identity for the sake of the economic and social advancement of the white oppressor. Growing up in the Jim Crow South of the

Reconstruction Era, Joe's and Violet's lives are pervaded with a sense of "incredulous terror" (Bhabha, 9) in the face of everyday assaults on their physical and psychological integrity. The horror of their lives is too intense to be remembered, though, and they go through their lives unaware of the damage done to their souls. They become part of the vast Black movement to the metropolitan areas of the North, known as the Great Migration. Following the call of modernity to forget their past and be part of the New Negro movement that promises unlimited freedom for Blacks, they live their lives in Harlem without looking back. They are sure they have overcome their troubled past, until it catches up with them and manifests itself in a violent repetition of childhood trauma that bubbles up against the surface of their New Negro masks. It is then, that Morrison's witnessing of the subaltern history takes place in the minds of her protagonists. Their memories are polyphonic voices of historical testimony that challenge any one dominant history as being merely discursive constructs containing a particular view of the world.

As its name indicates, *Jazz* is performed in the style of a Jazz piece, thereby challenging narrative conventions as to the authority of the narrative voice. Morrison's narrator gets reduced to just one voice among many, thereby deconstructing her discursive authority. Joe and Violet are granted the power to create their own histories, which enables them to reclaim their identities that had been defined externally for so long.

The last of the three novels I am examining, *Paradise*, was published in 1997 and concludes the historiographic trilogy started with *Beloved*'s depiction of slavery and its aftermath, and continued with *Jazz*'s narrative set in the post Civil War era and during the time of the Great Migration. While *Paradise* is set in the early American 1970s, during the time of the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights movement, its manifold stories sprawl over different decades in American history and its defining traumatic moment, its primal scene lies outside the bounds of the core narrative, present only in the memories of the novel's protagonists.

Paradise is different conceptually from the previous two novels. Like *Beloved* and *Jazz*, it deals with the commemoration of traumatic history, but where the previous two examine the difficulty of bearing witness and fashioning narratives, *Paradise* warns of the excesses of commemoration that can hold a community in its grip, thus keeping it bound to the time and place of the past and unable to adapt to the present. Basing the communal identity on a traumatic episode in the past, the novel's protagonists are

petrified inside their isolated space of commemoration, unable to adapt to social and cultural change.

Revolving around the dichotomy between the town of Ruby, an all-black utopia, and the Convent, a female utopia, the novel examines the idea of paradise as a closed space that depends in its existence on the exclusion of the Other. In the end, it turns out that any place as closed-off and rigidly fenced is doomed to failure. In order to thrive, places need to have flexible borders, permeable to the good as well as the bad.

In my exploration of trauma and space in Toni Morrison's novels, I have benefited from extensive research on the author and her work. Two quite recent scholarly works have been particularly helpful to get me started on matters of trauma in Toni Morrison. Gurleen Grewal's monograph *Circles of Sorrow, Lines of Struggle: The Novels of Toni Morrison* positions Morrison's work in a post-colonial tradition that seeks to work through "the collective trauma of colonialism" and thus puts the "impulse to reveal/educate/change" (Grewal x/xi) at the heart of her fiction. Grewal herself is a critic of the historical materialist feminist tradition, and therefore works with the premise that "the literary text is not isolated but embedded in and constituted by the material and historical processes to which it belongs, processes upon which the literary text may exert its own radical longings and determinations" (xi). As the title indicates, the book has at its core the connection between Black history and latent trauma that is at the heart of the novels analyzed in this dissertation as well.

J. Brooks Bouson takes a similar perspective in her monograph *Quiet as It's Kept: Shame, Trauma, and Race in the Novels of Toni Morrison*. Embedded in a framework of psychoanalytical investigations of shame and trauma, Bouson's analysis focuses on the "jarring depictions of the trauma of slavery and the horrors of racist oppression and black-on-black violence" (ix) that pervade Morrison's novels.

Both authors draw from Cathy Caruth's work on trauma that offers immense insights into the traumatized mind. I also have profited from her work *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, which pays particular attention to the process and significance of communal memory, the witnessing of a historical communal trauma. Her definition of trauma as the intrusion of extraordinary violence into the mind of the victim provided me with an interesting angle from which to look at the connection between trauma and the deconstruction of space.

On the theoretical level of place, I found a lot of useful observations in Yi-Fu Tuan's seminal work in human geography *Space and Place: The Perspective of*

Experience, in which the author finds his anthropological analysis of space and place upon the premise of place as shelter and intimacy. Taking this view as a basis for the discussion of place and trauma in Morrison's novels proved fruitful, even though (or maybe because) Tuan's modern sensibility of linear progress through time and space runs counter to Morrison's own concept of spatiotemporal cyclicity.

On the intersection between theories of trauma and theories of place, Homi K. Bhabha can be found to theorize on space, time and placelessness from a postcolonial point of view. His concepts of unhomeliness as "the world-in-the-home" (Bhabha 11) and the beyond as "an exploratory, restless movement [...]" (Bhabha 1) in space and time offer useful tools in pointing to Morrison's strategies for the deconstruction of hegemonic historiography and geography.

As far as issues of place and trauma in Toni Morrison's oeuvre are concerned, I have found that the research available focuses either on one aspect or on the other. Kristin Boudreau, Linda Krumholz, Nancy J. Peterson and Clifton R. Spargo all provide useful insight into Morrison's fiction with respect to African American trauma; Karin Luisa Badt, Nancy Jesser, Carolyn M. Jones, Charles Scruggs and Robert Stepto do a wonderful job in pointing to Morrison's sense of space and place.

Bringing these two conceptual planes together in an effort to connect Morrison's deep understanding of African American traumatic history to her rootedness in American places proved to be an intricate, yet rewarding effort, the fruit of which is this dissertation. The three novels I am exploring are prime examples for Morrison's extraordinary craft. Writing prose that is beautiful and political alike, she heeds W.E.B. DuBois' call for Black writers to use their great talent to fight the good fight: "The Apostle of Beauty thus becomes the Apostle of Truth and Right" (1000). Truly, in my opinion, Morrison is both.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Space and Place

The effect of individual and communal trauma on the experience of space and place is of central importance for a proper understanding of Toni Morrison's fiction. My analysis of selected novels by Morrison will combine the results of previous studies on aspects of place and trauma to produce new insights into this crucial nexus.¹ I will discuss the concept of space first, then give a brief overview on theories of trauma and, lastly, I will sketch the conceptual connections between the two that are at the basis of my analysis of Toni Morrison's trilogy.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, one of the leading theoreticians in the field, defines space "as a bodily sense rather than as an a priori form of sensibility" (qtd. in Hönninghausen 2005, 42), necessarily relative as to the individual's frame of reference. Edward S. Casey goes one step further and claims that not only does the bodily experience create place out of space, but that "body and place mutually constitute each other" (ibid). Accordingly, the creation and experience of place is different if body and mind have previously been exposed to violence and stress. Being part of an oppressed minority, the physical and mental space of Morrison's protagonists is dominated by a historical trauma that changes the perception of the flow of time and the concept of space and place. This is both a blessing and a curse. While it disables the protagonists to find a place in the present without revisiting the places of their troubled past, it also opens up a discourse that allows Morrison to revise hegemonic historiography to include subaltern histories of oppression and trauma.

In Morrison's novels, natural and built environments do not serve as mere fixed backgrounds for the actions and events unfolding in front of them. Places are indicators of the protagonists' traumatized minds, as well as reflections of social and political circumstances. This entails a particular perspective on space and time as categories of the human experience. A common view of space and time considers both objective

¹ Important contributions in Morrison criticism are Andrews, William L., and Nellie Y. McKay eds. Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: A Casebook. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999., Bouson, J. Brooks. Quiet As It's Kept: Shame, Trauma, and Race in the Novels of Toni Morrison. Albany: State University of New York, 2000., Grewal, Gurleen. Circles of Sorrow, Lines of Struggle: The Novels of Toni Morrison. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998., Matus, Jill. Toni Morrison. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998., Toni Morrison's Fiction: Contemporary Criticism. Ed. David L. Middleton. New York: Garland Publishing, 1997., Page, Philip. Dangerous Freedom: Fusion and Fragmentation in Toni Morrison's Novels. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995., Peach, Linden. Toni Morrison. London: MacMillan Press, 1995., Toni Morrison: Critical and Theoretical Approaches. Ed. Nancy J. Peterson. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1997.

features of the world, existing independent of our perception of them. Knowledge of places used to be rather superficial and mostly restricted to the knowledge of the specific functions of places in our lives. Yet, Martin Heidegger views place as a prime category for philosophy, as it provides the parameters of human existence: “‘place’ places man in such a way that it reveals the external bonds of his existence and the same time the depths of his freedom and reality” (qtd. in Relph 1976, 1). Based on existential human experiences like homesickness or nostalgia for childhood places, feelings of security and protection inside a place, and the urge to protect one’s place against forces from the outside, it is apparent that places do not only have a functional, but also an ontological significance.²

Space and time have traditionally been considered inherent to human sensibility, providing an a priori framework through which the world is perceived. But as our view of the world has been changed through postmodern glasses, the relative nature of both space and time has become accepted. Like all parameters of the human experience, “[...] time and space are in no way ‘objective’ conceptions but are created by material conditions and social practices. Put another way, under changed economic and technological conditions, definitions of time and space change accordingly” (Benesch 15). Morrison’s uses this insight in her novels and creates fictional places that mirror the protagonists’ mindsets and their development on the path of working through historical trauma.

Houses and homes are of particular importance to Morrison since they are primary places for human beings, serving as anchors and points of stability in the journey of life. In *The Poetics of Space* (1994), Gaston Bachelard claims that the house “is the human being’s first world. Before he is ‘cast into the world’ [...] Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house” (7). With this positive assessment of intimate space, Bachelard is in line with Yi-Fu Tuan (1977), who also bases his anthropological analysis of space and place upon the premise of place as shelter and intimacy: “Intimate places are places of nurture where our fundamental

² Standard works in the field are Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994.; Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.; Casey, Edward S. *Getting Back Into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding Of The Place-World*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993.; Dixon, Melvin. *Ride Out the Wilderness: Geography and Identity in Afro-American Literature*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987.; Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.; Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1977.

needs are heeded and cared for without fuss. Even the vigorous adult has fleeting moments of longing for the kind of coziness he knew in childhood” (137).³

This traditional sense of childhood places as places of absolute safety and shelter are the basis for both Tuan’s and Bachelard’s kind of topophilia. Both authors theorize the concept of home to be at the center of any theory of place, imagining homeliness, the building of a home, to be the motivation for any formation of place. Tuan and Bachelard, then, view home as a center of meaning, a first universe and thereby provide useful concepts for the study of man’s turning space into place, making a home in the world. Nevertheless, for the study of Morrison, these theories lack a minority perspective. Theorizing home as a place of freedom to be how we want and what we want vastly underestimates the policing power of the master to infiltrate the walls of the house and turn the family home into a site of oppression. They both theorize space and place from a hegemonic point of view, neglecting the vastly different experience of space and place for oppressed minorities. Far from enjoying the kind of intimate safe shelter of home as a child, in Morrison’s novels, the human being is cast into the world right away, since there does not seem to be a difference between the world and the home. The hostilities of the outside world are felt intensely within the recesses of the domestic spaces. David Harvey points out that “transformations of space, place, and environment are neither neutral nor innocent with respect to practices of domination and control” (In: Hönnighausen 2005, 43/44), a dynamic which is obvious in the fictional worlds of Toni Morrison. There, space, place and environment are experienced as metonymies of the oppressive and traumatizing social and cultural system that dominates the lives of the protagonists. There is often no “original warmth” in the house that they were born in, a place Bachelard calls the “material paradise” (Bachelard 7). They have to take the journey back to their primary places to be able to create the warmth that defines a home. The problem in *Paradise* is different though. The Rubyites practically always live in their primary place, stuck there since its traumatic moment of inception, not being able or willing to move forward. The primary place is a safe place to be. That moment of abject humiliation and racist trauma is the stable foundation for reactive pride and righteousness and the insistence of keeping to themselves. The

³ Bachelard and Tuan are discussed in Casey, Edward S. Getting Back Into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding Of The Place-World. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993.; Casey, Edward S. The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998; Cresswell, Tim. Place: A Short Introduction. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

primary place is the origin of the political, social and religious identity of Ruby and serves as an ever-present reference point for all of the Rubyites lives.

Yi-Fu Tuan has been influential in defining conceptions of space as one of the founding fathers of the discipline called “human geography”. In his seminal work “Space and Place: the Perspective of Experience” (1977), Tuan takes an anthropological perspective in the study of the earth. Concerned with the transformation of space into place, of earth into home, he looks at the myriad ways in which human beings attach value to space, thereby turning it into place. He achieves a crossculturally valid definition of home as a place that anchors the being in the world, where there is intimacy and care, thereby imbuing the concept of place with a decidedly social component.

Tuan sees place as combining the sense of position within society (the uses and symbolic significance of specific locations) with the sense of and identity with spatial location that comes from living in and associating with it. Place does not have any particular geographical scale associated with it, even though typical usage (at least in the English-speaking world) links it to the small or local. What is important is that places result from ‘fields of care’, which depend for their force on the emotional investments that people make in different places (Agnew, 444).

When Tuan started publishing and getting recognized in the 1970s, the focus of geography had only started to include the human component. Before, the study of the earth had been focused almost exclusively on space, fueled by the modern rise of science and the hype around the space race. In an environment of humanistic critique of that spatial focus, Tuan’s “perspective of experience” on the issue of space and place fell on fertile ground.

Tuan’s perspective is also biased though in that it does not account for minority cultures and their different perception of space and place. Tuan’s views on the formation of place and on the movement of people through time and space are marked by a distinct modern sensibility. Tuan points out that “a human life begins at birth and ends in death: it is a one-way journey. Human time is biased in favor of the future. [...] Human time, like the human body, is asymmetrical: one’s back is to the past, one’s face to the future. Living is a perpetual stepping forward into light and abandoning what is behind one’s back, cannot be seen, is dark and one’s past” (Tuan, 132/135). As a symbol for human beings’ movement through life, he chooses the arrow. For Tuan, life starts at a home base, passes through several preliminary camps, in order to finally

arrive at a goal: “Home is the stable world to be transcended, goal is the stable world to be attained, and camps are the rest stops for the journey from one world to the other. The arrow is the appropriate image” (Tuan, 180). This recalls Edward Relph’s description of roots and their importance in human life. In “Place and Placelessness” (1976), Relph writes: “To have roots in a place is to have a secure point from which to look out on the world, a firm grasp of one’s own position in the order of things, and a significant spiritual and psychological attachment to somewhere in particular” (38). Like Tuan’s image of the arrow, and his view of life’s course as goal-oriented with home base, and camps in between, Relph’s assessment implies a steady point of orientation, which gives direction and anchors the human being in the turmoil of life. Starting from this point, life is a self-directed, linear movement through space and time with a chosen goal in mind. This movement is onward and upward, never going back, nor going in circles.

These conceptions of the human movement through time and space mirror clearly modernity’s strong belief in continual progress in pursuit of freedom of mind and the realization of one’s physical and intellectual independence. Whereas the emancipatory thought at the basis of the modern project bears the potential for human beings to free themselves from unjust oppression and achieve freedom and happiness even from the dreariest of starting points, this focus on the future also bears dangers, especially for minority cultures: “[...] identity and social role no longer depend on *where one comes from*, but on *where one is heading*; life will take its meaning and purpose not from the past but from the future” (Pegrum, 11). Yet, this utopianism, the focus on the future, has the potential to be as oppressive and exclusive as the focus on the past, on one’s roots. The modern -isms of Marxism, socialism, liberalism, anarchism and so on grew out of the desire to fashion universally applicable teachings on how to achieve total human emancipation. Imposing a common ground to unite the interests of all humans, what Lyotard calls metanarratives, necessarily entails the silencing of minority voices. Thus, while modernity’s focus on the future has liberating potential, this will only come to fruition if the power metanarratives is curbed and a multitude of perspectives and voices takes its place. In this light, Tuan’s concept of self-willed and intentional movement through life is located at the center of western society and discourse. It does not fully include those at the margin of that society who are not always in the position of free choice to begin with and are therefore often excluded from the advantages of the modern project. Moreover, Tuan’s assessment of home as an intimate place cannot be

transferred simply to colonized societies, where private as well as public places are dominated by the physical and discursive power of the colonizer. In the America of slavery and post-slavery, the hostile world of the master does not allow for the slave to establish a sense of home. A narrowly modern theory of place does not account for traumatic mental or psychical damage that will prevent a person from transforming space into place, far less build a home for themselves.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, the term *domestic (or internal) colonialism* was developed by black historians in the United States to offer a new tool for the (r)evaluation of the black experience in America.⁴ In this context, the system of slavery is seen as a logical extension of Euro-American capitalism and can therefore be included in the category of colonialism: “The most profound conclusion to be drawn from a survey of the black experience in America [is] to consider Black America as a semi-colony” (qtd. in Grewal, 7). In that respect, Morrison’s novels are attempts to revise the colonial history of America from the inside. She “rewrites the nation” (Grewal, 8) from the viewpoint of the formerly voiceless subaltern. An important characteristic of post-colonialism is its aim of reconfiguring the past, emphasizing the subjectivity of any history and offering alternatives to taken-for-granted grand narratives that have been proliferated and been accepted without questioning for a long time.

The concepts on space, time and placelessness by the post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha are useful tools in showing the way Morrison deconstructs white hegemonic modernist discourse in her account of specific eras in African-American history.⁵ Bhabha’s concept of the “beyond” offers much in the way of locating the literary spaces of Morrison’s novels. The beyond signifies “the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the ‘beyond’: an exploratory, restless movement [...]” (Bhabha 1). It is this disorientation and disturbance that is felt in Morrison’s novels. The beyond is the interstitial space between the old and the new, the space that offers opportunities for the elaboration of new selfhoods and the uncovering of identities,

⁴ Important studies in the field are Cruse, Harold. “Revolutionary Nationalism and the Afro-American.” *Studies on the Left*. 1962

⁵ Bhabha’s key works are *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge, 1990. and *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994. He has been discussed in Hubbard, Phil, Rob Kitchin and Gill Valentine eds. *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*. London: Sage Publications, 2004., Huddart, David. *Homi K. Bhabha*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

becoming “a space of intervention in the here and now”. Art from the beyond “renews the past, reconfiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The ‘past-present’ becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living” (Bhabha, 7).

Morrison’s fiction is such art from the beyond. The individual and collective traumata of her protagonists keep them trapped in the nether-space between past and present, inside and outside, the private and the public. As Norberg-Schulz puts it in *Intentions in Architecture* (qtd. in Relph 49): “To be inside is the primary intention behind the place concept; that is to be somewhere, away from what is outside”. In Morrison, this distinction is put into question as her protagonists struggle to find a place “away from what is outside”. For them, the inside place is not necessarily a safe refuge, as shown in the example of the haunted house on 124 Bluestone road in *Beloved*. Here and elsewhere, inside places are open to what is meant to stay outside, such as violence, racist politics, and recollections of racist trauma. Already Gaston Bachelard warns against the dichotomy of inside and outside, private and public space: “Outside and inside are both intimate – they are always ready to be reversed, to exchange their hostility” (217/18).

With regard to the collapse of this spatial dichotomy, Homi Bhabha introduces an important concept for the reading of Morrison, the concept of unhomeliness. By this he does not refer to homelessness in the sense of being without shelter. It is rather an unsettling feeling of being placeless and “dwelling in a state of incredulous terror” at a world that “first shrinks [...] and then expands enormously” (Bhabha, 9). Here, Bhabha describes the collapse of the distinction between the private and the public sphere in the subaltern’s world. There does not exist a private sphere that is protected from intrusions of the hostile public. The world is the home, and the home is the world, thus the paradox of shrinking and expanding: “The recesses of the domestic space become sites for history’s most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting” (Bhabha, 9). Nevertheless, the distinction of inside and outside is upheld in the modern world view, since it promotes hiding colonial political practices from the public eye. According to Bhabha, in the literatures of the unhomely, this process is made visible and the domestic space is redrawn “as the space of the normalizing, pastoralizing, and individuating

techniques of modern power and police: the personal-*is-the-political*; the world-*in-the-home*” (Bhabha, 11).

The space theories of Yi-Fu Tuan and Homi Bhabha respectively are diametrically opposed in terms of their concepts of home and place. Whereas Tuan employs a modern view of human being’s course in life as goal-oriented progress and a connected ability to make place out of space, Bhabha take a post-colonial stance and views critically the concept of home and place under conditions of political oppression. It is the latter perspective that is adopted by Morrison. In Morrison’s novels, domestic spaces are regularly subject to intrusions of the public sphere. In her fictional worlds of slaves and ex-slaves, the concept of shelter and a private place is an illusion. Like the protagonists’ minds are open to intrusions from the traumatic past, their homes are open to intrusions from the hostile present. By confronting the demons of the past, Morrison’s characters are able to leave the nether-world of the beyond and enter the present. It is then, in a space of healing, that they can make a place for themselves, find an “inside” that is a true home.

2.2 Trauma and Memory

In Morrison’s novels, the characters’ loves are often dominated by a traumatic secret in the past, which keeps them from finding peace in the present. They need to remember, or re-memory as Morrison has it, their painful past in order to overcome it. To highlight the process of memory and its connection to place, the study will now elucidate the theoretical concepts and models that inform the complex connections between trauma and memory.

In a common view of memory, it is composed of “snapshots” of life’s experiences neatly stored and chronologically ordered in compartments of the brain, ready to be looked at and recalled at will.⁶ These memory-snapshots are seen to be actual, objective representations of what happened at the time, remaining unchanged throughout years in storage. Yet, like photos, memories fade over time and become less vivid. This view of memory implies that memories are untainted by the person’s imagination, underestimating the role of imagination in psychological development (Kirmayer

⁶Key works on memory are Warnock, Mary. Memory. London: Faber, 1987; Schacter, Daniel L. Searching for Memory: the brain, the mind, and the past. New York: Basic Books, 1996; Engel, Susan. Context is Everything: the nature of memory. New York: W.H. Freeman, 1999.

176/177).⁷ In assessing the impact of trauma on the victim's brain and its capacity for memory, complex models of mnemonic performance serve well to analyze these processes of formation and retention of memory. Recent insights on the nature of memory, especially traumatic memory, apparently have influenced Toni Morrison's tales of trauma and re-memory as well. Laurence J. Kirmayer (1996) claims that

[m]emory is anything but a photographic record of experience; it is a roadway full of potholes, badly in need of repair, worked on day and night by revisionist crews. What is registered is highly selective and thoroughly transformed by interpretation and semantic encoding at the moment of experience. [...] we readily engage in imaginative elaboration and confabulation and, once we have done this, the bare bones memory is lost forever within the animated story we have constructed (176).

Thus, rather than being faithful representations of actual events, memories are individual interpretations of events and experiences, constructed and continually reconstructed to a great extent by human imagination.

In the event of a trauma, these mnemonic mechanisms work in such a way as to protect the trauma victim from re-experiencing the traumatic event over and over again.⁸ The term "trauma" is of Greek origin and means "injury" or "wound". It was traditionally used in emergency medicine and later in neurology to describe bodily or neural injury. Nowadays it is used in psychiatry as well to describe a "wound of the soul", inflicted by extremely stressful, usually life-threatening events that put the victim or the eye-witness in a physiological alarm state, making him feel terrified, helpless or both (Schauer et al., 5). Due to its emotional intensity, the traumatic event is engraved deeper in the victim's memory than ordinary, everyday events. Yet, that same intensity has the victim suppress or repress the traumatic memory, so that he does not have to re-live the horror over and over again. Trauma theory distinguishes suppression, the conscious forgetting of the event, and repression, the subconscious forgetting of the event, as well as dissociation, which refers to the splitting of consciousness to "put aside" the painful memory in a remote corner of the mind. Traumatic events are so

⁷ Kirmayer argues that this bias reflects a general tendency in Western culture.

⁸ For a good overview of the research in the field see Felman, Shoshana and Dori Laub eds. Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History. New York: Routledge, 1992; Caruth, Cathy ed. Trauma: Explorations in Memory. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1995 and Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1996.; Antze, Paul and Michael Lambek eds. Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory. New York: Routledge, 1996.;

painful and overwhelming that they cannot be comprehended, or “be integrated into existing mental frameworks,” so that they are “dissociated, later to return intrusively as fragmented sensory or motoric experiences” (van der Kolk and van der Hart, 437).

Rather than actually being repressed, traumatic memories are often stored in a part of the mind that exists in isolation from the rest of the personal memory: “Dissociation reflects a horizontally layered model of mind: when a subject does not remember a trauma, its ‘memory’ is contained in an alternate stream of consciousness, which may be subconscious or dominate consciousness, e.g., during traumatic reenactments” (van der Kolk and van der Hart, 168). The whole traumatic event might not be accessible to the victim, since it is stored in an “alternate stream of consciousness”. Thus, gaps in the victim’s memory are symptomatic for this kind of dissociative disorder. Most of the time the person is not aware of having these memories at all. Before the traumatic event is integrated into the victim’s narrative memory and thereby into the temporal framework of his or her life, it exists “outside the parameters of ‘normal’ reality, such as causality, sequence, place and time” (Laub 1995, 69). Being so categorically different from the experiential context of “normal” life, the traumatic event defies comprehension, recounting and mastery. “Massive trauma precludes its registration” (Laub 1995, 57), which means that traumatic events are not recorded as such by the dominant, conscious part of the mind. Trauma enters the consciousness of the victim through the narrative process; it comes into being only by being related to a witness: “The emergence of the narrative which is being listened to – and heard – is, therefore, the process and the place wherein the cognizance, the ‘knowing’ of the event is given birth to. The listener, therefore, is a party to the creation of knowledge *de novo*” (Laub 1995, 57).

Another group of symptoms, connected to the aftermath of a traumatic experience is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Among these symptoms are the random re-experiencing of the event, the avoidance of reminders of the event, extreme alertness and nervousness, as well as the experience of severe problems in social, occupational, or other every day functioning (Schauer et al., 8). The protagonists in Morrison’s novels are exemplary for this kind of mental disorder, experiencing social isolation as well as random flashbacks.⁹ Repetition of the traumatic event until it is comprehended is one of the most important characteristics of trauma, one that is emphasized by Morrison as

⁹ This has been noted, for instance, in the studies by Bouson (2000) and Grewal (1998).

well¹⁰. “To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (Caruth, 4/5), and it is the function of narrating the event and being witness to it to reverse that order, to enable the victim to reclaim ownership of his painful history. In order to own the traumatic event, the victim has to “re-externalize” (Laub 1995, 69) it by articulating the story surrounding it. Only then can the vicious circle of repetition and reenactment of the traumatic event be broken, the victim can internalize it, integrate it into his existing mental framework and move on. Morrison is aware of the silent nature of trauma and renders her novels the place of witnessing, making her readers complicit in creating a knowledge of theretofore unknown individual and communal trauma.

Morrison uses images of space and place to illustrate the effect of trauma on the characters’ minds and lives. An important spatial image Morrison repeatedly uses is houses as symbols of the isolated, traumatized mind. Morrison’s protagonists are oftentimes holed up inside their homes. These homes, while seemingly protecting them from the hostile outside world, are hostile themselves. Metonymies for their traumatized minds, these homes already contain the hostile world, because they contain the memory of the traumatic past. It is only by externalizing that memory – literally by telling the story, and metaphorically by exorcizing the ghost of the past from the house – that the houses in Morrison’s fiction become true homes. By externalizing the trauma, they externalize the world, thereby re-establishing the dichotomy of inside and outside, which is necessary for the concept of home as the human being’s shelter from the world.

This conceptualization of history and memory as spatial and thereby publicly accessible is important in Morrison’s attempt to collectivize individual memory. As Michael Roth notes in *The Ironist’s Cage*,

memory in modernity is seen less as a public, collective function than as a private, psychological faculty: it is imagined [...] as being internal to each of us, at the core of the psychological self. We are what we

¹⁰ Repetition is “necessary for a postmodern ethics of place” (Su 1998, 601). It undermines the modernist credo of linear progress and emphasized the relevance of the past as a point of ethical orientation in the present. The return to past places, the repetition of past history serves in Morrison’s work as a means to allow right moral choices in the present, as well as to build identification with communal trauma. While constructing the memory of the past is an invaluable means especially for minority communities to envision a future, the process of remembering can never be over. Representations of past places are necessarily narrative constructs, there is not one singular truth: “[t]he interminability of haunting results from the impossibility of restoring what was lost, combined with the nagging doubt that the call of the past might not be ethical” (Su 606). Therefore, there cannot be aesthetic closure in a novel of haunting, because there cannot be closure to re-memory.

remember [...]. But the psychologization of memory makes it extremely difficult for people to share the past, for them to have confidence that they have a collective connection to what has gone before (10).

Morrison has indeed a penchant for observing psychological processes of fragmentation and madness in her protagonists. Yet, as fascinated as she is with their interiority, she finds it necessary to relate it to an external, political fragmentation as well. In *Tense Past* (1996), Paul Antze and Michael Lambek mention that “the rise of popular therapeutic discourse in North America has gone hand in hand with widespread political disengagement. [...] historical trauma is displaced by individual drama, [this resulted in] a shift in moral focus from collective obligations to narratives of individual suffering” (xx, xxiv). For oppressed minorities that have frequently been excluded from dominant historiography, the construction and reconstruction of histories of oppression and pain is an important tool in reconnecting to community tradition and claiming a group identity. Especially in case of a communal trauma, history writing assumes an important function by creating a past upon which the community can build a we-group of solidarity and a political agenda based on a legacy of oppression. But this political instrumentalization of historiography is atypical for mainstream strands of postmodernist thinking. Michael S. Roth (1995), coins the term “ironist’s cage” to refer to “the prison of cultural critics who realize that they have no position from which to make their criticism” (8). It is marked by an “ironic sophistication” (3), based on the awareness that all knowledge is constructed and constrained by the culture of the knower. In terms of history, critics are aware that “the past” is a collection of stories told from various perspectives, coming to various conclusions, serving various means. “Recognizing the constructedness of any historical account can lead one to an ironic position vis-à-vis the significance of the past. If the past can be made to mean anything at all, one way to cope with this relativism is by taking ironic distance from it or by simply celebrating the meaninglessness of the past” (Roth 5). With this attitude, of course, moral or political values and actions become impossible, which makes it a “sophisticate’s luxury” (4) typically found with an academic elite that can afford to be detached. Morrison refuses an ironic stance towards history and historiography, affirming Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s assessment of minor literatures, that “everything in them is political” (17). Viewing trauma as a public as well as a personal matter, Morrison shifts the emphasis from the individual drama to historical trauma,

thereby opening up a space of collective remembering, and, consequently, collective healing, a space Laurence Kirmayer (1996) calls a “public space of trauma” (190).

With regard to the interrelatedness of the body and the perception of place, Morrison uses great care and detail on her description of bodies in pain, the traumatized bodies of the slaves.¹¹ Morrison takes it upon her to narrate their story, to break the silence surrounding the breaking of the slave body. Metonymically as well as literally, the breaking, scarring, dissolving and healing of the black body is at the center of Morrison’s novels. The body is one of the spaces in Morrison’s novels that contain time, it is the text in which are inscribed the unspeakable atrocities committed by the slave masters. Like Morrison’s houses, her bodies will lend themselves up to the reader for a witnessing of an American history that is difficult to capture in conventional language. Sethe’s chokecherry tree, the big scar on her back, is more eloquent in relating the violent nature of slavery than Sethe herself could ever be. Like Morrison’s rememory as an actual place people can step into, rememory as the black body in pain makes publicly visible the theretofore invisible trauma of American slavery. In “Discipline and Punish” (1975), Michel Foucault, describes the human body as the site of negotiating political power, an issue Morrison explicitly deals with. From Foucault’s perspective, the human body is the central space upon and around which political and social life is arranged: “[...] the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. [...] the body becomes a useful body only if it is a productive body and a subjected body” (464). The body as the space of the manifestation of hegemonic power plays a big role as well in the context of trauma theory, since it is ultimately the body that registers the great shock resulting from physical trauma. What makes the body such a convenient space for the exercise of power – political and otherwise – is what Elaine Scarry calls “the inexpressibility of physical pain” (3): “Whatever pain achieves, it achieves it in part through its unsharability, and it ensures this unsharability through its resistance to language. [...] Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned” (4).

¹¹ On the function and uses of slavery in her novels see the general studies by Plasa (1994) and Sussere (2003).

In Morrison's worlds, the protagonists must forever struggle to give a voice to their pain. It is the voicing of this pain that makes it possible for their wounds to heal. Moreover, pulling physical pain out of the realm of silence and into the realm of verbal discourse makes it harder to appropriate it for political means:

The failure to express pain – whether the failure to objectify its attributes or instead the failure, once those attributes are objectified, to refer them to their original site in the human body – will always work to allow its appropriation and conflation with debased forms of power; conversely, the successful expression of pain will always work to expose and make impossible that appropriation and conflation (Scarry 15).

Thus, the conflation of power with pain is made impossible through the verbalization of said pain, since the power depends on the silence surrounding it¹². Scarry mentions how rarely we find the representation of physical pain in literature, precisely because the artist is often equally powerless and incapable when it comes to expressing the inexpressible. How much more valuable then is Morrison's attempt to give voice to the pain of the slaves and ex-slaves in her novels, and by extension to the historical pain of the African American community.

2.3 Trauma and the Experience of Space and Place

Sethe's monologue on places in *Beloved* conveys aptly Morrison's approach of spatializing time:

'I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the

¹² When Morrison focuses on the brokenness of the slave body and the dissolving, maddening effects the traumatic events of slavery have on the black psyche, she thereby situates the moment of modernism and even post-modernism within the moment of slavery. Whereas the conventional view sees the World War I as the origin of modernism and T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* as the first and quintessential expression of modernism's sense of psychological and cultural dissolution, Morrison corrects this estimation from the perspective of African Americans, and rightly so. For slaves and their descendants the circumstances of their lives starting with the Middle Passage necessarily lead to a sense of fragmentation of self and world. Consequently, Morrison dissents with the conventional view and situate the origin of modernism within the institution of slavery. Paul Gilroy puts it as follows: "[...] modern life begins with slavery [...] black women had to deal with post-modern problems in the nineteenth century and earlier. These things had to be addressed by black people a long time ago: certain kinds of dissolution, the loss of and the need to reconstruct certain kinds of stability. Certain kinds of madness, deliberately going mad [...] Slavery broke the world in half, broke it every way. It broke Europe. It made them into something else, it made them slave masters, it made them crazy" (Gilroy, 178).

place – the picture of it – stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or know, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened' (38).

Sethe here echoes ideas by Gaston Bachelard who, in “The Poetics of Space” (1964), claims that “[...] space contains compressed time. That is what space is for” (8). For him, memory is always connected to particular places. Moreover, it is not really history in its flow that we are remembering, it is rather a chronology of fixed spaces that contain the memories of particular events: “At times we think we know ourselves in time, when all we know is a sequence of fixations in the spaces of the being's stability – a being who does not want to melt away, and who, even in the past, when he sets out in search of things past, wants time to ‘suspend its flight. [...] Memories are motionless, and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are” (ibid). In Morrison's novels, the protagonists' memories are indeed very securely fixed in space. Her fictional spaces are crammed with memories of a personal and communal African American history.

Employing an image similar to Bachelard's “container for compressed time,” John J. Su in his essay “Haunted by Place: Moral Obligation and the Postmodern Novel” elaborates on the function of place as a “storehouse of memory.” Where Bachelard is concerned with the mere phenomenology of space and place, Su analyzes these concepts with regard to their relevance for a possibility of ethics and morality in the postmodern novel. Like Roth, Su mentions the centrality of individual consciousness in modernism and modernity. Connected to this celebration of the free, autonomous individual is a rejection of place as an anchor, binding the individual to a community, a shared belief system and customs, which in turn inhibit his choice to act ethically out of free will. Place means an obligation to something outside of the Cartesian rational ego, an obligation that “constrains the self's struggle for authenticity. The courage to act ethically presupposes the rejection of habitat and habit” (Su, 591).

But, as Su points out, this rationale does not hold true for people of post-colonial or neo-colonial status. For postcolonial communities, placelessness and the disconnection from habitat and habit is not a matter of rejection by choice out of a desire for ethical autonomy. Therefore, here, the modern rationale works in the opposite way: any attempt at free will and autonomy will lead to the search for place as the

common ground for ethical decision and action. From the position of the oppressed, displaced minority, resistance works in the ways of rejecting the credo of individualism and establishing a sense of place and group identity: “Laying claim to place, then, represents a rejection of the teleology underlying imperialism and its assertions about universal human progress” (Su 592). Enforced disconnection from their place of origin is a vital part of the subaltern’s existence, resulting in a longing and nostalgia for place. Place provides the subaltern with a connection to the ancestors, to a tradition that means stability and ethical guidance in a hostile world fashioned after the belief system of the hegemonic majority. Edward S. Casey is in agreement with Su and Bhabha when he states that “[t]o lack a primal place is to be ‘homeless’ indeed, not only in the literal sense of having no permanent sheltering structure, but also as being without any effective means of orientation in a complex and confusing world” (qtd. in Su 593). Casey here echoes in part Bhabha’s concept of “unhomeliness”, except that Bhabha merely refers to the metaphysical sense of being unhomed.

This longing for place as the storehouse for – mostly forgotten – memory is captured in Toni Morrison’s work. Her protagonists are displaced in a literal and metaphorical sense; they lack a home and community as a result of a metaphysical displacement that leaves them disconnected from a personal and communal history. They have to master their relationship to place by narrating their past places, by remembering or constructing a history of trauma that is, despite its horror, the anchor of their existence. By remembering, they find these roots, find values, ethics, a sense of community, a place, and anchor in this hostile world: “In sharing memories of the past, the residents not only recall their places of origin but create a collective defined by these individual memories. The past, in other words, is used to forge a communal space in the present. [...] places serve as a guide for ethics because the memories they contain identify the inhabitants with a community and make them feel responsible for it” (Su 594/595).

At the core of the three novels I am discussing here, are traumatic secrets that keep the protagonists from finding their place, and that have to be narrated in order to be overcome:

Repressed memories are pieces of your past that have become a mystery. They stalk your unconscious and hamper your life with their aftermath. They will tell you a story if you know how to listen to them, and the story will help you to make sense of your life and your pain. [...] you must

piece together mind and body clues to find out what you have forgotten. You will struggle at first to believe what you remembering, but your healing will take place as you recover your memories (Fredrickson, 24).

The connection to roots and the places of the ancestors is vital in building a sense of identity. Due to a hegemonic historiography, these roots can only be constructed in the form of stories, of fictional creations of memories, so the responsibility of creating and preserving them falls upon the story teller: “The figurative power of stories holds out the possibility of reconstructing our relationship to place, of connecting us not only to past and future places but to lost ones, or ones never had to begin with” (Su 597).

This dissertation will show how Toni Morrison conjures up new forms of individual and collective identity formation through figurations of space and trauma in three of her novels. A particular focus will be on the way Morrison presents fluid and rigid literary spaces that are either conducive or prohibitive to the development of individual and communal African American history and identity. By opening up a discursive space for imagining and re-interpreting African American time and space in her fiction, Morrison sets out to re-place an African American sense of self that had been dis-placed by centuries of silence surrounding the traumatic hi-stories at the core of the Black American experience.

III. BELOVED

3.1 Places are always there – History and Place in *Beloved*

Considering Fredric Jameson’s definition of postmodernism as the “attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place” (Jameson 2003, ix), *Beloved* is a quintessentially postmodern novel. Whereas modernism values the new as a chance to overcome the errors of the past, resulting in a rejection of past time and place, *Beloved*, like many postmodern novels, deals with history and historicity in a way that Linda Hutcheon famously coined “historiographic metafiction”. This return to history is not nostalgic, it is rather a critical fictional revisiting of actual historical sites and events, looking at them from different perspectives and offering alternatives to conventional historiography: “its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (historiographic metafiction) is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past” (Hutcheon 5).

For Morrison, narrating the silenced history of the characters in *Beloved* is a means to confront a perceived “national amnesia” on the subject of slavery: “[...] I realized I didn’t know anything about it, really. [...] it is about something that the characters don’t want to remember, I don’t want to remember, black people don’t want to remember. I mean, it’s national amnesia” (Angelo 257). It is this collective amnesia Morrison is going against by fictionalizing the historical case of Margaret Garner, a slave woman who rather killed her child than have it taken back to slavery. Morrison acknowledges the selectivity and subjectivity of historical accounts, presenting gaps and absences as necessary elements of any history and thereby questions the validity of any claim to completeness of a history of slavery. These absences in the story’s fabric are indispensable to its meaning, proposing “history as necessarily contradictory, fragmented and full of gaps that can never be adequately closed” (Lidinsky, 210).¹³

In Morrison’s archaeology of hidden traumatic histories, places play a major role. Acknowledging the absence of a historical marker or a memorial place to commemorate the horror of slavery, Morrison conceives of *Beloved* as a novel that had to exist in lieu of these: “There is no place you or I can go, to think about or not think about, to summon the presences of, or recollect the absences of slaves: nothing that reminds of the ones who made the journey and of those who did not make it. [...] And because such a place does not exist (that I know of), the book had to” (Andrews, 3). A memorial site itself, *Beloved* nevertheless also presents actual places, sites to commemorate the journeys of its protagonists. Its pages are filled with domestic and public places, rivers and cornfields, plantations and churches that place the told experiences solidly in the actual environment of late 19th century America.

Locations in *Beloved* are not merely backdrops for the scenes unfolding, but rather are infused with a specific sense of history and culture that binds the protagonists to them. Morrison has places serve as signifiers of particular points in time, anchors for the protagonists’ navigation of their complex and traumatic histories. Much of the conflict in Morrison’s work is informed by their search for these anchors, their “primal place”,

¹³ Further undermining the validity of historic master narratives, Morrison employs a magical realist mode of telling the story of Sethe and her family, blurring „ the boundaries between what is magic and what is real and thus calls into question accepted definitions of either. In *Beloved* this blurring takes the form of a lack of distinction between the spirit world and the material world, between the living and the dead, between pastpresentfuture” (Marshall, Brenda K. *Teaching the Postmodern: Fiction and Theory*: New York: Routledge, 1992). Using magical realism to express the unrepresentable, “the ‘real’ that is ‘beyond language’” (Bowers, Maggie Ann. *Magic(al) Realism*. New York: Routledge 2004. 81), Morrison acknowledges the existence of a history of women slaves beyond what is expressed in history books, even beyond what can be expressed in the vocabulary of dominant discourse.

as Edward S. Casey's calls it: "To lack a primal place is to be 'homeless' indeed, not only in the literal sense of having no permanent sheltering structure but also as being without any effective means of orientation in a complex and confusing world" (xiv/xv). *Beloved's* protagonists must take a journey back to the past to confront their trauma and thereby discover their primal place, in order to be able to find a place, a home in the present.

Critics often remark upon Morrison's extraordinary sense of place¹⁴, and in *Beloved* as well, the concept of place is of vital importance:

[...] the author enlarges and completes many previous attempts to show the importance of both place and person in the development of Afro-American culture. [...] Attentive to the physical and cultural geography of the small black towns that shaped her and her characters, Morrison constructs familiar yet new dialectical oppositions between enclosed and open spaces, between the fluid horizontality of neighborhoods (shifting, migrating populations, a profusion of character types and changing morals) and the fixed verticality, hence presumed stability, of the house (Dixon 142).

Morrison describes homes, streets, neighborhoods and cities in all their little details, thereby creating very distinct places that are rather prominent figures in the stories themselves, mirroring the psychological developments of the characters, or standing as synecdoches of the society at large. When asked about her commitment to portray space and place so vividly, Morrison herself also refers to the special connection a woman has with her place:

I think some of it is just a woman's strong sense of being in a room, a place, or a house. Sometimes my relationship to things in a house would be a little different from, say my brother's or father's or my sons'. I clean them and I do very intimate things 'in place': I am sort of rooted in it, so that writing about being in a room looking out, or being in a world looking out, or living in a small definite place, is probably very common among most women anyway (Stepo 11).

Indeed, Morrison often retreats to fictional domestic spaces in her quest to negotiate and redefine African American history. She portrays kitchens, bedrooms and living rooms in great detail and often presents them as "sites for history's most intricate invasions" (Bhabha 1994, 9), thereby employing a decidedly female perspective and questioning

¹⁴ See for example the studies by Dixon (1987), Scruggs (1993), Stepto (1994) and Cooperman (1999).

the conventional view of private space as moral refuge, opposed to the public space as the arena of politics and history.

Morrison's notion of "rememory", a hybrid of "remember" and "memory" describes her approach to the past as being a constant powerful influence in the present. Sethe's memories in *Beloved* are present for her as visible, tangible structures, spaces she can step into like she would into a room: "Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place – the picture of it – stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. [...] Someday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it's you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else" (38). This spatial conception of memory is ambivalent. It implies a view of memory as interconnected in the minds of different people. By rendering the historical past a physical presence in the present, Morrison allows for it to be inhabited and worked through: "Morrison makes personal traumatic memory accessible to public commemoration, renders it 'not just private and invisible, but independent entities existing in the outside world'" (Matus 114). Thus, Morrison constructs "a parallel between the individual process of psychological recovery and a historical or national process" (Krumholz 395), thereby offering the possibility of claiming a historical trauma as a common ground on which to base an African American cultural identity.

By spatializing time in this way, Morrison moves the task of remembering and commemorating trauma from the plane of the individual psyche to the plane of the public and thereby stresses the vital importance of public remembrance for a functioning sense of community. Morrison uses this connection between place and trauma to depict individual traumatic memories as representations of a larger historical trauma: "If Sethe's individual memories exist in the world as fragments of a historical memory, then, by extension, the individual process of recollection or 'rememory' can be reproduced on a historical level" (Krumholz 395). By painting her characters' memory as a container of lost places and places as containers of lost memory, Morrison unveils an American landscape of trauma and thereby offers new discursive possibilities on an unspeakable American history. Like *Jazz* and *Paradise*, *Beloved* presents a specific historical past as trauma of individual and collective dimensions. The (hi)story of Sethe and her family stands metonymously for the (hi)story of American slaves per se, since,

as Baby Suggs states in *Beloved*: “Not a house in the country ain’t packed to its rafters with some dead Negro’s grief” (5).

Linden Peach (1995) points out that the concept of rememory as it is presented in *Beloved*, could only originate in a culture dispossessed of its history and sense of belonging, like the African American: “Since slavery destroyed not only whole communities but entire families, banning their religions, stopping their music and eradicating their cultures, the only way in which individuals could acquire any sense of their ancestral line was to possess and piece together the stories and memories of others, to literally acquire for themselves the texts of which they had been deprived” (102).¹⁵ Thus, the imaginative aspect of rememory is necessary in African American culture to substitute the missing pieces of its written communal history. Whereas the majority culture can rely on history books, art and ancestors to furnish their place of the past, Morrison’s protagonists, as members of a minority culture, have access to each other’s rememories, memories of things that they themselves have never witnessed, thus forging a collective space of memory that has the potential of being more powerful than any history book.

While opening up spaces to commemorate the silenced history of African American trauma, “rememory” may also imply a dangerously immobile, static structure. Since Sethe’s memory stays the same over time, its ability to haunt and torture herself and her family remains unchanged. Hence *Beloved* can be also be seen as not foremost a novel about remembering trauma, but of the problems and potentials of expressing it. The past is shown not so much as repressed but silenced and frozen in time. Sethe is very much aware of the past, so much that it troubles her mind. Although she works “hard to remember as close to nothing as was safe”, she does not always succeed, because her “brain [is] devious [...] Why was there nothing it refused? No misery, no regret, no hateful picture too rotten to accept?” (6/74) She even acknowledges the relief madness would bring to her mind filled with memories of pain and loss: “Other people went crazy, why couldn’t she? Other people’s brains stopped, turned around and went on to something new, [...] What a relief to stop it right there. Close. Shut” (75). It is clear from this that memories of trauma are not at all repressed in *Beloved*, quite the contrary. But they exist in isolation in the individuals’ minds. At first, they do not

¹⁵ Moreover, the “spatial aspect of rememory – through which past events live ‘out there, in the world’ for anyone to ‘bump into,’ [38] as Sethe puts it – works against the masculinist model of the contained, proprietary self by casting history’s effects into the realm of collective responsibility” (Lidinsky 193).

connect them to any greater communal history of trauma but are left to cope with them by themselves. Before turning individual memory of trauma into a communal history of trauma, it needs to be narrativized. Only then can an open space of public memory come into being that in turn frees the traumatized individual and provides a space to think a future, a transcendence of the painful past. Only through narrating individual memory can public memory, and in turn communal identity and historiography be made possible.

The first step in this process, then, is to unearth and voice the individual trauma. To integrate a traumatic event into the narrative memory, a person needs to externalize it by telling it to a witness. Because “trauma precludes its registration” the traumatic event is not fully known until it is narrated and witnessed: “Bearing witness to a trauma is, in fact, a process that includes the listener. For the testimonial process to take place there needs to be a bonding, the intimate and total presence of an other – in the position of one who hears. Testimonies are not monologues; they cannot take place in solitude. The witnesses are to somebody: to somebody they have been waiting for a long time” (Laub 70/71). Indeed, when Paul D enters Sethe’s life again, it marks the beginning of their mental journey to the past towards a common place of trauma. In the presence of Paul D, Sethe begins to wonder if she could for a moment quit “the day’s serious work of beating back the past” (77) and “stop dead still in the middle of a cooking meal – not even leave the stove – and feel the hurt her back ought to. Trust things and remember things because the last of the Sweet Home men was there to catch her if she sank?” (19). This paragraph is the segue into the journey of remembrance that both Sethe and Paul D embark on, in which they supply each other with information each needs to make sense of their pasts. They can only approach a sense of wholeness through joint remembering: “The listener, therefore, is a party to the creation of knowledge *de novo*. The testimony to the trauma thus includes its hearer, who is, so to speak, the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time” (Laub 57). Through Sethe and Paul D, Morrison achieves the narrativization of the trauma that is necessary to externalize it, to open it up for public re-working and historicization.

When Paul D arrives at 124 Bluestone, he and Sethe begin a journey of remembrance, starting with Paul D seeing and touching the scar on Sethe’s back, the one she almost affectionately refers to as her “chokecherry tree”: “And he would tolerate no peace until he had touched every ridge and leaf of it with his mouth, none of which Sethe could feel because her back skin had been dead for years” (18). Sethe’s

physical inability to feel the skin on her back mirrors her psychological determination not to feel the emotions connected to her traumatic past, “to remember as close to nothing as was safe” (6). Acknowledging her pain, Paul D begins to function as a witness to Sethe’s trauma, opening up a space for her to start its narration. In the presence of Paul D, who is gentle and trustworthy and shares the same background of brutal oppression, Sethe is tempted for the first time to let her guard down and “feel the hurt her back ought to. Trust things and remember things because the last of the Sweet Home men was there to catch her if she sank” (19).

By expelling the ghost and gently breaking the hermetic isolation of the haunted house, Paul D sets in motion a process of joint remembering. In Sethe’s bedroom, the two form an intersubjective space of memory, each reminiscing about episodes in their past. Climbing the white stairs to the second story of the house is paralleled by an ascent into a higher consciousness. The layout of the house mirrors the lovers’ newfound ability to see and think further back into their pasts: “She led him to the top of the stairs, where light came straight from the sky because the second-story windows of that house had been placed in the pitched ceiling and not the walls” (21). In this room under the roof, they begin remembering things about Sweet Home, but at this point, their memory is still superficial and does not touch on the truly traumatic secrets in their past. Lying side by side, their internal monologues intersect as they touch each other almost involuntarily after the first sexual excitement has worn off: “they lay side by side resentful of one another and the skylight above them” (21). Looking at Sethe’s “chokecherry tree”, Paul D is reminded of Sweet Home, where he used to sit under a tree called “Brother”. Like Paul D was guided by tree blossoms on his geographical journey North, he is again guided by tree blossoms on his psychological journey back South, although once the romantic moment of their first encounter has passed, Paul D sees the chokecherry tree for what it really is “a revolting lump of scars. Not a tree, as she said. Maybe shaped like one, but nothing like any tree he knew because trees were inviting; [...] Sweet Home had more pretty trees than any farm around” (22). The mental image of the tree takes Paul D back to Sweet Home: Nevertheless, at this point his memory is purely nostalgic, failing to make the connection between the pretty trees at the plantation and Sethe’s scar that is a horrific echo of those pretty trees. But it is a start, and it takes them back to their primal place, the American South. From their present in Ohio, they travel back to their Southern past to unearth the roots of their traumata.

3.2 Fire and Brimstone Hidden in Lacy Groves – Sethe’s South

“The South often plays an important role as an imaginary homeplace in African-American literature with a primary Northern urban setting” (Kennedy, 58). Nostalgia for the South is an important theme in Toni Morrison’s fiction. In *Beloved*, the South is presented as an ambivalent place. On the one hand, it is the place of racist oppression and torture under the rule of slavery. On the other hand, it is home, and as such contains a nostalgic quality the protagonists in *Beloved* cannot deny. In *Blues People* (1963), Amiri Baraka sums up this ambivalence towards the South as follows:

But the sole idea was ‘to move,’ to split from the incredible fabric of guilt and servitude identified so graphically within the Negro consciousness as the white South. However, there was a paradox, even in the emotionalism of this reasoning. The South was *home*. It was the place that Negroes knew, and given the natural attachment of man to land, even loved. The North was to be beaten, there was room for attack. No such room had been possible in the South, but it was still to be called home (105).

This ambivalence is at the heart of Morrison’s depiction of the South in *Beloved*. Her protagonists try to escape their oppressive surroundings in the South by moving to the Promised Land in the North. Failing to complement this geographical journey to (superficial) freedom with a psychological journey to (actual) freedom, they cannot leave their traumatic past behind. Only when they undertake a journey of remembrance back to their Southern roots can they arrive in the here and now. This journey to their repressed roots is a journey back to the place of the ancestors and the mother, as Laura Mulvey claims: “[the] lost memory of the mother’s body is similar to other metaphors of a buried past or a lost history that contribute to the rhetoric of oppressed people” (167). The South has the maternal character of the womb of African American culture, the first home after the original home, “the maternal, understood as the roots of black culture” (Badt 574). If the characters in *Beloved* are motherless in the literal sense of the word, they are also motherless metaphorically, cut off from their traumatizing but also identity-forming roots in the South. Going back to the Southern roots is painful: “Given the atrocities in Afro-American history, to return to one’s ‘roots’ has the psychic resonance of returning to a subjugated position: Although the mother’s body, as the site of history, is made to signify anew [...] it is also the trace of an unbearable past” (Badt

575). Yet, the South is the site of black identity formation, without remembrance of the trauma that is the Southern past, no authentic Blackness is possible.

The place of the South and the place of the maternal body have similar resonances in the pages of *Beloved*. Like the mother gives life to the protagonists but is invisible or dead throughout their lives, so does the South give life and identity, but is worked hard at being overcome and forgotten. The mother-daughter bond in *Beloved* stands for Morrison's poetic attempt to recover the roots of an African-American identity in its connection, or rather disconnection to the African origins, as Sally Keenan (1993) points out:

Morrison's narrative [...] exposes with painful clarity that the ambiguities of connection and separation between the slave mother and child bear some correlation with the contradictions that mark the relationship of African Americans to their history. If, in psychoanalytic terms, the mother as source, or origin, is problematic and irrecoverable, so African Americans have learned through their particularly fractured past that history is problematic and often irrecoverable (47).

Like a bond with their mother is essential in a child's developing a sense of self, likewise a knowledge of roots and origin is essential for African-Americans' developing a sense of their own identity.

3.2.1 Will the Parts Hold – Sethe and Mother Loss

Sethe's loss of self and fragmentation of identity is rooted in the disconnection from her mother, leaving her psychologically wounded and prone to displacing her own self as a result. Thus, in order to understand Sethe's trauma, we must look at her relationship to her mother. The mother-daughter relationship is central to all of Morrison's novels: "In all of her writings Morrison emphasizes how essential mothering is for the well-being of children, because it is the mother who first loves the child and gives that child a loved sense of self. Children who are orphaned, abandoned, or denied nurturant mothering are psychologically wounded as adults" (O'Reilly 367). *Beloved* is a prime example in this respect, and Sethe's trauma exemplifies the loss of a sense of self, as she displaces her "best thing" (287) onto her daughter Beloved. Sethe's is a deeply wounded and fragmented personality, she experiences herself as not being whole and asks herself: "will the parts hold?" (287).

Growing up on a slave plantation, Sethe was not able to even get to know her own mother: “I didn’t see her but a few times out in the fields and once when she was working indigo. By the time I woke up in the morning, she was in line. If the moon was bright they worked by its light. Sunday she slept like a stick” (*Beloved* 65). The conditions on the plantation were such that Sethe’s mother had to show her child her slave mark to make sure Sethe would be able to recognize her: “Back there she opened up her dress and front and lifted her breast and pointed under it. Right on her rib was a circle and a cross burnt right in the skin. She said, ‘This is your ma’am. This,’ and she pointed” (65). The marking of the slave woman’s body is a complex sign. It is a signifier of the cruelty of slavery that brands blacks like cattle and thus marks them as inferior to whites. Yet, Sethe’s mother appropriates the sign to reaffirm the bond between herself and her daughter that had been severed by the harsh economic realities of slavery. Thus, the slave woman turns “the mark of the White man into the sign of the mother” (Doll, 39).

Scars in *Beloved* serve as a reminder not to forget. Like Sethe’s chokecherry tree is a mark of an unspeakable violence committed by white men to the pregnant black body, and *Beloved*’s “little curved shadow of a smile in the kootchy-kootchy-coo place under her chin” (251) is a reminder of Sethe’s unspeakable act of killing her own daughter, Sethe’s mother’s branding is both a trace of the bond between mother and daughter and a trace of its severing. In all cases, the scar is a sign of unspeakable violence afflicted to the Black body and soul. A sign of oppression by the white master, it also serves the oppressed as a visible reminder of and a connection to a common history of trauma that is not easily shared verbally: “The reappropriation of the mark is the rema(r)king of Black identity. It is that into which memory must flow again (rememory) so as not to forget, so as not to repeat” (ibid).

Therefore, the scar is ambiguous, both an outward sign of a physical and emotional trauma, and a sign for the connection between mother and child. However, ultimately the maternal bond is destroyed since Sethe is not able to recognize her mother by her mark after she has been hanged: “By the time they cut her down nobody could tell whether she had a circle and a cross or not, least of all me and I did look” (65). The scar, as a map of history on the slave body, “at once imposing identity and differentiating them from the unmarked” (Thomson 121), vanishes under the defacing power of slavery. Sethe’s mother is now one more unnamed, faceless victim of slavery, one of the “sixty million and more” Morrison mourns in the epigraph of *Beloved*.

3.2.2 It's Where We Were – Sweet Home

Nostalgia, “the longing to return to a lost place” (Su 2005, 3), plays a major role in *Beloved*, as both Sethe and Paul D paradoxically envision Sweet Home as such a lost place, a lost home which they feel connected to despite the terrors they experienced there. Morrison uses the nostalgia for places of the past as a means of interpreting the present: “[...] there is no indication in the novel that Sethe should be condemned for these longings or that they are even avoidable. They constitute significant parts of her memory and experience. Who she is, how she acts, and the claims she makes upon readers cannot be understood without reference to her nostalgia” (Su 2005, 2). Nevertheless, Morrison points out the danger in this longing for lost places, since it entails a displacement of self. Clinging to the idea of Sweet Home as that place where her identity lies, Sethe fails to find a home place in the present. Like she displaces her identity, her “best thing” outside herself and onto her children, Sethe is not able to anchor herself in the here and now. It is only after she works through the pain and loss that is connected to past places, that Sethe opens up an opportunity for home in the present and in herself.¹⁶

Sethe and Paul D’s journey South leads them to the place where they met, the plantation Sweet Home. The place presents itself as a safe haven for the slaves living on it, yet under its sweet mask lurks the ugly face of slavery. Right in the beginning of *Beloved*, the utopian claim of Sweet Home is contrasted by its dystopian reality. Going about her daily business on Bluestone Road, Sethe is plagued by intrusive recollections of her time at the slave plantation, transporting her back to a past place and time. Her memories of Sweet Home are vivid:

[...] suddenly there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes, and although there was not a leaf on that farm that did not make her want to scream, it rolled itself out before her in shameless beauty. It never looked as terrible as it was and it made her wonder if hell was a pretty place too. Fire and brimstone all right, but hidden in lacy groves. Boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world. It shamed

¹⁶ Nostalgia is mostly portrayed in a negative light, as a futile pining for a long lost and glorified past. Cultural critic bell hooks, for example, condemns nostalgia as harmful in recovering a memory that can be used in politically transforming the present. hooks calls for a “politicization of memory that distinguishes nostalgia, that longing for something to be as it once was, a kind of useless act, from that remembering that serves to illuminate and transform the present” (hooks 147). Yet, I would argue, Morrison uses nostalgia in a more complex way. The lost places she envisions serve her protagonists to claim a common ground, a common set of real or imagined memories upon which to base their individual and collective identity and their sense of community.

her – remembering the wonderful soothing trees rather than the boys. Try as she might to make it otherwise, the sycamores beat out the children every time and she could not forget her memory for that (6).

Sethe's recollections of Sweet Home exemplify the complex intertwined relationship between memory and nostalgia. The passage illuminates the selectivity of nostalgia, as Sethe does remember the lynchings, yet they are outweighed by the soothing images of Sweet Home's beautiful trees.¹⁷ The clash between the beauty of the trees and the horror of the lynchings is a prime example for the ambiguous character of the South in *Beloved*, on the one hand being the protagonists' home, providing beauty and comfort, on the other hand being the home of slavery, of horror and degradation.

Ever since she murdered her child, Sethe is shunned by the community and leads an isolated life. The house on 124 Bluestone does not offer her the sense of safety and warmth that traditionally characterizes a home place. She recognizes that her nostalgic memories are hardly accurate and reliable, yet she needs to remember Sweet Home this way to counter the profound sense of disorientation and fragmentation she experiences in the present. Sweet Home is the only "home" she has ever known, and as such it serves as the place of origin in which she locates her sense of identity. It also serves as the locus of a common past for Sethe, Baby Suggs and Paul D, and therefore is a vital point of reference in their common journey towards a retrieval of traumatic memory. When Paul D points out the irony in the naming of Sweet Home and thereby gently criticizes Sethe's own nostalgia for the place, Sethe counters by claiming Sweet Home as their common ground, the place that they remember as home whether they want to or not: "'She's right, Sethe. It wasn't sweet and it sure wasn't home.' He shook his head. 'But it's where we were,' said Sethe. 'All together. Comes back whether we want it or not'" (14). Sethe understands the problematic nature of her nostalgia, yet she also understands its relevance as place, as means of orientation. When faced with the choice of Sweet Home or no place at all, she chooses Sweet Home. It anchors her, serves as a point of reference against which she orients herself in the turmoil of her life.

Morrison is very effective in juxtaposing the beautiful appearance of Sweet Home with its horrible reality and to capture the ambivalent feelings of the slaves towards their Southern home. Although the plantation owners, the Garners, set up Sweet Home as a

¹⁷ Obviously, Sethe's own "chokecherry tree", the scar on her back, is Morrison's way of bitterly mocking the Edenic allusions of Sweet Home, its green pastures and beautiful trees: "The tree planted on Sethe's back by schoolteacher's student's whip is the Edenic tree of knowledge with a vengeance" (DeKoven 78).

philanthropic Utopia, they are not able to subvert the system of slavery. The plantation decks itself out in a layer of progressiveness and philanthropy, but ultimately, its lacy groves are just a discursive illusion staged by the Garners to elevate their own status and promote themselves as utopian philanthropists. Their “Utopia however is always-already contaminated by slavery: even at their best, the slaves’ lives are only almost livable, and nothing like autonomous or free” (DeKoven, 79). This truth about Sweet Home becomes apparent as Morrison juxtaposes Garner’s empty utopian promises and Schoolteacher’s harsh realities, whereby he “put[s] things in order” (*Beloved* 10). After Mr. Garner dies, the terminally ill Mrs. Garner first sells Paul F. and then hires schoolteacher to take over the business of the slave plantation: “Mrs. Garner, crying like a baby, had sold [Paul D’s] brother to pay off the debts that surfaced the minute she was widowed. Then schoolteacher arrived to put things in order. But what he did broke three more Sweet Home men and punched the glittering iron out of Sethe’s eyes, leaving two open wells that did not reflect firelight” (10).

The failure of the utopian enterprise of Sweet Home parallels on a greater historical scale the failure of Reconstruction itself. Marianne DeKoven (1995) cites *Beloved* and its depiction of the collapse of the goals and ideals of the Reconstruction Period as a prime example of American utopian, or rather, dystopian fiction. DeKoven claims that “the period in the 1870s and 1880s following the dissolution of the Freedmen’s Bureau, and the ultimate defeat of Reconstruction, was a post-utopian historical moment. It witnessed the break-up and disappearance of most of the antebellum utopian communities [...]” (76). Indeed, *Beloved* can be read as a historicization of the period of Reconstruction with its utopian ambition, and its subsequent decline. This decline is embodied in the character of schoolteacher, who upon his arrival, brings the real world with him to Sweet Home and destroys any kind of utopian ambition the place may have contained. Although it would be a far stretch to view Sweet Home as a utopian community per se, Morrison surely presents it as a safe haven for slaves in the otherwise brutal racist environment of the American South. But, as DeKoven notes, in *Beloved*, “history destroys or distorts potential or attempted utopias” (DeKoven, 77). Indeed, the intrusion of schoolteacher marks the bursting of the Edenic bubble of Sweet Home and reinstates the overtly racist order prevalent at the time.

Sweet Home was only able to exist as a closed space, shielded from the outside reality. This becomes obvious when Paul D notices in hindsight that the slaves were

only allowed and able to be men inside the confines of Sweet Home's boundaries, "they were only Sweet Home men at Sweet Home. One step off the ground and they were trespassers among the human race" (*Beloved*, 131). Sweet Home is a philanthropic enclave within the misanthropy of slavery, yet as is the case with enclaves, its rules apply only within. Since "Utopian space is an imaginary enclave within real social space" (Jameson 2005, 15), the utopian space that Mr. Garner had created at Sweet Home was solely dependent on his vision. As soon as the visionary is gone, the utopia is not able to perpetuate itself but collapses into the surrounding dystopia of slavery. Morrison criticizes the Garners' utopian project as a naïve pipe dream, acknowledging, like Jameson, the fact that the closed utopian space as enclave within real society "offers a kind of mental space in which the whole system can be imagined as radically different. But clearly, this enclave space is but a pause in the all-encompassing forward momentum of differentiation which will sweep it away altogether" (ibid, 16). The closedness of Sweet Home to the outside world leaves the slaves unprepared for what is to come once reality enters their world. Furthermore, at Sweet Home, the slaves are cut off from the nurturing of a community and access to a common history. As it is, defined by white society and closed off from the reality of the time and space of the American 1850s, Sweet Home is doomed to fail as an American Eden.

At Sweet Home, Garner has established his own version of slavery. In this system, the slaves are still not autonomous or free, but are left to believe that they actually count as human beings. Proud of his progressive attitude, Mr. Garner goes overboard to let everyone know he treats his slaves like men: "Now at Sweet Home, my niggers is men every one of them. Bought em thataway, raised em thataway. Men every one" (*Beloved* 11). Within the framework of slavery, it is certainly a modest step in the right direction to call the slaves "men" and not "boys" or, even worse, "beasts". Based on this progressive attitude, Mr. Garner claims a moral superiority that elevates him from the ranks of his fellow plantation owners: "'Y'all got boys,' he told them. 'Young boys, old boys, picky boys, stroppin boys. [...] But if you a man yourself, you'll want your niggers to be men too'" (11). Thus, by calling his slaves men, Garner solidifies his own manhood as well. Circumventing the traditional discourse of slavery that assigns slaves the status of animals, of children at best, Garner thus creates a utopian bubble that raises his slaves to believe in the illusion of being members of human society. The pretense of a friendly and familial relationship between slave and slave owner only masks their underlying racism, something Halle realizes early on: "What you want to

know Sethe?’ ‘Him and her, [...] they ain’t like the whites I seen before. [...] they talk soft for one thing.’ ‘It don’t matter, Sethe. What they say is the same. Loud or soft’” (*Beloved*, 205). Here, Halle points to the hypocrisy of Mr. and Mrs. Garner, the paradox of an enlightened slave economy. The benevolence of the Sweet Home patriarch is only superficial, because slavery can never be humanitarian.¹⁸

The brutal rationality at the heart of slavery is personified by Schoolteacher, whose brand of racist pseudoscience is symbolized by his measuring string, used to systematically measure the slaves’ facial angles, head shapes and brain sizes. He writes down the collected data to further corroborate the scientific basis for his power over the slaves and turn white supremacy into legitimate scientific theory, as J. Brooks Bouson points out: “A theory that codified the shaming of blacks and white contempt for the ‘lower’ races, the study of racial differences functioned to give so-called scientific confirmation of the superiority (pride) of the higher and civilized white race and the inferiority (shame) of the lower and degenerate black race” (140). Schoolteacher thus embodies the system of White indoctrination of Blacks into losing their sense of self and cultural identity. The school place in *Beloved* is not a place of shaping and opening up minds, but a place of dehumanizing brutality working under the principle of intellectual supremacy.

Schoolteacher’s pseudo-scientific stereotyping of the “animalistic, savage African Other” (Bouson 159) is the source of Sethe’s deepest and most debilitating shame trauma and the ultimate trigger for killing her daughter, lest they take her with them to raise her as an inferior being. At first, Sethe is unfazed by schoolteacher’s habit of measuring her head with a string: “I didn’t care nothing about the measuring string. We all laughed about that [...] Schoolteacher’d wrap that string all over my head, ‘cross my nose, around my behind. Number my teeth. I thought he was a fool” (201). Sethe later figures out, though, that she is in no position to judge schoolteacher’s foolishness. It

¹⁸ Moreover, while the Garners treat their slaves fairly well, they do not treat them as equals. This is apparent for one in the naming of the slaves. Calling three of his slaves Paul Garner, the slave owner dehumanizes the men by not acknowledging their individuality as human beings. Giving them his last name, Garner creates an artificial patrilineal connection, establishing himself as their father. The slaves serve the childless Garner as means to reinforce his manhood and his status within the slave owner society, yet there is no emotional or familial bond beyond that: “To name is also to claim dominion: naming children, slaves, domestic animals, or real estate is an announcement of figurative, if not literal, ownership of the named, as well as an indication of the namer’s relationship to or sentiments about the named” (Hayes 2004, 669). The Garners’ philanthropy concerns the slaves as a faceless group, a political cause, yet they are not concerned with them as individual beings. This disregard for their individuality further undermines the artificial familial bond between Garner and his “men”, and renders the naming of the slave plantation as “Sweet Home” deeply ironic.

does not matter if she deems him smart or foolish, since schoolteacher makes sure to show them that “definitions belonged to the definers – not the defined” (199). When she later overhears schoolteacher talking about her and instructing his nephews “to put her human characteristics on the left, her animal ones on the right” (202), she realizes that the purpose of his measuring is to categorize her as an animal rather than a human being. Her resulting feeling of humiliation is immediate and powerful: “When I bumped up against a tree my scalp was prickly. [...] My head itched like the devil. Like somebody was sticking fine needles in my scalp” (203).¹⁹ Sethe’s feeling of humiliation and shame expose schoolteacher’s powerful gaze as transformative of Sethe’s whole world. Because schoolteacher’s judgment of Sethe as an inferior human being is based upon his hegemonic freedom of definition, Sethe is automatically denied her own freedom and experiences herself through the slave master’s racist discourse. The prickly feeling on her scalp is the physical manifestation of this shaming experience of seeing her own inferiority through the eyes of the white oppressor.

Individual and cultural shame was an essential part of discourse and practice of slavery.²⁰ One means of subjugating the Black body and mind was the instilment of a feeling of inferiority in the slaves’ minds. Schoolteacher’s likening of the slave’s bodily and facial features to those of animals is a perfect example of that practice. Thus socializing Blacks to feel inherently inferior, Whites were able to maintain their privilege not only through bodily discipline and violence, but more effectively through a hegemonic racial discourse of Black inferiority: “One of the best ways to instill fear in people is to terrorize them. Yet this fear is best sustained by convincing them that their bodies are ugly, their intellect is inherently underdeveloped, their culture is less civilized, and their future warrants less concern than that of other peoples” (Cornel West 1993, 122/23, In: Bouson 2000, 13). For the slaves, the school space is a place of cultural annihilation by abnegating their humanity and thereby the basis of their sense of cultural identity.

Before schoolteacher’s arrival, Sethe still believes she can make a home for herself at Sweet Home. To compensate for her rootlessness, she is intent on transforming Mrs. Garner’s kitchen into a place she loved working in. Thinking about

¹⁹ When schoolteacher invades the yard of 124 Bluestone to take Sethe and her children back to Kentucky, the impact of this shame trauma is realized full force. Sethe’s physical sensation that “little hummingbirds stuck their needle beaks right through her headcloth into her hair and beat their wings” (171) is an eerie echo of the prickly feeling of humiliation Sethe experienced when she witnessed the measuring of her animal and human features.

²⁰ See Bouson (2000)

Sweet Home, she remembers that it was quite unbearable for her to work and live inside the Garners' house, if she did not bring something pretty inside:

she who had to bring a fistful of salsify into Mrs. Garner's kitchen every day just to be able to work in it, feel like some part of it was hers, because she wanted to love the work she did, to take the ugly out of it, and the only way she could feel at home on Sweet Home was if she picked some pretty growing thing and took it with her. The day she forgot was the day butter wouldn't come or the brine in the barrel blistered her arms (23).

Here Morrison exemplifies the hostility of the master's domestic space for the oppressed. The unhomely for Sethe can only be made tolerable if she brings nature inside, something that is not tinted by whiteness, by hostile society. At hindsight, from the perspective of having lived up North for decades now, Sethe realizes the delusion she was under when she thought that "Sweet Home really was one. As though a handful of myrtle stuck in the handle of a pressing iron propped against the door in a whitewoman's kitchen could make it hers. As though mint sprig in the mouth changed the breath as well as its odor. A bigger fool never lived" (*Beloved*, 25).

Sethe now sees that at Sweet Home they were all living under the false impression that they were living a life as human beings and therefore were free to carve out a space for them to call their own, a place they could call home. But now she realizes that the Garner's progressive attitude as well as Sethe's own efforts to make the whitewoman's kitchen her home, were but mere cosmetics, unable to change the stark reality of racism and slavery underneath. Mrs. Garner surrounds herself with Baby Suggs and then with Sethe, spending pleasant hours in the house doing household chores, pretending to have a friendship with the slave woman. While Mrs. Garner likes to uphold the illusion that she values Sethe's company as a friend and fellow human being, her true racist beliefs surface in the confrontation between these two women, one white and one black. Sethe approaches Mrs. Garner, expecting female solidarity and understanding concerning her love for Halle: "She and Mrs. Garner were the only women there, so she decided to ask her" (27). At this moment, historical reality disrupts the utopian female space of friendship in the kitchen and when Sethe asks "'Is there a wedding?'" (27), Mrs. Garner just laughs at the slave woman's naiveté. Because slaves were chattel, contracts such as marriages were not legally binding and. Living inside the Garners' Utopia, Sethe assumes she has the same right to a celebration of her love as everyone else, yet social reality momentarily finds its way inside the Garners' kitchen. No amount of salsify or

myrtle Sethe brought into this kitchen to make it pretty could make it hers, to transform the unhomely space of slavery into a home for her.

Although the scene is quite nonviolent and seems altogether unspectacular, it is nonetheless an example of Homi Bhabha's unhomeliness, or the world-in-the-home. In this kitchen, where Mrs. Garner and Sethe get together to perform their household chores, the political finds its way in and lets Sethe know unmistakably that she is not on the same level as white people, for whom it is natural to be able to celebrate their love. The scene also lends itself to a particularly feminist reading of its traumatogenic effect. Whereas it is not overtly brutal or violent, it testifies nevertheless to a form of "insidious" racist trauma, happening within the confines of the traditionally female-identified domestic space. According to Laura Brown (1992), "insidious trauma" refers to the "traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and spirit" (107). Morrison pays close attention to these subtle mechanisms of trauma that often occur in the hidden domestic sphere and are expressed through words and looks rather than physical violence. It is in the banalities of everyday life that the slave woman experiences assaults on her psychic and emotional integrity and sanity. The world of racism and slavery invades the domestic space and turns it unhomely, the very counterimage of the space of safety and intimacy that is usually thought of as home.

After much planning together with the other slaves, a heavily pregnant Sethe manages to escape the slave plantation and sets out for Ohio. Sethe's crossing of the Ohio River is a crossing of the boundary from bondage to freedom. In that respect it represents a sort of Middle Passage in reverse, an exodus to the Promised Land of the North. Sethe's crossing the Ohio River marks her transition from being physically enslaved to being physically free, yet her mind will linger for a long while longer in that liminal space between captivity and freedom, until she completes her psychological journey to freedom as well.

3.2 A Rusty Tobacco Tin - Paul D

Like Sethe, Paul D is preoccupied throughout his life with beating back the past. Whereas Sethe busies herself with housework and caring for her daughter Denver, Paul D has taken up a nomadic lifestyle and literally runs from the traumatic memories threatening to catch up with him should he stand still. To make sure he is not constantly

troubled by the emotional and physical pain of the past, Paul D has locked it away safely in a closed-off corner of his mind. This mechanism is quite common for victims of trauma, as Robert Scaer (2005) explains: “With the passage of time, the trauma victim may compartmentalize [...] the conscious, declarative memory of the trauma into secret little hiding places of pain, divorced from the realities and experiences of daily life. Dissociation and denial allow one to exist from day to day relatively free from the agonizing conscious perception of the repressed event” (88).²¹ Paul D uses the image of a tobacco tin to describe the space in his chest where he has buried his pain: “He would keep the rest where it belonged: in that tobacco tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be. Its lid rusted shut” (77). Alluding to the loss of his heart, Paul D acknowledges the loss of his emotions, the core of a human being. The red heart represents the center of the emotional and spiritual being, the pulsating source of life and love. Through veins and arteries, it connects this center of emotions to the rest of the body. A person with a red heart has integrated the emotional part of his being with his mind and psyche. The tobacco tin, an inanimate metal object, does not allow such a connection, it closes off memories and feelings of humiliation and pain and thus keeps them from being integrated in the whole of the human being. Morrison hereby visualizes the isolation of the traumatic memory from the rest of Paul D’s being.²²

Seeing Sethe again in Cincinnati after many years since her escape from Sweet Home sets in motion a journey back to the places of pain and trauma in Paul D’s past: “The closed portion of his head opened like a greased lock” (44). The scar on her back, stemming from brutal abuse by the slave master schoolteacher and shaped like a chokecherry tree, reminds him of the trees at Sweet Home and thus, he is mentally transported back to that place: “[It] was in fact a revolting lump of scars. Not a tree, as she said. Maybe shaped like one, but nothing like any tree he knew because trees were inviting; things you could trust and be near; talk to if you wanted to, as he frequently did since way back when he took the midday meal in the fields of Sweet Home” (22).

²¹ Nevertheless, the memories of traumatic events still remain fresh and intact, ready to emerge in case of an event recalling the traumatic situation. In fact, the trauma victim often is compelled to seek out situations triggering the traumatic memory, presumably in order to make better choices this time around and thus achieve mastery over the event. This goes back to Freud, who later conceded that the reenactment of the trauma in reality did not serve to free the trauma victim from the plague of the traumatic memory in the long run. Still, the concept of reenactment in order to achieve mastery is still popular in trauma theory today (see Scaer, *Trauma Spectrum* 88 ff.), and fits the motivations and actions of Morrison’s traumatized protagonists.

²² On the general treatment of the effect of trauma on feeling and emotion in Morrison see the studies by Boudreau (1995), Grewal (1998), Bouson (2000) and Durrant (2004).

Like trees guide Paul D on his way north after he escapes the prison camp in Alfred, Georgia, the “chokecherry tree” (16) on Sethe’s back guides him back to the origins of his trauma.

Paul D’s story is characterized mainly by his quest for places in which to live his manhood, which parallels Sethe’s quest for her motherhood. As a slave on Sweet Home and later in the hands of the sadistic white slave masters in Alfred, Georgia, Paul D experiences that his identity in general, and his manhood in particular, depend on the white hegemonic definition. At Sweet Home, the benevolent slave master Mr. Garner is always bragging about his slaves, claiming that they are men not boys: “Now at Sweet Home, my niggers is men every one of them. Bought em thataway, raised em thataway. Men every one” (*Beloved* 11). Thus, Mr. Garner tries to set an example for his fellow Kentuckian plantation owners, whom he wants to teach the progressive, paradoxically utopian way of slavery. But his philanthropy serves mainly one goal, which is to make Mr. Garner feel proud of himself, to prove a point: “Then a fierce argument, sometimes a fight, and Garner came home bruised and pleased, having demonstrated one more time what a real Kentuckian was: one tough enough and smart enough to make and call his own niggers men” (11). This self-praise undercuts his utopian ambition, since his thoughts are not with the slaves or the abolition movement, but only with himself and how he can present himself as a progressive humanitarian. In hindsight, Paul D recognizes the irony in the Sweet Home system under Mr. Garner and realizes that what was set up as a utopia was really just a play staged by Mr. Garner: “Garner called and announced them men – but only on Sweet Home, and by his leave. Was he naming what he saw or creating what he did not?” (*Beloved*, 231). Here, it dawns on Paul D that his entire identity depends on external definitions, that the name given to him by his white masters, be it “man”, “animal”, or “nigger”, defines his whole being. That is the trauma at the heart of Paul D, which eventually sets him off to escape the master’s places of black dehumanization and emasculation and roam the vast American spaces in pursuit of freedom, to eventually settle at 124 Bluestone Road in the hope to be able to be a man for Sethe.

The years on Sweet Home with Garner had taught him that he was indeed a man. Garner was “a boss who showed them how to shoot and listened to what they had to say” (*Beloved*, 230). Yet, Paul D later learns that his life under Garner had been only an illusion, a fake display of humanity. His manhood is taken from him by schoolteacher and there is nothing he can do about it: “At the peak of his strength, taller than tall men,

and stronger than most, they clipped him, Paul D. First his shotgun, then his thoughts [...]” (*Beloved*, 231), the former being the insignia of his manhood, the latter being the insignia of his personhood. Paul D’s identity as a man and a human being was solely reliant on one person, Mr. Garner: “Everything rested on Garner being alive. Without his life each of theirs fell into pieces. Now ain’t that slavery or what is it? [...] Oh, he did manly things, but was that Garner’s gift or his own will? [...] Suppose Garner woke up one morning and changed his mind? Took the word away” (*Beloved*, 231). Sweet Home is a utopian place allowing the slaves manhood only when the respective master’s philosophy supports it.

Paul D recognizes that the discursive power lies solely with the white slave master. His preoccupation with naming and definitions is mirrored throughout the novel, among other things in his inferiority complex towards a rooster named Mister. The rooster with the name connoting social status and commanding respect is the symbol of Paul D’s own emasculation. When Paul D is led past the roosters in the yard of Sweet Home, and an iron bit in his mouth, it becomes apparent to him how different the question of identity is for him and the rooster named Mister:

Mister, he looked so ... free. Better than me. Stronger, tougher. [...] Mister was allowed to be and stay what he was. But I wasn’t allowed to be and stay what I was. Even if you cooked him you’d be cooking a rooster named Mister. But wasn’t no way I’d ever be Paul D again, living or dead. Schoolteacher changed me. I was something else and that something was less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub (76/77).

In this moment of unspeakable humiliation and debasement, Paul D recognizes that Sweet Home, a place housing the brutality of slavery, takes away his essential integrity as a human being, a wholeness that is granted even to farm animals. This is an essential traumatic moment for Paul D, one of the moments of psychic fragmentation central to the novel and central to the character’s quests for selfhood. Later, Paul D is deported to work in a chain gang in Alfred, Georgia,²³ the place that finally breaks him. After Sweet

²³ Chained like an animal, he is led away from the slave plantation: “When he turned his head, aiming for a last look at Brother, turned as much as the rope that connected his neck to the axle of a buckboard allowed, and, later on, when they fastened the iron around his ankles and clamped the wrists as well, there was no sign of trembling at all” (112). The last look he gives to Brother, his tree friend, is the last look he is able to cast on something steady and familiar. Trees in *Beloved* come to symbolize a multitude of things. Whereas the main metaphor to explain Joe Trace’s brand of nomadism in *Jazz* are traces, *Beloved*’s main metaphor to explain Paul D’s nomadic quest to find his masculinity are trees. For Paul D “trees were inviting; things you could trust and be near; talk to if you wanted to [...] His choice he called Brother” (22). With Brother, Paul D is able to fulfill several needs. For one, he is able to name. As I

Home with its arbitrary discursive power of granting manhood to the slaves and taking it away again, the emasculating power of slavery takes on a different shape in Alfred. The innocent, homely offer of “Breakfast?” (114), uttered by the white prison guards, receives a violent twist to mean forced fellatio. The many humiliations, the shame and the violence by now have taken their toll on Paul D, who starts trembling uncontrollably as an outward sign of his psychic trauma: “But when they shoved him into the box and dropped the cage door down, his hands quit taking instructions. On their own, they traveled. Nothing could stop them or get their attention. They would not hold his penis to urinate or a spoon to scoop lumps of lima beans into his mouth. The miracle of their obedience came with the hammer at dawn” (113).

Paul D’s traumatic memory appears here as a visceral sensation, an unstoppable force of life, melting his icy resolve to not remember, forcing him to acknowledge its existence: “It felt like rippling – gentle at first and then wild. As though the further south they led him the more his blood, frozen like an ice pond for twenty years, began thawing, breaking into pieces that, once melted, had no choice but to swirl and eddy” (112/113). It is telling that Paul D experiences this powerful return of life memory when he is traveling South. Whereas the North in *Beloved*, as well as in *Jazz*, stands for the grateful accepting of forgetfulness, the South is the home place where Black history of trauma is so present, it cannot be overlooked. The warm pulsing power of life returns to Paul D, waking his frozen feeling and memories he worked so hard to numb. He knows he cannot afford to feel the pain, to be vulnerable have hope for a better life, so he uses his sledgehammer to beat life back into submission: “And they beat. [...] Eighty-six days and done. Life was dead” (115).

mentioned before, naming and definitions are important to Paul D, since his identity as a man and as a human being is dependent on his slave master naming him “man”, “boy”, or “animal”. By naming his favorite tree Brother, he exercises his naming power and furthermore establishes for himself a semblance of a family. Brother is always there, he will listen and be strong enough for Paul D to lean on, just like a real brother would. Moreover, the tree is his last connection to some sort of roots, a semblance, however ironic in hindsight, of home.

3.3.1 Paul D and the Blues

In the rhythmic space of music, Paul D and his fellow prisoners find the strength to endure their ordeal. Like the music of Jazz in *Jazz*, the music of Blues in *Beloved* offers a space in which to inscribe “unspeakable” African American experience. In the words of Houston A. Baker, Jr., the Blues can be conceived of as a matrix or a womb, carrying Black American culture, a “multiplex, enabling script in which Afro-American cultural discourse is inscribed” (Baker, 230). Using the Blues to render her historiography of this American Era, Morrison acknowledges the power of the Blues as an instrument to record and pass on history. Where conventional historical accounts fail to narrate the unspeakable history of American slavery, Paul D’s Bluesman embodies centuries of African American historical and cultural memory. Through his musical recollections of his journey through the United States, Morrison weaves a dense fabric of significant events in American history, now told from the unusual perspective of a slave. Thereby Morrison reframes for example the building of the American railroad system not as a milestone of American progress but as an exploitative enterprise. The reference to the American railroad is of particular importance in the context of the Blues. As Houston A. Baker, Jr. notes: “To suggest a trope for the blues as a forceful matrix in cultural understanding is to summon an image of the black blues singer at the railway junction lustily transforming experiences of a durative (unceasingly oppressive) landscape into the extraordinary energies of rhythmic song” (232).

Indeed, during their time in the chain gang in Georgia, Paul D and his fellow prisoners are able to endure the brutal oppression at the hands of their masters through song. The channel their rage and frustration into the physical activity and their sledge hammers and accompany the work with the rhythm of their songs. The men’s singing provides them with a measure of control to coordinate their work, a beat within which to yield their hammer, a measure to break down the seemingly endless and monotone workdays: “In pragmatic terms, it enabled them to survive the physical demands of developing the New World” (Kitts, 506). Apart from the sheer rhythmic force that guides their movements, the bluesy lyrics also do their part in keeping them from literally and metaphorically going off the rail. The men work hard at beating back any kind of thoughts of life, of the past and the future. They use their sheer physical force and the cathartic movement of the sledgehammer to fend off any emotion that would threaten their ability to function in the oppressive here and now: “they killed the flirt whom folks called Life for leading them on. Making them think the next sunrise would

be worth it; that another stroke of time would to it at last. Only when she was dead would they be safe” (115). What they are doing is trying to kill time, literally. To avoid thinking in any concept of linear time that has a past and a future, for that would imply thinking of the things they have lost and can never regain. Paul D uses his sledgehammer to forge the tobacco tin in his chest, where he buries all remnants of memories and emotions that might lead him to feel, to acknowledge his pain.

3.3.2 Paul D’s Journey North

The prison camp of the chain gang is a veritable grave for the living:

[...] the ditches; the one thousand feet of earth – five feet deep, five feet wide, into which wooden boxes had been fitted. A door of bars that you could lift on hinges like a cage opened into three walls and a roof of scrap lumber and red dirt. Two feet of it over his head; three feet of open trench in front of him with anything that that crawled or scurried welcome to share that grave calling itself quarters (112)²⁴.

Morrison transforms the benign concept of shelter into something so hostile and harmful as to endanger the human being’s life. Paul D’s cage is only a mean joke of a shelter anyway, open to any kind of insect or snake traveling through the soil the cage is built into. Moreover, when it starts raining, the narrow space in the ground threatens to turn into a grave for Paul D and the other prisoners.

Whereas human-built shelters are meant to protect from the waywardness of weather, this space turns against its inhabitants in the moment where they need its protection the most: “It rained. In the boxes the men heard the water rise in the trench and looked out for cottonmouths. They squatted in muddy water, slept above it, peed in it. [...] Above him rivulets of mud slid through the boards of the roof. When it come down, he thought, gonna crush me like a thick bug. [...] The ditch was caving in and mud oozed under and through the bars” (116). The space of the prison cage is an

²⁴ Elaine Scarry (1985) delineates the way that “[i]n normal contexts, the room, the simplest form of shelter, expresses the most benign potential of human life. [...] while the room is a magnification of the body, it is simultaneously a miniaturization of the world, of civilization. Although its walls, for example, mimic the body’s attempt to secure for the individual a stable internal space [...] the walls are also, throughout all this, independent objects, objects which stand apart from and free of the body, objects which realize the human being’s impulse to project himself out into a space beyond the boundaries of the body in acts of making, either physical or verbal, that once multiplied, collected, and shared are called civilization” (39). Thus perceived, the domestic space retains a protective quality also echoed in Yi-Fu Tuan’s conception of rooms as basic shelter. The domestic here becomes a benign miniature model of the outside world, sheltering the human body while at the same time providing a connection to the outside and expressing the human need for creating.

extension of the oppressive power of the white masters. Scarry (1985) analyzes the way space can be used by the hegemonic power as a weapon of torture against the oppressed: “The torture room is not just the setting in which the torture occurs, [...] It is itself literally converted into another weapon, into an agent of pain. All aspects of the basic structure – walls, ceiling, windows, doors – undergo this conversion” (40). Thus turning the most basic assumptions of the function of inside space upside down, the torturer effects a dissolution of the prisoner’s world, wherein the concept of safety from the hostile outside world no longer exists. The threatening and destruction of these boundaries leads to a fundamentally impaired sense of the self and its relation to the outside world.

Yet, the flooding of the camp is ambivalent, in that it also provides the opportunity for the chain gang to escape. The same chain that is the symbol for their imprisonment and their reduction to animals is transformed into an instrument of communication between the slaves:

It started like the chain-up but the difference was the power of the chain. [...] Some lost direction and their neighbors, feeling the confused pull of the chain, snatched them around. For if one lost, all lost. The chain that held them would save all or none, and Hi Man was the delivery. They talked through that chain like Sam Morse and, Great God, they all came up. Like the unshriven dead, zombies on the loose, holding the chains in their hands, they trusted the rain and the dark, yes, but mostly Hi Man and each other (116/117).

The system of the prison camp is based on isolating the slaves from each other, keeping them in closed, coffin-like boxes in the ground. In this moment of great danger, the slaves realize that they can only survive if they break their fragmentation and form a whole, communicating through the very means of their oppression. Appropriating the code of slavery, the shackles, the prisoners are able to transcend it by forming a space of communal discourse.

After his escape, Paul D travels North in a quest for freedom, social and psychological. Yearning to leave the South, the place of brutal racist oppression, he also yearns to leave his memories behind, to make a fresh start in the free North. His ambivalent relationship with the South is representative for the ambivalent relationship of all African-Americans with that place that stands for the history of slavery, of oppression and disenfranchisement:

[...] he could not help being astonished by the beauty of this land that was not his. He hid in its breast, fingered its earth for food, clung to its banks to lap water and tried not to love it. On nights when the sky was personal, weak with the weight of its own stars, he made himself not love it. Its graveyards and low-lying rivers. Or just a house – solitary under a chinaberry tree; maybe a mule tethered and the light hitting its hide just so. Anything could stir him and he tried hard not to love it (283).

Morrison here captures once again the tension between the intimate relationship of African-Americans to their land and their disenfranchisement that made it impossible for them to consider themselves part of it. They were the ones that cultivated the land, they made it yield crops and lived on it day in and day out. Nevertheless, those fruits of their labor were not theirs to consume and their stay on the earth was merely tolerated and did not grant them any sense of belonging. Hence, there existed a tension between spiritual ownership and material alienation from the land. Morrison uses this metaphor of landscape to explore issues of selfhood: “With the act of writing, of reclaiming the landscape through memory and imagination, Morrison suggests [...] how the South functions both as a site for disjunction and for reunion with the self” (Jones, 37). Paul D’s is a geographical journey through the land he does not belong to but that is the only land he knows to call home. It is also a mental journey to start a recovery of his self. Whereas before, he had been moved around from one oppressive place to another, after his escape from Georgia he has to find his own way home.

Kenneth M. Stamp (1989) observes that slave masters kept a knowledge of geography from the slaves to discourage a desire to escape, for they would not know how to get where they wanted to go: “Not only the slave’s fear of capture but his limited knowledge of geography, make the prospect of successful escape seem discouragingly dim” (154). Paul D’s ignorance of the Southern geography is particularly striking: “Paul D had no idea of what to do and knew less than anybody, it seemed” (118). In the Cherokee camp, where the escaped men find refuge, two groups of people betrayed by the white master. The Cherokees are resisters who decided to stay on their old land, rather to move west to the Indian territory in Oklahoma. They are forced to hide in their own home land, but their unfaltering spiritual connection to the land they live on serves as an example for Paul D, who lacks this kind of deep rootedness: “The land of the southeastern woods becomes the common ground where black and Indian meet in resistance; the Cherokee rootedness in their home and consequent refusal to move West

is linked to the necessity of Paul D to go north over the same ground, to escape those who would repossess him” (Kennedy 2006, 204).

The Cherokee men have an understanding of their land that is not contained in any linear geography. Whereas the escaped slaves plan their journeys along geographical landmarks, the Cherokee world is structured along more spiritual, metaphysical landmarks: “He heard his co-convicts talk knowledgeably about rivers and states, towns and territories. Heard Cherokee men describe the beginning of the world and its end” (118). Only Paul D is completely disoriented, both geographically and spiritually and has to ask the help of the Cherokee men to even acquire a sense of the general direction he has to travel to get to his goal, to “Free North. Magical North. Welcoming, benevolent North” (118). A Cherokee man teaches Paul D how to read the tree flowers to guide him on his journey North: “Follow the tree flowers [...] As they go, you go” (119). So he does, and by following the flowers as signposts of nature he finds his way: “From February to July he was on the lookout for blossoms. [...] He did not touch them or stop to smell. He merely followed in their wake, a dark ragged figure guided by the blossoming plums” (119).

Here, the ambivalent relationship of the escaped slave and the place of his enslavement shows again. It is as if the earth tries to redeem itself, first by dissolving the prison into mud, so that the prisoners can escape, now by guiding Paul D the way to freedom. But he is so traumatized and intent on stifling his hurt, that he cannot let himself feel anything, not even the pleasure of touching and smelling the beauty of nature. He will let the land aid him on his journey, but will not have it remind him of the beauties life has in store, for that would weaken the metal grip of his tobacco tin, wherein he stores images of pain and horror too violent to comprehend: “It was some time before he could put Alfred, Georgia, Sixo, schoolteacher, Halle, his brothers, Sethe, Mister, the taste of iron, the sight of butter, the smell of hickory, notebook paper, one by one, into the tobacco tin lodged in his chest. By the time he got to 124 nothing in this world could pry it open” (119).

From that moment on, Paul D is a “walking man” (49), set in motion simultaneously by the desire to escape his past and the joy in being able to wander around freely, after having had his space defined for him by the slave masters for so many years: “If a Negro got legs he ought to use them. Sit down too long, somebody will figure out a way to tie them up” (10). His journey seemingly comes to an end when he arrives at Sethe’s doorstep. He feels at home for the first time: “But when I got here

and sat out here on the porch, waiting for you, well, I knew it wasn't the place I was heading toward; it was you. We can make a life, girl. A life." (49). Seemingly establishing his manhood, the status of which has troubled him all his life, he takes it upon him to exorcise the ghost from the house on 124 Bluestone Road "[w]ith a table and a loud male voice" (40), to make room for himself in this tight little family. With Sethe he feels like he can finally settle down, feels ready to carry her burden for her, as well as melt the steely grip of his tobacco tin, for when he sees Sethe for the first time after all these years "the closed portion of his head opened like a greased lock" (44).

Ironically, when Paul resolves to settle down, to end his nomadic lifestyle, he is moved around by a force greater than himself: Beloved. The mysterious girl moves him, in the double meaning of the word. She sets him in motion again, moves him out of the house, because he disturbs the female space of remembering she wants 124 to be: "But she moved him nonetheless, and Paul D didn't know how to stop it because it looked like he was moving himself. Imperceptibly, downright reasonably, he was moving out of 124" (121). Paul D goes from sleeping in Sethe's bedroom, to sleeping in a rocker by the stove and then sleeping in the storeroom, outside of 124. Beloved feels Paul D's presence to disturb the budding symbiotic relationship she has with the woman, she wants her all to herself. So she uses her powers to make Paul D uncomfortable in the house and thus moves him outside: "the moving was involuntary. He wasn't being nervous; he was being prevented" (122).

Beloved also moves him emotionally. Seducing him in the storeroom by ordering him "touch me on the inside part and call me my name" (122), Beloved pries open Paul D's tobacco tin: "he didn't hear the whisper that the flakes of rust made either as they fell away from the seams of his tobacco tin. So when the lid gave he didn't know it. What he knew was that when he reached the inside part he was saying, 'Red heart. Red heart'" (123). Beloved acts like an emotional catalyst, a medium connecting Paul D to his repressed memories and the collective history of slavery, maybe even to the dead of the Middle Passage, for, at the end of the novel Paul D is grateful to Beloved for "having been escorted to some ocean-deep place he once belonged to" (278). While fulfilling the role of the medium, or Paul D's analyst of you will, Beloved stands at the same time for the memory itself that she connects Paul D to: "In a sense she is like an analyst, the object of transference and cathexis that draws out the past, while at the same time she is that past" (Krumholz 400).

Paul D's final move leads him to the church cellar, where he muses his traumatic past, for "his tobacco tin, blown open, spilled contents that floated freely and made him their play and prey" (229). Clearly a womblike space, "the damp cellar was fairly warm" (229) and provides Paul D with a place of isolation and meditation to ponder the contents of the tobacco tin. The reconnection with his red heart finally makes Paul D a whole man, and when he emerges from the cellar, it is like a second birth. A new Paul D now experiences a catharsis when taking in the incomprehensible horrors of slavery and finally connecting them to Sethe's incomprehensible deed:

A shudder ran through Paul D. A bone-cold spasm that made him clutch his knees. He didn't know if it was bad whiskey, nights in the cellar, pig fever, iron bits, smiling roosters, fired feet, laughing dead men, hissing grass, rain, apple blossoms, neck jewelry, Judy in the slaughterhouse, Halle in the butter, ghost-white stairs, chokecherry trees, cameo pins, aspens, Paul A's face, sausage or the loss of a red, red, heart (247).

If Paul D does not understand why Sethe did what she did, he does understand that it is impossible for him to judge her, now that he comprehends the full extent of slavery's incomprehensibility: "How much is a nigger supposed to take? [...] Why? Why? Why? Why? Why?" (247).

3.4 The Self that was No Self - Baby Suggs in the South of Slavery

Throughout *Beloved*, Morrison depicts the barbarity of slavery by showing how it sabotages the natural connection and space of intimacy between mother and child, thereby stressing the special brutality slavery had in store for women, as Gurleen Grewal (1998) points out: "*Beloved* makes brutally clear that aside from the 'equality of oppression' that black men and women suffered, black women were also oppressed as *women*. They were routinely subjected to rape, enforced childbirth, and natal alienation from their children. As Morrison's novel shows, physical abuse is humiliating, but the added emotional pain of a mother is devastating" (100). Baby Suggs' story is typical in that respect, being born into slavery, bought and sold at random, raped and impregnated only to watch her children being ripped away from her side. The slave woman learns the definition of slavery by having to bear and lose all of her children except Halle:

So Baby's eight children had six fathers. What she called the nastiness of life was the shock she received upon learning that nobody stopped

playing checkers just because the pieces included her children. Halle she was able to keep the longest. Twenty years. A lifetime. Given to her, no doubt, to make up for *hearing* that her two girls, neither of whom had their adult teeth, were sold and gone and she had not been able to wave goodbye (24).

Morrison here is effective in pointing out the hardships of slavery pertaining particularly to the lives of women.

Psychologically, many slave women were not able to mother a child that was the result of a rape by her white slave master. This often resulted in the death of the child due to neglect, hence it also was a subtle but effective way of sabotaging the slave economy at the time. More often, though, it was the slave master who cut the mother-child bond, since he used slave women essentially as breeders to obtain more valuable human capital. He owned the women and their offspring and was able to sell them whenever and wherever he pleased: “[...] in all of Baby’s life, as well as Sethe’s own, men and women were moved around like checkers. Anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn’t been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized” (24). As a consequence, many slave mothers learnt not to get too attached to their children, since they were going to get snatched away anyway: “[Baby Suggs’] two girls, neither of whom had her adult teeth, were sold and gone and she had not been able to wave goodbye. [...] to find herself pregnant by the man who promised not to and did. That child she could not love and the rest she would not. ‘God take what He would,’ she said. And He did, and He did, and He did [...]” (24/25). Matter-of-factly as Baby Suggs refers to the children she lost, it points to her resolution not to love them too much, born out of a deep-seated trauma of loss. Even if Baby Suggs survived her time in the hell of slavery at the cost of busted “legs, back, head, eyes, hands, kidneys, womb and tongue” (92), her psychological damage resulting from the repeated loss of her children is the more fundamental one. Morrison here points to the ultimate impossibility of a home place, of family and intimate personal ties and how this leads to an inner void, a hole at the core of her being at the place where Baby Suggs’ heart was supposed to have its place. But love for herself and for others has no place in a world where the trauma of abandonment is omnipresent and getting attached to anyone guarantees the pain of loss and a broken heart.

This loss of self, of soul or spirit is expressed in Baby Suggs’ acknowledging the “self that was no self” (147). All of her belongs to forces outside herself. Without roots in the past or the future, parents or children, Baby Suggs is left without a map with

which to ground herself in the world. Paralleling her inside unhomeliness is Baby Suggs' outward homelessness, her literal lack of a home. Although Sweet Home is a better place than the slave plantations she has worked at before, it still is nothing like a home place [quote something defining home], She says: "It's better here, but I'm not" (148), hinting at the impossibility of making a home anyplace without making a home within herself first. Life as a slave in the American South has deprived Baby Suggs of the knowledge of her self, of her worth as a human being, of the core of her existence.

3.4.1 Baby Suggs as the Ancestor Figure in the North

When Baby Suggs is released to freedom however, she is able to discover herself, to claim her free self, something that she views as a difficult task: "Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (100). Amazingly, for Baby Suggs, the geographical journey to freedom is complemented by a psychological one as well. It is as if she was handed "the map to discover what she was like" (147) along with the map to freedom: "'These hands belong to me. These *my* hands.' Next she felt a knocking in her chest and discovered something else: her own heartbeat" (149). Overjoyed and astonished at the discovery of her own self, she is determined to pass on her wisdom to the community, which she does in the Clearing.

As in *Jazz* and *Paradise*, Morrison sets up the American North in *Beloved* as a space filled with the promise of freedom and peace for the Blacks escaping the Southern space of overt racism and slavery. Sethe and her family, as well as Paul D, travel North towards the presumed Promised Land. Indeed, Cincinnati proves to be a much more peaceful space, providing room for the oppressed to negotiate new identities for themselves on the background of their violent pasts. Still, underneath the progressive exterior, Cincinnati is still a vastly racist and unhomey place, in reality segregated along social and racial lines. Baby Suggs is both impressed and frightened by the city's appearance when she first gets there after her son Halle buys her out of slavery: "She couldn't get over the city. More people than Carolina and enough whitefolks to stop the breath. Two-story buildings everywhere, and walkways made of perfectly cut slats of wood. Roads wide as Garner's whole house" (*Beloved*, 150). Baby Suggs is marveling at the sheer size of the city, the width and magnitude of the urban space. While being impressed, she also notices that this vast space is filled to the brim with white people. Even the abolitionist Bodwins, who provide a house for Baby Suggs when she gets to Cincinnati, are deeply racist, decorating their home with a Sambo figurine:

A blackboy's mouth full of money. His head was thrown back farther than a head could go, his hands were shoved in his pockets. Bulging like moons, two eyes were all the face he had above the gaping red mouth. His hair was a cluster of raised, widely spaced dots made of nail heads. And he was on his knees. His mouth, wide as a cup, held the coins needed to pay for a delivery or some other small service, but could just as well have held buttons, pins or crab-apple jelly. Painted across the pedestal he knelt on were the words 'At your service' (268).

This little figurine tells us all about the attitude underlying the Bodwin's abolitionism. Far from considering African-Americans as equal, they, too, work under the white supremacist ideology that will only allow Blacks an inferior position in society, even if they overtly do not support physical violence done unto them.

The physical position of the figurine, the head thrown back, the bulging eyes and the gaping mouth, recall images of lynching. The hand jammed in the pockets, on his knees, the boy is not able to move, is constricted by the submissive posture. His mouth can be filled with anything from coins to jelly, in any case, it cannot be used for speaking. His exaggerated physical features serve to stress his corporeality. The black boy is presented as nothing but his body parts. Echoing Paul D's recollections of the prison camp in Georgia, where he knelt before the white guards and was forced to fellate them, the figurine is a silent reminder of the omnipresence of the cruelty of slavery, even in the superficially benevolent North. Even in the supposed shelter of the Bodwins' house, the history of slavery finds a place, right at its entrance, and subverts the possibility of home for the ex-slaves. The Bodwins help slaves "because they hated slavery worse than they hated slaves" (144), but in their superficial philanthropy they are like the Garners, part of the problem and not the solution.

Morrison paints Cincinnati as an ambiguous space of both promise and disappointment. Nevertheless, she offers a possibility for the North to become home, but only if the newcomers retain their connection to their roots. In this respect, the commemoration of individual and communal trauma is essential, since it makes up a vital part of those roots. The community needs to be based on a collective memory and an awareness of common ancestors. Closed spaces, such as the haunted house on 124 Bluestone Road, diminish the ex-slaves' chances of making a home for themselves, since they lead to disconnection from the power of the community. Charles Scruggs (1992) points out that whereas the white writer usually sees urbanity as depriving the

human being of its individuality, and of destroying basic community values, the black writer sees the city essentially as a community.

In this respect, the black ancestor fulfills an important role by anchoring the community and binding it: “For most black writers, what creates a livable space in the city is not the absence of the machine but the presence of the ancestor, the person who connects past and present and embodies a sense of historical continuity and communal wisdom. Because of the ancestor, the hostile, centrifugal modern city can be reshaped in terms of a cohesive village” (100). In *Beloved*, Baby Suggs is aforementioned ancestor, holding the community of the Cincinnati suburb together. She is the spiritual healer, the reverend figure of the community. But her spirit is not strong enough to prevent the horror from happening. At the display of too much generosity, of abundance and wealth, the community turns its back on her, thus severing the communal ties that are needed to fence off the hostile forces threatening to invade their world. And surely, this attitude of class envy allows schoolteacher to arrive in Baby Suggs’ yard unnoticed.

3.4.2 The Beat and Beating Heart – Baby Suggs and The Clearing

In her sermons in the Clearing, Baby Suggs preaches against the fragmentation of the black being, the negation of its humanity and reifying of its body. Whereas the promised land of the North fails to deliver its utopian promise, the Clearing offers a truly free space for the African Americans: “The Clearing has strong utopian resonance, with its anonymous provenance, its anti-instrumentality, its spaciousness and its depth in the woods – the primeval nature of the American Eden” (DeKoven 2004, 276).

The Clearing is a church of nature. Baby Suggs, “an unchurched preacher, one who visited pulpits and opened her great heart to those who could use it” (92), utilizes the wide open space of the Clearing to gather the community and asks them “lovingly to re-imagine and reclaim themselves, this open territory, therefore, being neither an empty nor a private place, but one filled with the communal expression of desire” (Wilson 245). Whereas Sweet Home and the Northern City are not able to fulfill their Utopian promise in *Beloved*, the space with the most Utopian potential is the Clearing, “a wide-open place cut deep in the woods nobody knew for what at the end of a path known only to deer and whoever cleared the land in the first place” (92). In the Clearing, Baby Suggs manages to create a space in which the community remembers their “own internal needs.” Outside the oppressive civilization and the confines of the domestic, the Clearing provides a safe space in which past and present pain and trauma of slavery can

be confronted. Here, nature offers the only truly safe refuge for the oppressed, a place outside the master's sphere of control: "The renewing power of the wilderness, nature as the temple of God and habitation of spirits, an old American theme, is replayed here with peculiar significance in relation to the lives of women to whom the land has never belonged except as a vehicle of secret fantasies of freedom and a place of periodic escape from the duties of domestic life" (Chandler, 294).

The Clearing provides a space where the Black body, the individual and the communal, can find wholeness. Fragmentation of the Black body in the places of whites, in their kitchens and on their fields, is a major theme in the novel. The communal body was ripped apart by the economic necessities of white capitalism that did not concern itself with maintaining their slaves' functioning familial and social ties. On the level of the individual slave's body, it was taken apart by the slave holders, only seen as a commodity, performing different tasks. For the slave masters, the body of the slave was the text in which they inscribed their power. They valued the arms for carrying, the legs for walking, but only insofar as these body parts were bringing them profit. Disowning the slave of her body, fragmenting it, measuring it, the slave's body symbolized the dehumanizing power of the master. Schoolteacher and his pseudo-scientific reasoning, his measuring of heads and bodies, his listing of the slaves' human and animal features stand for the Nineteenth-century American slavery discourse and its assumption that "'blackness' is equivalent to a usable, marketable 'body'" (Dobbs, 564). While schoolteacher and his helpers "transform feeling flesh into dead specimens of science and machines of (re)production" (ibid), Baby Suggs takes the exact opposite stance, urging the ex-slaves to bring their bodies back to life and to make them whole by loving their flesh, all of it.

Elaine Scarry mentions the power of torture by pointing out that pain does not have a language, that bodies in pain are a privileged site of the masters' power because they cannot express themselves. Baby Suggs and the community in the Clearing resist this hegemony of power and subvert the semiotic system of the silent bodies in pain. The sermon reclaims the slave body, its individual body parts that were despised – yet needed for profit – by white hegemonic culture. In Baby Suggs' sermon, "[t]his reclamation is both linguistic and musical; at the same time, the 'claiming' is profoundly personal – as personal as the particular parts of each listener's body – and utterly communal and historical, a group's response to a particular historical 'theft'" (Dobbs, 566).

Baby Suggs' sermon in the clearing is an attempt at integration, at making whole the slave body and mind: "Love your hands! [...] Flesh that needs to be loved. Feet that need to rest and to dance; backs that need support; shoulders that need arms, strong arms I'm telling you. [...] hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize" (*Beloved*, 93/94). In the Clearing, the bodily flesh and the heart and mind are reunited again in sound. The body as property is restored into a whole human being by the power of communal song and dance: "Saying no more, she stood up and danced with her twisted hip the rest of what her heart had to say while the others opened their mouths and gave her the music. Long notes held until the four-part harmony was perfect enough for their deeply loved flesh" (94). In the harmonious space of song, the boundaries of the self dissolve and the community is one in its celebration of their bodies. Baby Suggs privileges the flesh over the word and lets the community express themselves through their individual bodies and as a communal body. Like the slave's body and mind are being made whole through the spiritual power of Baby Suggs' sermon, the individual and collective trauma are integrated to form a common history of pain and loss. In the open space of the Clearing, outside the narrow confines of the individual's domestic space, the Black community of Bluestone Road overcomes its fragmentation and rediscovers its commonality and the strength of its historical roots.

It is the evocative power of Baby Suggs that made them experience "the grace they could imagine" (93) and that created the Utopian space in the wilderness. But like the Utopian ambition of Sweet Home crumbles when Garner dies and cannot uphold it any longer, so does the Utopian space of the Clearing change when Baby Suggs gives up and recognizes that "[t]here was no grace – imaginary or real – and no Clearing could change that" (94). Without the power of Baby Suggs's and the community's imagination, the Clearing loses its power to heal and strengthen the individual and communal body. So, when Sethe returns to the Clearing, after learning that Halle had gone mad at the sight of her brutal abuse by schoolteacher's nephew, the wide open space has a different effect on her than she expects.

Sethe feels the urge to go to the Clearing "to listen to the spaces that the long-ago singing had left behind" (94), meaning that she is now ready for a hearing of history in order to experience the sort of ancestral wisdom and spiritual healing that has been missing in her life ever since Baby Suggs had died. These spaces, gaps in the fabric of history, may be silent because the women who created them with their songs are long gone, but that silence loudly beckons for Sethe to listen and fill the gaps with new

meaning. In that circular space carved out in the trees, Sethe steps into the rememory of Denver's birth: "Followed by the two girls, down a bright green corridor of oak and horse chestnut, Sethe began to sweat a sweat just like the other one when she woke, mud-caked, on the banks of the Ohio" (95). It is no coincidence that she remembers Denver's birth in the Clearing, because like no other character in *Beloved*, Denver represents the convergence of past, present and future. By drinking her sister's blood along with her mother's milk, Denver's now carries the past in her and represents the intertwining of different temporal planes in *Beloved*. Denver also carries the possibility of a future within her, so that by conjuring up her birth in the wide open space of the Clearing, Sethe can conjure up a time when she felt free and in charge of a future. She relives the pleasure of being in the community of 124 Bluestone after arriving there with Denver, and recalls the feeling of being free for the first time and being able to "decide what to do with the day" (100). Like it did back when Baby Suggs preached there, the Clearing offers a space that is open for the imagination to roam to the past and the future.

In the present in the Clearing, Sethe is abruptly taken back to reality, when she feels being strangled. The Clearing as a place of convergence of different temporal planes is also open to intrusion from the world of the dead: "But for eighteen years she had lived in a house full of touches from the other side. And the thumbs that pressed her nape were the same. After Paul D beat it out of 124, maybe it collected itself in the Clearing. Reasonable, she thought" (104). Still a "wide-open" place where the boundaries of self and other dissolve, the Clearing loses its sheltering function without the spiritual guidance of Baby Suggs. The ancestor figure was a mediator, able to uphold a balance between the space of the sacred and the space of the secular, between the space of the past and the space of the present. Just like the communal body falls apart without her ancestral leadership, Sethe's body is threatened by the unmediated collapse of the past into the present.

When Baby Suggs preached in the Clearing, the community gathered to join in peaceful commemoration and celebration of the body. Now, Sethe is by herself, in the company of Beloved, who tries to pull her to the past, and Denver, who tries to pull her into the future: "the three women in the middle of the Clearing, at the base of the rock where Baby Suggs, holy, had loved. One seated, yielding up her throat to the kind hands of one of the two kneeling before her. [...] [Beloved] leaned over and kissed the tenderness under Sethe's chin" (103). In this scene Beloved's hunger for Sethe is on

display. It is after this, that she starts to actively pull Sethe into her world, to eat her up psychically. Moving Paul D out of 124 Bluestone, sucking up every word coming out of Sethe's mouth and then, bit by bit, sucking the life out of her as well. It is then that Denver, the shy girl who had lived in the isolation of 124 Bluestone for most of its life, decides to take matters in her own hands, step off the porch and into the future, to save the life of her family.

3.5 Know it, and go on – Denver as the Link to the Future

Denver's role as connection to the future is one that the girl has to painfully define for herself. Indoctrinated by Sethe to view history as constant, unchanging, a bodily entity threatening to disrupt the here and now: "The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there – you who never was there – if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. So, Denver, you can't never go there. Never. Because even though it's all over – over and done with – it's going to always be there waiting for you" (38/39), Denver leads a life of fear and stasis, never leaving the yard of 124 Bluestone Road. She has the most rigid boundaries of anyone in the novel and seeks boundaries to protect her from the hostile outside world. Described as "round" (12) and intent on eating "Denver dipped a bit of bread into the jelly. Slowly, methodically, miserably she ate it" (20), her hunger for food suggests her subconscious desire to surround her body with a thick shell to protect it.

When the real world gets too overwhelming, Denver retreats to the "emerald closet" the ring of boxwood bushes providing respite from the ontological insecurity she experiences inside of 124 Bluestone. The emerald closet is like a womb in that it protects Denver from the real and perceived threats of the outside world, she is "closed off from the hurt of the hurt world" (30). A place of nature with soft boundaries, like the Clearing, the emerald closet is "a place in flux and transition – a place from which one may decide to move forward to the future or be moved back and fixed by the past" (Jesser 326/327). Indeed, in the womblike space of the boxwood bower, Denver is taken back to the time and place of her own birth, an event that she "remembers" so vividly, because she has heard it countless times told by her mother: "Once when she was in the boxwood, an autumn long before Paul D moved into the house with her mother, she was made suddenly cold by the combination of wind and the perfume on her skin. She dressed herself, bent down to leave and stood up in snowfall: a thin and whipping snow very like the picture her mother had painted as she described the circumstances of

Denver's birth in a canoe straddled by a whitegirl for whom she was named. [...] Easily she stepped into the told story" (31). Having inherited Sethe's concept of spatialized time, Denver experiences her own past like a space she can step into and live through over and over again. The story of her birth is the space she feels most comfortable in, because its almost mythological grandeur bolsters her sense of self: "Denver stopped and sighed. This was the part of the story she loved. She was coming to it now and she loved it because it was all about herself; but she hated it too because it made her feel like a bill was owing somewhere and she, Denver, had to pay it" (82). Amy Denver, the white girl Sethe meets on her escape journey, helps save her life and deliver Denver, hence she might feel at once a debt towards the white woman and an unspecified pressure on her shoulders to fulfill the expectations connected to this gift of life, to being the one miraculously saved from certain death.

The emerald closet is also the only space she feels safe enough in to feel like a woman and not like child. In her mother's company and in the house that is suspended in a static past, Denver is always the little girl, the daughter and is fixed by the story of her birth. She cannot thrive and blossom in this barren environment, but in the vibrant, green space in the boxwood, she simultaneously retreats from the outside life and connects with her inside life: "Denver's secrets were sweet. Accompanied every time by wild veronica until she discovered cologne. [...] Veiled and protected by the live green walls, she felt ripe and clear, and salvation was as easy as a wish" (30/31). The emerald closet, then, functions for Denver as a sort of miniature version of the Clearing. Here, in the womblike, maternal space in the woods, she can imagine life's sensual pleasures, as well as protection and salvation, all of which is lacking painfully from her isolated existence on 124 Bluestone Road.

In Denver's world, the baby ghost haunting her house was her only companion, which is why she is sad and angry when Paul D chases it from 124. Her special connection to the ghost begins intensifying after she is confronted with her mother's crime, which traumatizes her to the point of turning deaf. On the one occasion she ventures out into the world, to take part in Lady Jones' class, Nelson Lord innocently asks a question about Sethe's killing of her baby and it "put chalk, the little *i* and all the rest that those afternoons held, out of reach forever" (108). When Denver finds the courage to ask Sethe about the boy's question, she does not hear the answer, "nor anything at all thereafter" (ibid). Suffering from secondary trauma from hearing about

Sethe's deed, Denver spontaneously goes deaf and thereby shuts herself off from the outside world, retreating to the safe place within herself.

After this, she begins to concentrate her attention to the baby ghost, whom she was not interested in before. Yet, after Nelson Lord and his information about Sethe led to Denver's total isolation, the baby ghost offers a fixed point upon which to focus and place herself: "Now it held for her all the anger, love and fear she didn't know what to do with" (108). Robbed of the future that the lessons in Lady Jones' class held in store, Denver now focuses on the past, specifically her mother's past, in the form of the baby ghost. The ghost is at the gateway to the past and the present signifier for that invisible time and place that is the root for all the pain Denver experiences in the here and now. Therefore, while Denver's fixation on the ghost seems to further her isolation and keep her disconnected from the present time and place, it is nevertheless necessary for her in order to confront this gap in her ancestral fabric and thereby fashion a possibility for a future. Laura Doyle points out this importance of the ghost of the past for Denver's own future: "For Denver [the ghost] is the one remaining point of physical leverage into the spatiotemporal world which includes but transforms a painful slave past" (227).

This explains her profound anger and sadness at Paul D's exorcism of the ghost: "It was gone. Denver walked through the silence to the stove. [...] Now her mother was upstairs with the man who had gotten rid of the only other company she had. Denver dipped a bit of bread into the jelly. Slowly, methodically, miserably she ate it" (19). Denver's small universe has now been reduced to silence, and Denver turns to food to fill the hole inside her being left by the sudden absence of her companion, the only thing filling her existence with meaning, as Laura Doyle points out:

Therefore, when Paul D comes and exorcises the ghost from the house, Denver faces a crisis not only of run-of-the-mill loneliness and jealousy but also of a deep ontological order. Her instrument of insertion (the ghost with plans, the past harboring a future) into a temporal ongoingness, into her own future, has been taken. [...] Denver faces an ontological annihilation, a repetition of her mother's displacement (227).

Hence it is understandable why she latches onto the mysteriously appearing Beloved right away, making the connection between the baby ghost who left and the girl who appeared before anyone else. Without an originary sense of self, she submerges herself so deeply in the new relationship with her "sister" Beloved, that she feels herself vanishing when Beloved withdraws her affection and disappears during an argument:

“Denver looks anyway because the loss is ungovernable. [...] If she stumbles she is not aware of it because she does not know where her body stops, which part of her is an arm, a foot or a knee. She feels like an ice cake torn away from the solid surface of the stream, floating on darkness, thin and crashing against the edges of things around it. Breakable, meltable and cold” (129). Her sensations are similar to the ones she describes as pleasurable whenever she is with Beloved: “Denver’s skin dissolved under that gaze [...] She floated near but outside her own body” (124), but when she is with Beloved, Denver’s loss of self is countered by Beloved’s gaze. When Beloved looks at her, she brings Denver alive and the existential hunger Denver has felt in all of her isolated existence is satiated: “Luckily for Denver, looking was food enough to last. [...] Needing nothing. Being what there was” (ibid). The empty place inside of herself, left there by her displaced sense of self, is now being filled by Beloved’s attention.

When Beloved is out of reach and Denver cannot find her gaze anywhere, she feels an ontological terror, a fear of fragmentation that comes from submerging all of her self into the relationship with this ghost from the past: “Now she was crying because she has no self. Death was a skipped meal compared to this. She can feel her thickness thinning, dissolving into nothing” (129). Without Beloved to interact with, Denver’s “original hunger” (127) threatens to envelop her again, to engulf her in a sea of silence and loneliness. She imagines Beloved to be her only connection to a “textured life” (Stanford 77), without whom fragmentation and chaos would take over once more.

It is this yearning to feel alive and complete that has Denver fulfill every one of Beloved’s wishes, to satiate her hunger for stories. It is not until she notices Sethe wasting away under Beloved’s ceaseless demands and accusations, that Denver’s attitude changes: “Then Sethe spit up something she had not eaten and it rocked Denver like gunshot” (255). Sethe is literally being eaten up from the inside by the enormously destructive power this embodiment of the traumatic past has over her. This situation of Sethe and Beloved existing in a kind of spatiotemporal vacuum, a stand-off fueled by a cycle of accusations and regret, is Denver’s chance to grow up, to emancipate herself from Sethe’s own traumatic concept of space and time and taking charge of shaping her own destiny and that of her family: “Denver knew it was on her. She would have to leave the yard; step off the edge of the world, leave the two behind and go ask somebody for help” (255). The triad of Sethe, Denver and Beloved has become a dyad, with Beloved and Sethe existing on their own spatiotemporal plane that does not allow for any intruders. Denver recognizes her position as between the two women, as well as

a gateway between her mother's past and future, and acknowledges her role as the only one who can save Sethe from certain death.

Denver feels excluded from her mother's past that revolves around Sweet Home and the Sweet Home men, because she is non-existent in it. Growing up without a sense of self, she relishes those stories that feature her prominently, especially of course the one dealing with her dramatic birth on the Ohio River. Sethe contributes her share to leaving Denver in the dark about her family history, considering it a form of protection against "the hurt of the hurt world" (30). But eventually, Denver has to confront her family's historical demons, painful as it may be, for as Linda Krumholz (1992) points out, "Without knowledge of her mother's past, Denver must remain in isolation from history and from her position in the world that can only be understood through history" (404). She can only know her spatial and metaphorical position in the world in relation to the fixed points in her past, so as to figure a kind of spatio-temporal grid along which she can position herself.

It is through her interactions with Beloved that Denver begins to immerse herself in the past. While the mysterious guest's inquiries may be ceaseless and ultimately draining, they nevertheless prove beneficial for Denver in the big picture, since they open a door for her into a world she had previously been avoiding, to the point that she now lacks sufficient knowledge to fashion a place for herself in the here and now. Since Beloved insists on hearing the story of Denver's birth, she tells it to her, even though, as she claims, Sethe never told her "all of it" (80). Putting together the scraps of stories Sethe told her, Denver tries to shape a coherent narrative, "a net to hold Beloved" (81). Portraying Denver's storytelling as the equivalent of weaving a fabric together from "strings she had heard all her life" (*ibid*) echoes Morrison's own belief in the impossibility of a linear, coherent history for African Americans, as they have to cope with narrative gaps due to the mysteriousness and unspeakability of much of their traumatic past. While Morrison acknowledges the healing power of narrative, as evidenced here in the example of Denver, she also points to the limits of representability of histories and lives too fragmented and horrific to grasp with words. Nevertheless, the net Denver weaves, full of holes as it may be, is able to hold Beloved and even hold herself, as she posits herself more securely inside the historic fabric of her family and her culture. Telling Sethe's story to Beloved, she develops a newfound understanding for her mother: "Denver was seeing it now and feeling it – through Beloved. Feeling how it must have felt to her mother. Seeing how it must have looked. [...] Denver spoke

and Beloved listened, and the two did the best they could to create what really happened, how it really was [...]” (82).

Denver and Beloved engage in the classic post-trauma scenario between survivor-narrator and witness-listener. It is important to note that Denver takes on the role of the trauma survivor without actually having been exposed to the trauma. By taking on Sethe’s role, immersing herself in her story, she quasi becomes traumatized empathically, functioning as a survivor and witness at the same time. When she then tells the story to Beloved, the girl becomes the witness to Denver’s survivor story, thus giving the story ever more space. By improvising on the limited amount of information Sethe provided, Denver solidifies the presence of her history in the here and now. In this respect, the role of Beloved is crucial, because it is her insistence on witnessing that prompts the interaction and hence the creation of the narrative. Dori Laub (1995) explains the importance of the narrator-witness scenario for the recreation of lost histories: “To a certain extent, the interviewer-listener takes on the responsibility for bearing witness that previously the narrator felt her bore alone, and therefore could not carry out. It is the encounter and the coming together between the survivor and the listener, which makes possible something like a repossession of the act of witnessing. This joint responsibility is the source of the reemerging truth” (69). Telling the story to Beloved, Denver not only creates a discursive space for the reclaiming of a traumatic personal history, but also recreates herself not as standing outside of that history, but as an empathic witness to it. Thereby she lays the basis for her subsequent empathy for Sethe that leads her to embark on her mission to save her from the succubus that is Beloved. Emerging herself in the past was the prerequisite of leaving it behind seek the future. “The testimony is, therefore, the process by which the narrator (the survivor) reclaims his position as a witness: reconstitutes the internal “thou,” and thus the possibility of a witness or a listener inside himself” (Laub 1995, 70).

Leaving the hermetically closed off space of 124 Bluestone proves difficult for Denver. For her, the outside world is eponymous with trauma. It is where things beyond your control happen and are ready to swallow you alive, where words are said that hurt, memories linger that are impossible to grasp: “Out there where small things scratched and sometimes touched. Where words could be spoken that would close your ears shut. Where, if you were alone, feeling could overtake you and stick to you like a shadow. Out there where there were places in which things so bad had happened that when you went near them it would happen again” (256). Denver is clearly traumatized not by her

own experiences, but quasi by proxy, through hearing about Sethe's past, having it reflected to her by Nelson Lord and by Sethe's own concept of "rememory" that spatializes time and makes the past a constant, threatening presence in the here and now.

What prompts Denver to overcome her fears of the world and step out of the space of isolation and the past into the space of the social and the present is her reconnection with Baby Suggs. Whereas up until now she had relied on Beloved to be her connection to a meaningful, if traumatic past, she now remembers Baby Suggs, the benevolent, wise ancestor. When Denver stands on the porch, paralyzed by fear of the unknown lurking in the open spaces outside 124 Bluestone, she hears the voice of her grandmother: "You mean I never told you about North Carolina? About your daddy? [...] I never told you all that? Is that why you can't walk down the steps? My Jesus my" (257), counting down a series of tragic, traumatizing events that had been silenced for Denver not to know about them. Denver, still frightened, consults with Baby Suggs: "But you said there was no defense. 'There ain't.' Then what do I do? 'Know it, and go on out the yard. Go on" (ibid). And so she does. One has to wonder why the mere mention of these traumatic events is enabling Denver to overcome her fears, when the logical consequence would be the opposite. Doesn't Baby Suggs' speech confirm Sethe's assessment of a constant never-changing past? Shouldn't it cause Denver to retreat back into the house, instead of venture out into the hostile world where all of these horrific things happened and supposedly still linger in the form of rememory? While all of this is true, it is Baby Suggs' verbalizing the traumata in such an off-hand way, mentioning them quasi in passing, and then urging Denver to move on, that turns the novel's approach to the past on its head and opens a door the present and to the future: "It is the speech act itself, the voice of the grandmother putting the past where it belongs, into oral history, that frees Denver to enter the present" (Wyatt 73). Baby Suggs takes a displaced, traumatic family history that had up until now hardly been narrativized, much less made sense of, and puts it in a concise, linear, spatio-temporal order. By placing the displaced family trauma, Baby Suggs weakens the smothering grip of the pain on her family and thus emboldens Denver to overcome her supposed destiny and fashion her own: "The temporal continuum of beginning, middle, and end appears to be the antidote to the dislocated, disjunctive moments of trauma" (ibid, 74). Just as she made the ex-slaves' fragmented bodies and minds whole again in her healing ritual in the Clearing, Baby Suggs administers healing even from the space of the afterlife and mends the family's fragmented history. It was the unacknowledged past

that kept Denver in a closed-off space outside the spatio-temporal continuum of the outside world. Now that she was able to face the trauma of the past, she can venture into the world, go forward in space and time instead of remaining stagnant. Thus, Denver comes to embody the hope for a future for her family and for the whole community.

3.6 Her smiling Face is the Face for me – The Middle Passage as original Trauma

The chronology of trauma in *Beloved* starts inside the hull of a slave ship in the Middle Passage. Beloved's memories of the Middle Passage ground the novel's historical origins in a time-space far removed from the present of 1873. The hull of the slave ship in which the girl crosses the Atlantic Ocean is the place of Beloved's primal scene²⁵ and the place of origin for all traumas in *Beloved*: "In *Beloved*, Morrison attempts her most ambitious intervolvement of primal scenes, one that accentuates the deferral of narrative origins further and further back, until only slavery stands alone as cause and curse" (Rushdy 318). All the physical and emotional pain the protagonists are experiencing from the hands of white people has its cause in the institution of slavery, for which the slave ship stands as a powerful symbol in *Beloved*.

The Middle Passage marks the beginning of African enslavement in America and as such constitutes the original trauma at the heart of *Beloved*, the root cause for the protagonists' pain and suffering. While Sethe's killing of her daughter lies at the heart of her individual trauma and perhaps the communal trauma of the neighborhood on Bluestone Road, the Middle Passage constitutes the historical trauma of African-Americans which lies hidden in the deepest recesses of communal memory: "In this

²⁵ When Morrison's protagonists make their mental journeys to the places of their past, they often visit the sites of primal scenes. Ashraf H. A. Rushdy (1990) takes the term "primal scenes" from Freud but redefines it "as the critical event (or events) whose significance to the narrated life becomes manifest only at a secondary critical event, when by a preconscious association the primal scene is recalled" (303). At the time of the event, its traumatic impact is too overwhelming for it to be registered fully, so it is only at this later time that its significance for the person's life becomes apparent. Remembering and integrating the memories of pain and loss into the story of their lives is vitally important for the characters' discovering a sense of wholeness: "Morrison's novels, studies in the process of rememory in characters' lives, are especially concerned with how anamnesis serves and conserves a sense of self" (Rushdy 303). Anamnesis, a psychoanalytic term, refers to remembering and narrating certain repressed events of the past that have an effect on our present lives, often in the way of triggering neurotic symptoms. Rushdy reads *Beloved* in a Freudian light and suggests the characters' achieving a sense of wholeness from practicing anamnesis and recovering their repressed memories. I agree with him for the most part but will suggest that Morrison is not concerned about neatly resolving her characters' fragmentation into a sense of wholeness, but to recognize and accept their fragmented state as a result and reminder of historical trauma.

evocation of the grave as a reservoir of historical suffering, Morrison begins to write an epitaph for the millions of unmarked “graves” that were left behind by the Middle Passage” (Dussere 46). By presenting the narrative of the Middle Passage as the traumatic center of the novel, Morrison acknowledges its formative power in the inception of African American history and culture. *Beloved*’s rememory of her experience on the slave ship takes the reader back to that time and place that has not been explored in great detail by conventional historiography: “Avatar of history, *Beloved* embodies the slave past by recalling to memory the violence of its originary moment, the journey from Africa to America” (Dussere 46).

Leaving behind their homeland and culture, their connections to families and ancestors, the Middle Passage marks the beginning of a history of dislocation, both geographically and psychologically, for the African captives. The protagonists’ difficult relationship to place and home can be traced back to this original displacement from the African homeland. The passage leaves them disoriented, displaced and disowned of their African identity, their knowledge of self. The Middle Passage is an in-between-space, the movement from home to the hell of slavery, and as such marks the split of the self between the old and the new identity.

For the slaves, the image of the slave ship serves as a symbol of death (coffin) and life (womb) at the same time, because while their free African identity is killed on the passage, their enslaved, African-American identity is created, as Houston A. Baker (1991) points out: “A ‘strange’ Afro-American birth implicitly converges with African death in the fetid hole (‘less room than a man in a coffin’). The hole, thus, stands as an ironic indictment of the commercial birth of modern man” (Baker 1991, 107)²⁶. In line with Houston A. Baker’s reasoning, Morrison’s depiction of the brutality of the Middle Passage functions as a critique of modernity and its preeminent striving for commercial profit. The modern celebration of rationality and scientific and technological progress allows for slavery to be justified in the name of economic progress and slaves to be viewed not as human beings but as chattel, useful in the pursuit thereof. This dehumanization of African slaves, made possible by scientific racism grounded in enlightenment rationality, was an intrinsic part of the modern capitalist enterprise and, in the case of slavery, resulted in traumatized individuals devoid of their ontological

²⁶ Homi K. Bhabha (1994) sees in those literatures that have their terrain in the „transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees – these border and frontier conditions“ (12) the potential to form what he calls „world literature.“ These „freak social and cultural displacements“ are based on historical trauma and express cultural otherness instead of

stability as human beings. The absence of humanity in the hull of the slave ship entails a human void in the slaves themselves: “Commodification of human beings meant that the relationships of property, and not free, human, personal relations marked the spaces between Europeans and Africans. Ownership was the watchword over the hole. And within its suffocating spaces occurred a brutal purgation, a violent acclimatization and reaction formation that left a black vessel to be filled” (Baker 1991, 10). The rupture of the Middle Passage is geographical and temporal as well as ontological. Destroying the Africans’ connection to the history and culture of their homeland, it plants the trauma of a deep-seated ontological insecurity, an identity-crisis at the heart of every African-American. Much of Morrison’s oeuvre, *Beloved* in particular, is dedicated to filling this ontological void, of recovering the cultural and historical roots cut off at the inception of slavery in America.

Beloved’s account of the Middle Passage as a founding event of American and African American history defies representation within the bounds of a conventionally linear historical narrative. The girl’s traumatic memory is elusive and fragmented; like bodies of the living and dead are lying indistinguishably on top of each other in the hull of the ship, her recollections are but fragments of memory lying around in shambles in her mind. By having *Beloved* narrate the Middle Passage in such a manner, Morrison puts a question mark behind the idea of the “knowability” and accessibility of a history of trauma by means of rational inquiry and conventional historiography, as R. Clifton Spargo (2002) notes:

To the extent that [trauma] testifies, to borrow Cathy Caruth’s phrase, to ‘a reality or truth that is otherwise not available’ (4), the trauma depends by definition on the inadequacy of our knowledge in the present order. For this very reason, the trauma has come to function for many critics as a trope of access to more difficult histories, providing us with entry into a world inhabited by the victims of extraordinary social violences, those perspectives so often left out of rational, progressive narratives of history. Indeed, in this respect the trauma functions rather as a ghost of rationality, that which announces a history haunting the very possibility of history. (114)

Beloved’s rememory of the Middle Passage is prompted by Denver, who is fascinated by the girl whom she thinks is her sister having come back from the dead. When Denver asks *Beloved*: “What’s it like over there, where you were before” (79), referring to the place of the afterlife. *Beloved* answers with her bodily memories of the Middle Passage,

inadvertently likening it to death itself: “I’m small in that place. I’m like this here.’ She raised her head off the bed, lay down on her side and curled up” (79). Beloved’s traumatic memory is therefore intrinsically tied to the space she has experienced the pain in. Gaston Bachelard’s (1964) notion that “[...] space contains compressed time” (8) mirrors Morrison’s way of employing Beloved’s deeply spatial and physical memories from inside the slave ship to take the reader back there to witness an unspeakable history.

Space is a bodily experience, and the spatial parameters of the experience on the slave ship are presented in vivid detail. Through the recollection of Beloved’s traumatized body we experience the narrowness, the darkness, the heat and the stench inside the ship. There are no boundaries between one tortured body and the next, they lie on top of and nestled against each other, touching each other and breathing each other in. Week after week, their minds experience their bodies in pain. It is the physical pain of thirst and hunger, of lying in unnatural positions on wooden planks and the sensual pain of a foul stench from unwashed human flesh and excrement. But it is also the pain and anguish of displacement, geographical and psychological. Caged in a dark hole with no access to sunlight and thus no visual clues as to the time of day and the passage of time, being huddled about as the ship dances in unsteady movements over the waves across the ocean, the African captives exist in a timeless space: “Suspended in an eternal present, [the slave ship is] a dark place with no room to move where past history is relived eternally” (Dussere 46). Beloved is trapped in the eternal present of the Middle Passage, and in the first part of her internal narrative, she expresses this by her lack of punctuation and temporal signifiers. The permanent present tense she uses makes it impossible to situate her story within the time-space of her life. The slave ship is an atemporal place existing outside the bounds of Beloved’s narrative memory: “All of it is now it is always now there will never be a time when I am not crouching and watching others who are crouching too I am always crouching the man on my face is dead” (221). Beloved’s repeated assertion that “all of it is now” points to the collapsing of the spaces of past and present in the mind of the traumatized girl and to the impossibility of the Middle Passage to be mourned and then put aside. Unable to integrate the memory of the slave ship into her narrative history, it will always stay present, never to be overcome. Beloved’s history is one “that literally has no place,

neither in the past, in which it is not fully experienced, nor in the present, in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood” (Caruth 153).²⁷

Due to the unspeakability of the atrocities, Morrison embodies them in preverbal, spatial images in *Beloved*'s mind. The loss of freedom and the loss of self are inscribed in *Beloved*'s body and return just like mental memories of trauma at this later point in her life. Presenting memory as a corporeal phenomenon, Morrison emphasizes the essential role of the body, of reclaiming the body in the African American experience. Like the tortured bodies of the ex-slaves have recorded every bit of pain done onto them, visualized it in scars and crippled extremities, *Beloved* has recorded the whole history of the Middle Passage onto her body. As Sam Durrant (2004) observes, “[...] memories lodge themselves in the body precisely because they cannot be verbalized, [...] Morrison has recourse to a language of the body precisely in order to indicate that which defies mourning” (87). In an abstract sense, then, *Beloved* is the racial memory of all African Americans, she “carries with her memories of the historic (or rather prehistoric) violence done to the black body during the Middle Passage, [...], she is herself a bodily memory, a memory that has taken on flesh” (89).

According to trauma theory, traumatic wounds can be healed only if they are expressed via language, thereby being grasped and integrated into the experiential space of the victim: “Telling this story and having it witnessed [...] restores cohesion and autonomy of the self. Furthermore, it initiates a mourning process that emerges once the ‘wreckage’ of the trauma has been sifted through” (Klein 20). The impossibility, or at least enormous difficulty of telling the trauma of African-American history is apparent in *Beloved*'s incoherent account of the Middle Passage.

The girl's failure to express her experiences once more points to the shortcomings of conventional historiography in incorporating a history of trauma. Language fails when faced with the incomprehensible atrocities of slavery, therefore *Beloved* resorts to a seemingly nonsensical, jumbled narrative, corroborating Elaine Scarry's notion of trauma destroying language, thereby making it an effective instrument for political power: “Intense pain is also language-destroying: as the content of one's world disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source

²⁷ This collapse of one time-space into the other, is also a rather typical pathology of trauma: “This simultaneity is related to the fact that the traumatic experience/ memory is, in a sense, timeless. It is not transformed into a story, placed in time, with a beginning, a middle and an end (which is characteristic for narrative memory). If it can be told at all, it is still a (re)experience” (van der Kolk and van der Hart, 177).

and its subject” (Scarry 35). In the beginning of Beloved’s monologue she articulates the difficulty, rather the impossibility of narrating her story, her history without a distinct sense of self: “how can I say things that are pictures I am separate from her there is no place where I stop her face is my own and I want to be there in the place where her face is and to be looking at it too” (*Beloved* 221).

This loss of self is caused by the early loss of her mother, which Morrison describes as a Lacanian trauma. Beloved’s mother willfully abandons her by jumping off the slave ship into her death: “She went there. She was getting ready to smile at me and when she saw the dead people pushed into the sea she went also and left me there with no face or hers” (225). Her frequently mentioning the face she misses, the face she thinks to have found in Sethe, points to the loss of her mother’s face, which left her incomplete, with a fragmented self: “the woman is there with the face I want the face that is mine [...] the woman with my face is in the sea” (222). In her cryptic language, Beloved expresses the lack of boundaries between herself and her mother, seeing herself in the woman’s face. She has displaced her sense of self onto her mother and therefore is left without a stable core, when the woman commits suicide. Morrison’s depiction of Beloved’s experience of mother loss recalls the Lacanian concept of the “‘mirror stage’, when the child sees its own reflection in the mirror and begins to conceive of itself as a unified being, separate from the rest of the world” (Barry 114). Before that stage, the child is still in a kind of fusional relationship with the mother. The child sees itself as the center of the mother’s desire, at the same time the mother represents the image the child wants to adopt as his own. Judging from Beloved’s fear of fragmentation throughout the novel and her desire to find “the join” (224), it seems like she is just about to enter the mirror stage when her mother leaves her, “for in fact, before the mirror stage the child does not yet experience his body as a unified totality but as something disjointed”, what Lacan calls “the fantasy of the fragmented body” (Dor 95).

The loss of her mother, her mirror, leaves Beloved in constant fear of fragmentation. When she feels Paul D intruding in her and Sethe’s budding relationship, she pulls a tooth out of her mouth and fears that she is coming apart: “Pieces of her would drop maybe one at a time, maybe all at once. [...] She had two dreams, exploding, and being swallowed” (140). Beloved feels the constant need of recognition and attention from Sethe, in order for her to maintain her corporeality. As a plurality of stories, perspectives, spectral forms and identities, Beloved needs Sethe to give her the cohesion, literally and figuratively, that she desires: “Beloved exists in a state of

perpetual liminality, caught between slavery and the present moment of social (and narrative) reconstruction, between the spirit and material world, between the real and the imaginary. As such she risks losing stable form and content for herself, the characters in the novel, and perhaps even the reader” (Spaulding, 70). As a ghost in bodily form, *Beloved* literally fears falling into pieces, as if she has not mastered her newly found corporeality. As a symbol, a signifier of history, *Beloved* cannot maintain her singular form, she must fall into pieces to do justice to the “six million and more”, whose individual fates she represents.

When she sees Sethe, and recognizes in the older woman’s face the face of the mother who left her, *Beloved*’s sees the chance to join: “Sethe’s is the face that left me Sethe sees me see her and I see the smile her smiling face is the place for me it is the face I lost she is my face smiling at me doing it at last a hot thing now we can join a hot thing” (224). *Beloved* narrates the Middle Passage twice, first in an incoherent, stream-of-consciousness fashion, then in a coherent manner that mirrors her newfound psychological coherence. After her join with Sethe, her newfound subjectivity enables *Beloved* to narrate her trauma and to mourn her loss. When she claims Sethe as her lost mother, *Beloved* recovers her language.

Morrison uses *Beloved*’s use of punctuation, time and more complete syntax in her monologue to signify the girl’s recovering sense of subjectivity: “Repeating *Beloved*’s story of the Middle Passage, [...] the chapters do not so much mirror each other in their chaotic prose as they map out a progression from a disintegration of identity, narrative, and history to a re-remembering of the separate parts of this narrative of physical, psychological, and cultural collapse” (Dobbs 570). *Beloved*’s restored language marks her re-making of the world previously unmade by the unspeakability of her painful memories. She is able to gradually verbalize the meaning of the Middle Passage, to translate experience into language and thereby externalize its horror. The introduction of time into her speech signifies the possibility of a narration of history, the making of a story of pain with a beginning and an end.

3.7 The World is in this Room - 124 Bluestone

Marilyn R. Chandler (1991) observes that, American Literature is, “among other things, a history of the project of American self-definition wherein house-building, and for women housekeeping, have been recognized as a kind of autobiographical enterprise – a visible and concrete means of defining and articulating the self” (Chandler, 3). In the

context of African-American women's lives, the domestic space assumes an even more complex role, since their domestication was not born out of a desire to define and articulate the self, but out of the economic realities of slavery. As house slaves and later as hired domestics, it was their role to make homes out of other people's houses. Elizabeth T. Hayes (2004) claims that because of this vexed relationship with domestic space, there is a particularly strong awareness among African American women of the need to make a place for the self, a place in which to negotiate one's identity. Out of this heightened awareness of space develops the pre-eminence and detail of spatial accounts in African-American women's fiction: "[...] the houses in African American women's literature are often palimpsests of all four kinds of space – architectural, geographic, psychic, and communal – and thus they are multilayered signifiers" (670).

Beloved questions and reverses some of the more fundamental assumptions about domesticity, such as the notion of the home as a place of protection, away from the hostile outside world. In *Beloved*, domestic spaces do not provide that refuge from the world, but rather blur these boundaries between private and public. Homi K. Bhabha (1994) even takes the domestic space in *Beloved* as an example for his notion of unhomeliness, by which he refers to "the anxiety that accompanies both the repression of historical trauma and the estranging relocation of cross-cultural experience" (Britton 121). Bhabha claims that the 'unhomely' "has a resonance that can be heard distinctly, if erratically, in fictions that negotiate the powers of cultural difference in a range of transhistorical sites. [...] in 1873 on the outskirts of Cincinnati, in mumbling houses like 124 Bluestone Road, you hear the undecipherable voices of the black and angry dead; the voice of Toni Morrison" (Bhabha 9/10).

Blurring the borders between public and private, Morrison has (hi)story's most defining moments happen within the unhomely walls of 124 Bluestone. The home place that is usually seen as a space to shelter its inhabitants from the chaos outside, is in *Beloved* a haunted house invaded by the very lively ghost of a traumatic past, as Jeannette Batz Cooperman (1999) points out: "In many of her books, Toni Morrison has inverted the usual order, in which houses were stable vertical enclosures that shelter their inhabitants from chaos, and the outside world was horizontal, constantly shifting, always threatening" (119).

The haunted house of 124 Bluestone Road is one of the protagonists of the novel. In *Beloved*, as in many other American novels, the "house stands at stage center as a unifying symbolic structure that represents and defines the relationships of the central

characters to one another, to themselves, and to the world” (Chandler, 1). Therefore, it is of central importance in exploring the spatial universe of *Beloved*, to pay attention to the “spiteful” (3), “loud” (177) and “quiet” (251) house in the Black neighborhood in the outskirts of Cincinnati.

We get the first impression of the house at the opening of the novel which introduces it as a powerful protagonist in the unfolding story: “124 was spiteful. Full of a baby’s venom” (3). The house has a name, feelings and moods, just like a person. The person that the house embodies is Sethe’s baby daughter, whom she killed a long time ago and who has kept haunting the house ever since that day. The fact that the house is haunted troubles its inhabitants and the community, but it does not particularly surprise them: “Not a house in the country ain’t packed with some dead negro’s grief” (5). The idea that the dead inhabit parts of the world of the living is not unusual in African-American thought, where time is thought to be of a cyclical nature, as opposed to linear, and life and death are part of the same cycle of time.

A proper reading of the domestic space of the house, necessitates that 124 is put in its complex context of Bluestone Road, the black neighborhood on the outskirts of Cincinnati. Its relationship to the social surroundings is essential to understanding the relationship between the black community and the hegemonic white culture surrounding it, as well as Morrison’s approach to the relationship between individual and community: “In Morrison’s novels the house becomes an increasingly complex measure of individual well being, and as the basic unit of the community its relations to other houses become the measure of the well being of an invisible city [...]” (Scruggs 97/99). The position of the African-American neighborhood on the margin of the city of Cincinnati is a synecdoche for the African American community’s being situated at the margins of American society.²⁸ Even more ostracized than the rest of the neighborhood, 124 Bluestone is isolated from the Black neighborhood on account of the terrible

²⁸ The position of 124 Bluestone Road on the margins of the community and of society at large is ambiguous though. The theorist bell hooks has argued that cultural and social marginality of oppressed people is essential “for the production of counter-hegemonic discourse” (hooks, “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness,” 149). In “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness,” hooks claims that marginalized people can use their place at the margin “as a site of resistance – as location of radical openness and possibility” (204). The home space, viewed as per se feminine and closed off from the public eye, can be such a space: “The very meaning of home changes with experience of decolonization, of radicalization. [...] Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and ever-changing perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference” (149). With 124 Bluestone Road, Morrison has imagined such a home at the cultural margin, a place that promotes “varied and ever-changing perspectives” on Sethe’s personal history of trauma and by extension, the collective African-American history of pain and loss.

murder that happened there. The people of the community shun the haunted house and its inhabitants: “Outside a driver whipped his horse into the gallop local people felt necessary when they passed 124” (4).

Morrison’s description of the house situates it in a kind of floating, undefined space. Even in geographic terms, the position of the house is unclear: “It didn’t have a number then because Cincinnati didn’t stretch that far” (3). Rather than being an organic part of a growing and developing city, this African American neighborhood is geographically and socially disconnected from it. The only connections the people of Bluestone Road have with Cincinnati itself are purely economic; Sethe goes to work in Sawyer’s restaurant, Paul D in the city’s slaughter houses. Like Harlem in *Jazz*, Cincinnati bears great hopes for the Black ex-slaves, but any kind of promises of freedom and fulfillment are only met at the level of money. When Garner brings Baby Suggs into the city, he characterizes it only by the material riches it has to offer: “Everything you ever dreamed of, they make it right here. Iron stoves, buttons, ships, shirts, hairbrushes, paint, steam engines, books” (150). Assuming that these are the things a Black slave woman dreams of reveals an astonishing naïveté on Mr. Garner’s part that once again makes the reader question the sincerity of his abolitionist quest. The items he mentions are either items of luxury for a slave woman, like buttons or hairbrushes, or items she cannot possibly have use for, such as steam engines or books. The mention of ships is particularly offensive, since ships can only connote the Middle Passage for Baby Suggs. So, in that case, she might actually have dreamed about them, but these dreams surely were nightmares. In any case, Garner’s boastful list of Cincinnati’s great achievements are mere mockery when put in perspective of the situation he utters it in.

Mr. Garner further mentions that Cincinnati “is a city of water, [...] Everything travels by water and what the rivers can’t carry the canals take” (150). The rivers, canals, and sewers are symbols for the openness and fluidity of the city space. The pervasiveness of water and its use as the favorite means of transportation for “everything” foreshadow Beloved’s emergence out of the water. *Beloved*, as the haunting of the untold past, finds her way to 124 Bluestone through the waters of Cincinnati. The rivers that transport the material achievements of the city, symbols for the success of modernity, hide underneath their surface the dark secrets that speak to the flaws in the modern enterprise. One of those secrets surfaces in the shape of the girl Beloved and enters the lives of Sethe and her family.

Being situated at the margins of Cincinnati, the Black community does not get to experience the city as place, in the sense of roots and tradition. Morrison's depiction of this Black community is in line with Alain Locke who stresses the difference between basing a community on a "common condition" versus basing it on a "common consciousness" (*The New Negro In: Scruggs* 102). If a community is based on a common condition as is the case with the community of ex-slaves on Bluestone Road, it is defined by external circumstances, which make for a frail, temporary bond. If, on the other hand, a community is based on a common consciousness, it acknowledges "that its members share a world in common" (*Scruggs* 103), which makes for a stable, almost mythical sense of one-ness.

In the case of the neighborhood in *Beloved*, the trauma of forced displacement of the slaves and ex-slaves, their common position on the margin of society, in opposition of the white masters constitute a common condition, but not a common consciousness. Just as they are uprooted from their original spaces, from ancestral and traditional places, they are uprooted from the memory of a mutual history of suffering and oppression. Being based on a common resistance to hostile outside forces, the community's identity is defined by its relationship to an external force, the oppressor. According to Charles Scruggs, this external fixation is the reason that the Black community on 124 Bluestone lacks a stable foundation: "The community defined only by an opposition ignores its own internal needs, the experience of mutuality is subjected to external definition" (*Scruggs* 103). Being disconnected from the memory of a common history, from ancestors and a binding tradition, the communal connection of the runaway and freed slaves in the Bluestone neighborhood is resting on feet of clay. Without an organic deep connection with the space they inhabit, thus turning it into place, they initially fail to establish an organic deep connection amongst themselves as well. In this lack of a common ground lies the basis for the rupture of the community's fabric after Baby Suggs feast.

Long before that event, when Sethe arrives at 124 Bluestone 18 years before the time in which the novel opens in 1873, it is run by Baby Suggs. Under her "reign," it is a safe haven, a lively and friendly communal place:

Before 124 and everybody in it had closed down, veiled over and shut away; before it had become the plaything of spirits and the home of the chafed, 124 had been a cheerful, buzzing house where Baby Suggs, holy, loved, cautioned, fed, chastised and soothed. Where not one, but two pots

simmered on the stove; where the lamp burned all night long. Strangers rested there while children tried on their shoes. Messages were left there, for whoever needed them was sure to stop in one day soon. Talk was low and to the point – for Baby Suggs, holy, didn't approve of extra (91/92).

Baby Suggs is the spiritual leader of the community and opens her house and her heart to its members who gratefully accept her services. The old woman is the ancestor figure that binds the community together, provides a sense of history and roots and thus makes it possible for the community to experience the urban space as a communal place: “For most black writers, what creates livable space in the city is not the absence of the machine, but the presence of the ancestor, the person who connects past and present and embodies a sense of historical continuity and communal wisdom. [...] Thus the city becomes home *if* the ancestor is a functioning source of power” (Scruggs, 100). The ancestor figure is the kind of familiar bond that counters modernity's threat of alienation and fragmentation. When that bond fails, as it does when Baby Suggs is ostracized, the neighborhood's cohesion dissolves.

Baby Suggs is open and welcoming to people who approach her for help, and when she runs 124 Bluestone, the house is as well, open, warm and hospitable. It is a domestic space in the best, the traditional sense of the word. It is a space that provides protection and nurture, away from the hostility of the outside, the public world. When Baby Suggs moves into the house, after her son Halle buys her out of slavery, she changes its structure, so as to make it a home. Before, when the house was inhabited by white people, the kitchen was outside the house, in a separate shed. Because their cooking was done by servants, it needed a separate space to emphasize this distinction between the space of the master and the space of the servant. For Baby Suggs, kitchen is and needs to be inside the house, to make it the kind of open, warm space that nurtures the whole community: “Said she didn't care what folks said about her fixing a two-story house up like a cabin where you cook inside. She said they told her visitors with nice dresses don't want to sit in the same room with the cook stove and the peelings and the grease and the smoke. She wouldn't pay them no mind, she said” (217).

At first, Baby Suggs is able to transform the former space of the oppressor into the heart of the black community. But on the day after the magically growing feast, the ones that took refuge in Baby Suggs' house so many times turn their backs at her at her display of too much generosity: “It made them furious. They swallowed baking soda, the morning after, to calm the stomach violence caused by the bounty, the reckless

generosity on display at 124. Whispered to each other in the yards about fat rats, doom and uncalled-for pride” (145). Reading Baby Suggs’ gesture as one of pride and excess, the community senses a desire in the old woman for her “and hers always [to be] the center of things” (144), thereby setting herself apart. Although Baby Suggs restructured 124 into a cabin, to reflect her ideal of an egalitarian community, it remains a two-story house, symbolizing her supposedly higher status to the neighborhood. The rift within the communal fabric causes communication to break down. It is bitterly ironic that 124 Bluestone, a “way station” and message center for escaping blacks, is so isolated from the community on the day after the feast, that the news of the impending arrival of the slave catchers does not even travel there before the fact.

It is thus possible that the formerly safe space of 124 Bluestone Road is invaded by the forces of slavery, in the guise of Sethe’s former slave master schoolteacher who takes the journey to Ohio to take her back with him to Sweet Home and into slavery. The community’s envy at their being blessed has rendered the family unblessed themselves (Jesser, 336). The intrusion into the yard of 124 marks the intrusion of traumatic history into the lives of Sethe, Baby Suggs and the children. Sethe is so horrified at the thought of her children growing up in slavery that she tries to kill all of them, succeeding with one, her baby girl. Sethe wants to bring her children “through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them. Over there. Outside this place where they would be safe” (171). Sethe’s words mirror her desire for her children to be outside of the here and now. The “veil” suggests that Sethe wants to bring her children back into her womb, as it is the only place where they could be completely safe from the outside: “Sethe describes her attempt to make her children safe as a mode of birthing in reverse, an attempt to force her children back into the womb” (Durrant 95). After Schoolteacher’s depriving Sethe of her maternal rights, the most extreme expression of which was when he had his nephews steal her milk, Sethe’s extreme act of violence, her symbolic putting her child back into her womb is also an assertion of the absolute primacy of motherhood and mother love over any kind of law, be it the racist law of slavery or the law that “thou shalt not kill”.

Schoolteacher arrival is described as an apocalyptic event, Morrison names him and his helpers “the four horsemen” (156), referring to The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, who are the harbingers of the end of the world. And indeed, the moment of schoolteacher’s arrival marks an apocalyptic moment in the history of the house and its inhabitants. The four men break into Sethe’s world and initiate a chain of events that

end the flow of time for her, leaving her in a state of frozen space-time, as Nancy Jesser puts it: “[...] 124 is hurled out of time to become a fixed, timeless world trapped on the border of death. [...] The achievement of this apocalypse is a world out of time, fixed and fixing for all its inhabitants” (Jesser 1999, 337). Sethe herself enters a state of living death, as symbolized by the blood of her baby stiffening her dress “like rigor mortis” (153). Denver, her other daughter, drinks some of her murdered sister’s blood along with her mother’s milk, thereby also forging a lasting connection with the realm of the dead.

From that day on, the house turns into a ghostly, isolated space, completely cut off from the life-giving power of the community. By the time the novel opens in 1873, the house and its inhabitants have been living in this state of a timeless present for 18 years. Like the house is spatially and temporally located on a sphere disconnected from the here and now of Bluestone Road in 1873, Sethe and Denver live their lives in a permanent limbo suspended between the traumatic past and an uncertain future. The first impression we get of the house is lonely and cold: “Within two months, in the dead of winter, leaving their grandmother; and their little sister, Denver, all by themselves in the gray-and-white house on Bluestone Road” (3). Set in the harsh Ohio winter, the mood of the scene is one of desolation and bleakness. Winter here comes to play its traditional role as the season of barrenness. During its cold, bleak reign, Sethe’s family is reduced by two, thereby diminishing her hopes for a future. Opening the description of the house in this wintry setting, Morrison hints at the fact that the house indeed is a place of the past, harboring memories of a time long ago, as Gaston Bachelard notes: “Winter is by far the oldest of the seasons. Not only does it confer age upon our memories, taking us back to a remote past but, on snowy days, the house too is old. It is as though it were living in the past of centuries gone by” (41). Indeed, 124 Bluestone is a space of the past, suspended at the time of the gruesome killing.

The inside of the house is bleak as well. Although 124 Bluestone is “spiteful” (3), it is at the same time strangely somber: “Out of the dimness of the room in which they sat, a white staircase climbed toward the blue-and-white wallpaper of the second floor. Paul D could see just the beginning of the paper; discreet flecks of yellow sprinkled among a blizzard of snowdrops all backed by blue. The luminous white of the railing and steps kept him glancing toward it. Every sense he had told him the air above the stairwell was charmed and very thin” (*Beloved*, 3/12). The paleness of the house, Charles Scruggs calls it “naked” (110), suggests winter, cold, depression and death.

There is no color in the house except the occasional fleck of yellow in the wallpaper. The chilly atmosphere mirrors the lonely and static lives of the two women inhabiting the house. The “white stairs her baby girl loved to climb” (42) are mentioned throughout the novel and, as a whole, the “grey and white house” is devoid of color, like it is devoid of life.²⁹ It is only when Paul D arrives at the house that we learn that there is indeed a very vital presence in the house, as he is greeted by the ghost: “Paul D tied his shoes together, hung them over his shoulder and followed her through the door straight into a pool of red and undulating light that locked him where he stood” (Morrison 1988, 9). The ghostly presence in the house, signified by the “pulsing red light” (10), is so powerful, it forces emotions on anyone daring to enter the house: “She was right. It was sad. Walking through it, a wave of grief soaked him so thoroughly he wanted to cry” (10). This exposition of the house as a violently hostile and sad space lends itself to a metonymical reading of the place as a projection of Sethe’s traumatized mind. Like Sethe’s mental space is filled with the memory of her killing, her home space is filled with unforgiving rage at that act. Kai Erikson’s definition of trauma mirrors Morrison’s approach of juxtaposing mental and physical space in her depiction of the effects of trauma: “Something alien breaks in on you, smashing through whatever barriers your mind has set up as a line of defense. It invades you, takes you over, becomes a dominating feature of your interior landscape – ‘possesses you [...] and in the process threatens to drain you and leave you empty’ (183). The trauma of killing her child has invaded Sethe’s house as well as her “interior landscape.”

²⁹ Sethe notices the lack of color in the house, but just like she is numb to the touch, she seems to be numb to other sensory stimulations, like color, as well: “Sethe [...] thought how little color there was in the house and how strange that she had not missed it the way Baby did. [...] It was as though one day she saw red baby blood, another day the pink gravestone chips, and that was the last of it” (41). It seems that the murder of her daughter was a traumatic experience for Sethe so strong that it caused what Freud referred to as a breach in the stimulus barrier: “[T]he barrier of consciousness is a barrier of sensation and knowledge that protects the organism by placing stimulation within an ordered experience of time” (Caruth 1996, 61). Trauma occurs belatedly, it is experienced too unexpectedly to be fully registered until it resurfaces in dreams, repetitive actions or in Sethe’s case in the shape of a ghost. It is a “breach in the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world” (ibid 4). Said temporal breach in turn prevents sensory stimuli from being experienced as they occur, since the original “ordered experience of time” was destroyed. Sethe’s inability to see color might be rooted in her traumatic overexposure to the color red when she killed her daughter. The incomprehensibility of that occurrence, its shock value, numbed her eyes so that they refuse to see color. Jill Matus (1998) notes that “[Sethe’s] refusal to see color is a traumatic commemoration – as the blood drained from her daughter’s body, so the color drains from Sethe’s subsequent world. Perceptions of the world are therefore powerfully marked by the central traumatic incident” (109). Color also is used figuratively as a symbol of life, which is completely lacking in Sethe’s world on 124 Bluestone road: “The walls of the room were slate-colored, the floor earth-brown, the wooden dresser the color of itself, curtains white, and the dominating feature, the quilt over an iron cot, was made up of scraps of blue serge, black, brown and gray wool – the full range of the dark and the muted that thrift and modesty allowed” (41).

Paul D exorcises the ghost from the house and the haunting stops. Unwittingly, though, he functions as the catalyst setting off a chain of events that bring Sethe to finally begin her work of mourning. A short time after the exorcism, the ghost manifests itself as a young woman sitting on the stoop in front of the house – Beloved. Sethe’s meeting the girls is presented by Morrison in a way that suggests a birth. She voids a large amount of water, which reminds her of her water breaking when she gave birth to Denver: “Like a horse, she thought, but as it went on and on she thought, No, more like flooding the boat when Denver was born. [...] there was no stopping water breaking from a breaking womb and there was no stopping now” (54). The juxtaposition of Denver’s birth and Beloved’s appearance suggest indeed that Beloved is Sethe’s dead baby daughter returning from the dead. The fact that Beloved “walked out of the water” (53), together with Sethe’s breaking water recalls Garner’s statement that in Cincinnati, “[e]verything travels by water” (150). This also suggests Beloved’s surfacing from the dead of the Middle Passage, which represents the most profound, yet most liminal space of memory. In this scene of the first encounter between Sethe and Beloved, several temporal and spatial planes are evoked: the Middle Passage, Denver’s birth, and Sethe’s killing of her baby girl. The boundaries between past and present, life and death, self and other are blurred. Keeping with the imagery of water, Beloved is immensely thirsty when she arrives at 124 Bluestone: “The woman gulped water from a speckled tin cup and held it out for more. Four times Denver filled it, and four times the woman drank as though she had crossed a desert” (54). In reality, the woman – or rather the ghost – had crossed an ocean, but on the slave ship, they did not give her anything to drink: “if we had more to drink we could make tears” (221). Now that Beloved drinks, she is able to produce tears, to finally mourn the tragedy she has endured. Together with Sethe, she will go through the mourning process not only for her fate but for the fate of all women drowned during the Middle Passage.

After being taken in by Sethe and Denver, Beloved takes an immense interest in Sethe and becomes more and more possessive of her. When Paul D is moved out of the house by Beloved, and the three women are alone in the building, 124 Bluestone turns into a space of the past, a veritable grave in which Sethe is positively consumed by her guilt and Beloved’s accusations. If 124 has always been a feminine space, housing three generations of women, it is after Paul D leaves it that 124 becomes a space that represents “the African American feminine Other by re-presenting it, by giving textual (and architectural) voice to its silences, its ways of knowing and being, and its power”

(Hayes 671). The position of 124 Bluestone Road on the margins of the community and of society at large is therefore ambiguous. The theorist bell hooks has argued that cultural and social marginality of oppressed people is essential “for the production of counter-hegemonic discourse” (hooks, “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness,” 149), claiming that marginalized people can use their place at the margin “as a site of resistance – as location of radical openness and possibility” (204). The home space, viewed as per se feminine and closed off from the public eye, can be such a space: “The very meaning of home changes with experience of decolonization, of radicalization. [...] Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and ever-changing perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference” (149). With 124 Bluestone Road, Morrison has imagined such a home at the cultural margin, a place that promotes “varied and ever-changing perspectives” on Sethe’s personal history of trauma and by extension, the collective African-American history of pain and loss.

Holed up inside the home, Sethe and Beloved form a discursive space in which they negotiate their history of trauma, shame and guilt. Sethe clings to her guilt and tries to justify, to rectify it, thereby denying herself the possibility of ever moving on, moving out of this space of the dead, of having a place in the future: “Sethe began to talk, explain, describe how much she had suffered, been through, for her children, [...] And Sethe cried, [...] Sethe pleaded for forgiveness, counting, listing again and again her reasons [...]” (253/254). Sam Durrant (2004) elaborates on the Freudian juxtaposition of mourning and melancholia in his analysis of Baby Suggs and Sethe’s way of dealing with their traumatic histories and claims that, for Freud, mourning is “a ‘healthy’ process of remembering in order to forget,” whereas melancholia is “an ‘unhealthy’ process of remembering that seems to have no end other than the perpetuation of the process of remembering itself” (Durrant 9). Sethe stands for this melancholia, for “the materiality of racial memory [...] ‘unhealthy’ insofar as it is a melancholic identification *with* the dead, a life-threatening, other-centered mode of being claimed *by* the dead, a mode of being-for-death” (ibid). Sethe is so consumed by guilt and remorse at her deed that she willingly complies with all of Beloved’s wishes and accepts all her accusations. 124 Bluestone has now completed the change from womb into a tomb, Beloved has gained total power over its inhabitants and has isolated the house from the present time and space. It is now filled solely with memories of pain and trauma not only of Beloved and Sethe, but of many generations of Blacks that have

suffered and died during slavery: “he believed the undecipherable language clamoring around the house was the mumbling of the black and angry dead. [...] Mixed in with the voices surrounding the house, recognizable but undecipherable to Stamp Paid, were the thoughts of the women of 124, unspeakable thoughts, unspoken” (208/209).

Elizabeth T. Hayes (2004) proposes that 124 Bluestone functions as what Julia Kristeva calls “semiotic chora”, “a pre-verbal, pre-Oedipal space of the mother, a discourse space that Plato, from which Kristeva took the term *chora*, designates as an indeterminate, ‘unnameable’ maternal receptacle (qtd. in Rivkin and Ryan 453-54; 460-61, n5)” (671). Indeed, 124 is the space of women’s discourse and the space of discourse between this world the “other side”. Thus, at the margins of the margin (the margin of the Black community which is already at the margin of hegemonic society), a discursive space opens up and allows the negotiation of otherwise silenced and unspeakable histories of maternal trauma. The womb symbolic of 124 Bluestone is ambivalent. On the one hand, the house used to be at one point vibrant and full of life. Baby Suggs’ maternal care turned the house into a nurturing, safe space. After Sethe’s killing however, the house turns into the kind of womb that is “a doorless windowless corridor of pain, [...] a place of destruction, aggressivity and death” (Adams, 35). Later, the isolation from the community and the proximity to the world of death in the form of the baby ghost turn the house into a hostile space.³⁰ The all-consuming power of this identification with the dead shows in the regression of Sethe, in her wasting away while Beloved gets stronger:

The bigger Beloved got, the smaller Sethe became; the brighter Beloved’s eyes, the more those eyes that never used to look away became slits of sleeplessness. Sethe no longer combed her hair or splashed her face with water. She sat in the chair licking her lips like a chastised child while Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it. And the older woman yielded it up without a murmur (263).

³⁰ Nevertheless, it is that proximity to death and its being closed off from the surrounding space that turns 124 Bluestone in what Kristeva calls semiotic chora. It is the place of the semiotic as opposed to the symbolic. “The realm of the symbolic is linear and logical; it is social and syntactical. By participating in these rules of order, we are able to communicate easily with one another. But the semiotic realm, on the other hand, is a kind of underground communication. It is a pulsing, kinetic, heterogeneous space whose meanings are much more fluid and imprecise, yet no less powerful” (Daly, Ann. *Critical Gestures: Writings on Dance and Culture*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002. 308). In *Beloved*, the public hegemonic realm is the realm of the symbolic. Time, space and human conversation progress in a linear fashion. For Sethe and other traumatized individuals not of the hegemonic realm, the symbolic is silencing because it cannot contain the kind of nonlinear, illogical narrative of trauma.

The house is hermetically closed off to the outside world, existing on a spatial and temporal plane completely disconnected from the here and now. As closed off as the house is from the surrounding community, as isolated is Sethe from the world of the living, she identifies only with the dead, is stuck in a past that she tries to, but cannot change, justify, or rectify. She willingly turns away from the outside world and narrows her life down to the closed off space in the house: “Whatever is going on outside my door ain’t for me. The world is in this room. This here’s all there is and all there needs to be” (191).

In the end, it is only by breaking the isolation of the house and by opening it up to reconnection with the community that this state of being frozen in time and space can be overcome. When the women of Bluestone Road gather in front of Sethe’s house, they begin chanting: “the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words” (275). The women break the spell that keeps Sethe tied to Beloved, to her unforgivable deed and to the world of the dead, and they open up the heretofore hermetically closed off space of 124 Bluestone Road. By opening up the physical confines of the house, the women also open up the hermetically closed story of Sethe’s murder. When Sethe steps out of the house and onto the street, she also steps out of the now told story of her past and into the present. The image of the womb as simultaneously a place of birth and death is fitting. In *Beloved*, Morrison brings the dead to life, only to bury them in the end. She has to let Beloved rise from the realm of the dead, leaving her watery grave to come to life, bloom and gain supernatural power in 124 Bluestone, to be able to justly mourn her death and the death of the “six million and more” she stands for. After doing that, it is necessary that the dead be buried, in order for Sethe and the community to have a chance at a future.

IV. JAZZ

4.1 Everything’s ahead – History and Place in Jazz

In many respects, *Jazz* is a novel about space and place and the impossibility for its protagonists of finding a home in the world and in their own minds. In the following, I will present two schools of thought concerning the issues of space, place and home. I will point out their connections to the theoretical movements of modernism and post-colonialism, and situate Morrison’s novel within these theoretical spaces.

In his book *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, geographer Yi-Fu Tuan takes an anthropological perspective on the various ways in which human beings transform space into place, meaning in which ways they attach value to certain spaces, thereby turning them into places. For Tuan, it is the human experience which allows for the formation of place to happen, and he explores these experiences, beginning at childhood.

According to Tuan, the nurturing and stable parent is the starting point of all formation of place. The first place the small child encounters are its parents, who are necessary for its development of the objective world. Especially in hostile environments, the infant is closely attached to the protective adult and draws from it a stable sense of safety and security. [T]he mother is the child's primary place. [...] A child is adrift – placeless – without the supportive parent” (Tuan, 29). Without it, a child cannot develop a sense of belonging to a specific locale and is placeless also in a mental and spiritual way. Tuan describes “the curve of the human arm” as the place of “comfort and security absolute, made all the more delectable by the threatening wolf in the storybook” (Tuan, 137). Tuan's theory of the formation of place does not account for this trauma of parental abandonment resulting in a displacement of the self, which was indeed common among the African American people, as a result of slavery in the rural American South.

In *Jazz*, as in many of Toni Morrison's novels, the stories evolve around children or adults who have not been able to experience an essential loving mother-child relationship, mostly as an effect of slavery or slave-like conditions after the Civil War. Without this maternal love, these children are not able to develop a sense of love for themselves:

Without this self-love, the me that Morrison speaks of is lost and forgotten. We thus move from mother-love through self-love to selfhood. Morrison's sixth novel, *Jazz*, tells the story of unmothered children who never take this journey from mother-love to self-love, and thus never come to know their own selves (O'Reilly 368).

Motherless children also have a hard time defining a place for themselves. Because they were never able to attach to their mother as the primary place, they did not attach to other places after that. In *Violet*, the lack of her mother manifests itself in a dislocation of the self, symbolized by her schizophrenia: Violet and *that* Violet. According to O'Reilly, the absence of the mother in Violet's childhood means “an

absence of foundation, a fundamental Lacanian lack, or a selfhood without a core or center” (368).

Tuan’s assessment of home as an intimate place does not hold true in colonized societies, where private as well as public places are dominated by the physical and discursive power of the colonizer. The hostile world of the master does not allow for the slave to establish a sense of home, even in the Reconstruction Era. According to Tuan, the formation of house as an intimate place is not so much dependent on the building itself, as on the objects within it, to which its inhabitants become attached and which hold “enchanted memories of the past” (Tuan,144). As far as Violet is concerned, the objects in her house only hold traumatic memories. When she is sitting in the Malt Shop, thinking of the white China cup her mother used to drink of, it is not enchanted memories of sweet childhood days that are evoked, but images of racist violence and oppression that pervaded the domestic space in the Jim Crow South.

Tuan’s views on the formation of place and on the movement of humans through time and space are marked by a distinct modern sensibility. Tuan points out that

a human life begins at birth and ends in death: it is a one-way journey. Human time is biased in favor of the future. [...] Human time, like the human body, is asymmetrical: one’s back is to the past, one’s face to the future. Living is a perpetual stepping forward into light and abandoning what is behind one’s back, cannot be seen, is dark and one’s past (Tuan, 132/135).

As a symbol for human beings’ movement through life, he chooses the arrow. For him, life starts at a home base, passes through several preliminary camps, in order to finally arrive at a goal: “Home is the stable world to be transcended, goal is the stable world to be attained, and camps are the rest stops for the journey from one world to the other. The arrow is the appropriate image” (Tuan, 180). Thus, life is a self-directed, linear movement through space-time with a chosen goal in mind. The movement is presented in the diagram as going forward in space, from left to right, and upward in time and social hierarchy.

Tuan’s conceptions of the human movement through time and space mirror clearly modernity’s strong belief in continual progress and movement forward in pursuit of freedom of mind and the realization of one’s physical and intellectual independence. The modern concept of self-willed and intentional progress through life is created from a position at the center of western society and discourse. It does not include those at the

margin of that society, who are not in the position of free choice to begin with. Therefore they are excluded from the modern project.

In *Jazz*, Joe and Violet's movement from the rural South to Harlem is an escape from the raging racist violence in the American South in the aftermath of slavery. Joe's final decision to move to Harlem is an expression of his ultimate desire for economic, social and spiritual freedom. Yet, the promises that lure him to New York are nonetheless merely revised versions of the white modern ideal of reason and freedom of the mind, established during the European Enlightenment. Insofar, even the concept of the New Negro is a model conceived from a modern position that demands a complete rejection of the colonial past and an unquestioning submission to the white master's discourse of progress and movement.

According to Scott Lash (1990), "the modern [...] is a metaphysics of change and movement, but is a rejection of history" (65). This attitude is expressed in the euphoric embrace of the modern city by the new African American immigrants in *Jazz*:

At last, at last, everything's ahead. The smart ones say so and people listening to them and reading what they write down agree: Here comes the new. Look out. There goes the sad stuff. The bad stuff. The things-nobody-could-help stuff. The way everybody was then and there. Forget that. History is over, you all, and everything's ahead at last (7).

The "new" that is propagated by the smart ones represents the idea of the New Negro, a concept first introduced by the African American philosopher Alain Locke. It embodies the modernist belief in the power of human reason and encouraged African Americans to re-create themselves as free and ambitious individuals, thereby adapting the myth of the American Dream for the upwardly mobile African American in Harlem. Violet and Joe embrace the modern ideal promoted by the City and the New Negro ideal, yet Morrison shows throughout the novel that the acceptance of the Harlemites of the New Negro myth demanded a complete rejection of their former rural selves and an uncritical embracing of the essentially modern white urban American Dream. In the description of Joe and Violet's mental and spiritual displacement symbolized by the cracks in their urban personae, their mask of the New Negro, Morrison deconstructs the New Negro myth and unmask it as a modern construct essentially destructive for the just recently freed Blacks.

Tuan also argues that "every person is at the center of his world, and circumambient space is differentiated in accordance with the schema of the body"

(Tuan, 41). Again, this notion reflects a modernist belief in the centrality of man and the human mind. It does not hold true for minorities or colonized subjects since it presumes an equality of men that allows for everyone to be one's own center. In colonized societies, the whole being of the colonized subject is under an external rule, making it impossible for her to locate the center within herself. In the world of the minority, the being is pushed towards the margins, leaving the center of the world and the center of power for the master to inhabit. In *Jazz*, Harlem is quite literally still ruled by whites, despite the promise of economic and social freedom. The tools of success, education and money, are still not available to its black inhabitants, thereby preventing them from ever being the center of their world.

Morrison depicts the unequal positions of human beings within their spatial universe, thereby engages in a post-colonial discourse and “intervene[s] in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic ‘normality’ to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities, peoples” (Bhabha, 171). Instead of explaining the world from the position of the center, in the fashion of Yi-Fu Tuan, she assumes a different perspective and offers a “subaltern history of the margins of modernity” (Bhabha, 175).

In the course of the novel, the blatant modernity and belief in constant progress of the city of Harlem is deconstructed by post-modernist and post-colonialist literary means. Morrison succeeds in showing that the modernity embedded in the modern city does not hold its promise of transcending historical bondage for its African American inhabitants. At the basis of modernity lies the Kantian belief in human beings' ability to overcome their “self-incurred tutelage” (qtd. in Waugh 1992). Bearing in mind that Immanuel Kant was a relatively privileged European male philosopher, the idea that tutelage is self-incurred might seem plausible from his viewpoint. But for the colonized of the world, this idea cannot hold true. Transcending bondage via self-will implies that one has the space to do so and if one is in bondage still, it means that one does not use one's inherent ability to think for oneself. In the course of post-structuralist thought, though, it has become clear, that neither thought nor action is purely self-willed, but that both are normatively constructed by the discourse of the dominant power. The implication of Enlightenment that fate is always in one's own hands cannot be applied to colonized subjects. This would mean for example that slavery in America was self-incurred and could have been overcome by the slaves, had they only thought for themselves and thus transcended their situation. The theory of reason does not take into

consideration, though, that the slave as a whole, the environment she lived in, the language she spoke, her body and mind, were colonized and thus fully dominated by a power external to herself. Post-colonial and post-modern theory and literature acknowledge this shortcoming of modern western philosophy and question its belief in the universal ability of man to break free from tutelage and bondage. They point to the Eurocentrism of the concept and the untenability of its assumptions since it neglects social and historical circumstances. Likewise, Morrison deconstructs Harlem and the “New Negro” as modern concepts and finds a way to incorporate history in her story. In effect, *Jazz* is a historicization of the Great Migration from a post-colonial perspective. In the 1960s and early 1970s, the term *domestic (or internal) colonialism* was developed by black historians to offer a tool for the (r)evaluation of the black experience within America. In this context, the slave system is seen as a logical extension of Euro-American capitalism and can therefore be included into the category colonialism: “The most profound conclusion to be drawn from a survey of the black experience in America [is] to consider Black America as a semi-colony” (Allen qtd. in Grewal, 7). Thus, Morrison’s novels are attempts to revise the colonial history of America from the inside. She “rewrites the nation” (Grewal, 8) from the viewpoint of the formerly voiceless subaltern.

Post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha’s concepts on space, time and placelessness are useful tools in showing the way Morrison deconstructs white hegemonic modernist discourse in her account of the Reconstruction Era in the American South and the Harlem Renaissance in New York. Bhabha’s concept of the “beyond” seems to offer much in ways of locating the literary space of *Jazz* itself. The beyond signifies

the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the ‘beyond’: an exploratory, restless movement [...] (Bhabha 1).

It is this disorientation and disturbance of direction that is felt in the pages of *Jazz*. The beyond is the interstitial space between the old and the new, the space that offers opportunities for the elaboration of new selfhoods and the uncovering of identities. I would argue that the novel *Jazz* itself presents such a space. Within its pages, the reader experiences multi-directional movements of the characters between the past and the present, inside and outside, the private and the public.

Thus, this literary space of the beyond resembles a bridge described by German philosopher Martin Heidegger: “Always and ever differently the bridge escorts the lingering and hastening ways of men to and fro, so that they may get to other banks. ... The bridge *gathers* as a passage that crosses” (Bhabha 5). In *Jazz*, as on this bridge, something new can begin its presencing. It gathers the ones left behind in the more ethnocentric movement of modernism, which excludes from its space members of many oppressed groups such as women, the colonized, homosexuals and other minorities. It is the interstitial space of the beyond that allows for empowerment and experimentation in the desire to move beyond the ethnocentric grand narratives of modern philosophical thought. The beyond is expressed in the prefix ‘post’ that is likely to be attached to many theoretical schools in our time, such as in post-modernism, post-colonialism or post-feminism. Rather than signifying a movement away from the respective theoretical stance, the ‘post’ signifies a going beyond the narrow confinements of the philosophy and emphasize a steadily transforming energy of the present.

An important characteristic of post-colonialism is its aim of reconfiguring the past, emphasizing the subjectivity of any history and thereby offering alternatives to taken-for-granted grand narratives that have been proliferated and been accepted without questioning for too long a time. In this context, the space of the beyond “becomes a space of intervention in the here and now”. Art from the beyond “renews the past, reconfiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The ‘past-present’ becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living” (Bhabha, 7). *Jazz* is such art from the beyond. Its characters revisit the past and make their interpretation of it accessible to the reader. They thereby function as witnesses to a traumatic period in American history that needs to be retold from the perspective of the disenfranchised in order for it to function as a corrective influence to the present. They recount their cultural, geographical and psychological displacement and thus create a space of healing and empowerment for others who are disenfranchised. According to Bhabha, such art embodies “the Benjaminian ‘present’: that moment blasted out of the continuum of history” (Bhabha, 8). It is by halting the continuous flow of history and the modernist constant progress forward, that we can renegotiate particular historical issues and look at them from a minority perspective.

Bhabha introduces an important concept for the reading of *Jazz*, the concept of unhomeliness. This term goes beyond the meaning of physical displacement and

signifies an “estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world [...] that is the condition of the extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations” (Bhabha 9). Members of colonial and post-colonial societies and groups are per definition in a state of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiation, because the space they live in and the culture that surrounds them does not allow for them to integrate and turn their surroundings into place. Therefore, though they might not be homeless in the sense of shelterless, they are certainly unhomey in the sense of being placeless and, according to Bhabha, are “dwelling in a state of incredulous terror” at a world that “first shrinks [...] and then expands enormously” (Bhabha, 9). Here, Bhabha describes the collapse of the common distinction between the private and the public sphere for the subaltern. He does not have a private sphere that is protected from intrusions of the hostile public. His world is the home, and his home is the world, thus the paradox of shrinking and expanding:

The recesses of the domestic space become sites for history’s most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting” (Bhabha, 9).

Nevertheless, the distinction of inside and outside is upheld in the modern world view, since it promotes hiding colonial political practices from the public eye. According to Bhabha, in the literatures of the unhomey, this process is made visible and the domestic space is redrawn “as the space of the normalizing, pastoralizing, and individuating techniques of modern power and police: the personal-*is*-the-political; the world-*in*-the-home” (Bhabha, 11). This disruption of the modern western notion of the public and the private in the colonial and post-colonial space becomes apparent in *Jazz*. In the Morrison’s rendition of the South of the Reconstruction Era, unhomeliness can be felt painfully, especially in the portrayal of Violet’s family and their eviction from their home. It is apparent that for the freed slaves, even the four walls of the home do not provide protection from the intrusive forces of the master. Violet’s mother has no rights in the domestic sphere, which is supposed to be – according to Yi-Fu Tuan – an intimate place of nurture and care. In the context of *Jazz*, the connotations of the post-colonial home are quite different from Tuan’s and it is portrayed as a hostile environment, leaving its inhabitants vulnerable to the master’s violence. Even after arriving in Harlem, the postulated space of economic, social and artistic freedom for African

Americans, the domestic space stays cold and hostile, as exemplified in Joe and Violet's apartment on Lenox Avenue. In both Harlem and the Reconstruction South, the unhomeliness of the domestic space serves as a synecdoche of the state of mind of its inhabitants. Just as the physical space is still dominated by the master's intrusion and haunted by the traumatic colonial past, so are the minds of Joe and Violet who project their mental displacement, or rather dys-placement, onto their surroundings. Not only does the unhomely moment stand for the state of an individual psyche, it rather "relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence" (Bhabha, 11). Thus Morrison's portrayal of two individuals under extreme traumatic distress, Joe and Violet Trace, is to be read as a historicization of Jim Crow and the Great Migration, the Harlem Renaissance and its decline via the rendition of individual histories for the sake of personalizing the traumatic experience.

In his account of the connection of space and place, Yi-Fu Tuan states that the starting point for the child's intimate experience of place is the "curve of the human arm" (Tuan, 137). It is defined by absolute security from the violent outside world, a place where the human being can let down his guard. This place of safety and comfort marks the beginning of a concentric expansion of intimate human place, including house, street, neighborhood and city subsequently. Considering this intimate experience and its significance for the formation of place, it becomes clear that Tuan's theory cannot hold true in the world described in *Jazz*. In the lives of Joe and Violet, there is no human arm to provide intimacy and security. Especially the child's primary place, the mother, is notably absent as an anchor point for the formation of a stable world. Without the "curve of the human arm", the concentric expansion of intimate place cannot begin for Joe and Violet. Especially Violet's home is an obvious example for the lack of security that denies any definition of place. As a consequence, the protagonists in *Jazz* are never able to find a place in the world, but drift through the literary space until they revisit their past and find a certain peace and security in each other.

In respect to its relevance for the analysis of *Jazz*, Tuan's theory holds true when he states that without the love and care of supporting parent, the child is adrift – this term describes well the state of mind of Violet and especially of Joe. They are adrift physically – floating from one transitory space to the next – as well as mentally – not able to establish a stable sense of self within which to find peace. In this sense, Morrison rejects the universalizing theory of the formation of physical and mental place

as put forward by Yi-Fu Tuan. She deconstructs modernity's promises of progress and freedom as white constructs that fail for the colonized Black population.

Jazz can be read as a literary example for Homi Bhabha's post-colonial theory. In her novel, Morrison creates "'inbetween' spaces [that] provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (Bhabha, 2). In the literary space of *Jazz*, Joe and Violet take on the task of finding a place for themselves in the world. They acknowledge past pain and trauma and thus are able to experience their own history and emancipate themselves from the discursive power of white hegemony. Only then can they redefine their identity and in doing so, start experiencing home.

4.2 The World in the Home – Jim Crow South in *Jazz*

Toni Morrison's description of the American South in *Jazz* constitutes a revision of the dominant historiography of the period. Calling the Era "Reconstruction" implies a viewpoint that is framed by hegemonic white discourse. Whereas Reconstruction indicates a mending, a "making whole", a rebuilding of something that had been destroyed by years of fighting and chaos, Morrison's account shatters that image as a white discursive construct. Actually, the South we encounter in *Jazz* is characterized by the de-construction, rather than the re-construction, of Black place, life and identity. Morrison offers a picture of history that defines the era as an economic reconstruction of Southern white society by means of the exploitation, terrorization and traumatization of the Black community. Her descriptions support the theory of domestic colonialism, which views the Black space within America as a subaltern space. In her essay "Subaltern Studies in a U.S. Frame" (1996), Eva Cherniavsky elaborates a theoretical frame that allows for the analysis of colonial power within the United States. In her words, "the United States arguably achieves hegemony through the exercise of a colonial dominance that systematically displaces both indigenous peoples and nonwhite labor from the social and symbolic territory of the consensual Euro-American state" (Cherniavsky, 87). She claims that colonial domination in the U.S. has been naturalized, since the colonized people reside within its national borders. Therefore the post-colonial demand "that colonial power be returned to its 'own' (national) borders has been rendered unintelligible" (Cherniavsky, 88). This argument goes hand in hand with Homi

Bhabha's concept of unhomeliness, which is defined by the normalization and naturalization of modern power and police within the boundaries of the domestic space.

In *Jazz*, the terror resulting in trauma does not become evident in the novel until 1926, a long time after the infliction of the trauma. Seduced by the glamorous city of Harlem into forgetfulness, neither Violet or Joe had been able to recover the memory of their traumatic past. Indeed, the loss or lack of memory is a sign of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which manifests itself in symptoms ranging from "amnesia for part, or all, of the traumatic events to frank dissociation, in which large realms of experience or aspects of one's identity are disowned" (Greenberg and van der Kolk in Caruth, 152). The traumatic incident has thus never been fully integrated into the mental space, the memory, of the traumatized person. Therefore, it is not a "narrative memory" that is part of a linear story of the past that has a beginning and an ending. The traumatic incident remains by definition outside the realm of reason or intelligence, since its horror was so unexpected and intense that it has not been dealt with on an intellectual or emotional level. The overwhelming experiences are not integrated "into existing mental frameworks and, instead, are dissociated, later to return intrusively as fragmented sensory or motoric experiences" (van der Kolk and van der Hart 176). Joe's reenactment of the hunt for his mother, Violet's sitting down in the middle of the street, the cracks in both their consciousnesses – these are external signs of an internal disorder resulting from latent traumatic memories. Important in this context is the concept of "insidious trauma" (Brown 107). By this we refer to "the traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and spirit" (Brown 107). This includes, for example, the witnessing of oppression or violence acted out on others belonging to the same racial or social group. For instance, Violet's learning of lynchings in the South, even if not in her immediate neighborhood, is an insidious trauma. The term refers to "everyday assaults on integrity and personal safety [as] sources of psychic trauma, [...] the absence of safety in the daily lives of women and other nondominant groups" (Brown 105). In this sense, we might acknowledge the term as the psychological equivalent of the cultural and sociological concept of unhomeliness, which also manifests itself most effectively in the banalities of everyday life: "it is precisely in these banalities that the unhomely stirs, as the violence of a racialized society falls most enduringly on the details of life" (Bhabha, 15).

As Cathy Caruth states in her book *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, “to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (4/5). Thus it is important to understand the specific events that lead to the murder of Dorcas and the subsequent reunification of Joe and Violet. These events possess, or *own*, their victims. Only the integration of the traumatic memories into the personal narrative of the victim allows for the healing of the psychological wounds. They have to regain ownership of their past, in order to re-assemble their fragmented identity and reclaim their lives: “One has to know one’s buried truth in order to be able to live one’s life” (Laub 63). It is through the transformation of the trauma into narrative memory by the act of remembering and re-witnessing history that the ghosts of the past may be overcome and history may be reclaimed. This reclaiming of history is a post-colonial act in that it transfers the power of discourse and thereby the power of knowledge from the oppressor to the oppressed.

The act of witnessing the traumatic past of an oppressed people is at the core of *Jazz*. Morrison intends her novel to be “the fully realized presence of a haunting of history” (qtd. in Bhabha, 12), and it is this presence that can be felt in the pages of *Jazz*. After Violet and Joe repeat their trauma of unhomeliness in Harlem, it opens up a passage for them to go back to their past in the South. They end up telling their story in fragmented flashbacks, thereby becoming witnesses to history and reclaiming their own past. The trauma remembered is narrated as an individual symptom, but by setting up Violet and Joe as synecdoches of Black society during Reconstruction and the Harlem Renaissance, Morrison recovers a long-repressed cultural history.

In this section of the paper, I will outline the recovery of Joe and Violet’s memory of the American South of the Reconstruction Era. I will show that the physical surroundings and the events occurring in them are deeply traumatizing. Their psychological trauma combined with the masked unhomeliness of Harlem makes it impossible for them to form a sense of place in the City. As a consequence, the modern, “Tuanian”, notion of space and the place of the human being in the world fails for these colonized subjects. We have to keep in mind Homi Bhabha’s notion of unhomeliness in order to understand the traumata and behaviors that surface in the urban environment of Harlem, long after the protagonists left the openly hostile space of the South.

Morrison gives the most detailed description of Black life in the Reconstruction South in Violet’s retracing of her family history and the traumatizing effect it has on her. Even the fragmentation of Violet’s memory of her Southern past depicts a deeply

unhomely space, in which the erosion and corrosion of black identity are the norm – despite the euphemism of the term “reconstruction”. Violet remembers incidents in the lives of her mother and grandmother that point to the unbearable nature of the unhomely life in the South. Their experiences are sometimes extraordinary and sometimes banal, but oftentimes it is the most trivial of cruelties that causes traumatization. According to Homi Bhabha, “it is precisely in the banalities that the unhomely stirs, as the violence of a racialized society falls most enduringly on the details of life: where you can sit, or not; how you can live, or not; what you can learn, or not; who you can love, or not” (Bhabha, 15). What is at stake here is precisely the issue of choice, of freedom of desire, the lack of which is thematized in *Jazz* and leads to the traumatization of the protagonists.

Whereas Violet’s story helps uncover the restriction within the cultured space of the South, Joe’s story leads the reader away from cultured space into nature, a space outside the cultural reach of the white master – or is it? In following Violet’s family history over three generations and Joe’s “family” over two, Morrison offers an effective synecdoche for Southern Black society on the path from slavery to Reconstruction, and via the Great Migration to the Northern metropolis. Morrison describes the traumatizing effect of internalized racism, economic oppression and physical and mental unhomeliness on the grandmother True Belle, the mother Rose Dear and eventually the daughter Violet herself. The history of the women in Violet’s family is a history of victimization, traumatization and growing insanity that is passed on from generation to generation in the Jim Crow South.

4.2.1 The Legacy of the Golden Ideal – Violet

True Belle’s history marks the beginning of a pathology of latent trauma that is being passed on to the following generations of women. The former slave woman has deeply internalized a racist hierarchy of beauty and worth that goes unnoticed and is thus passed on to her daughter, but more importantly to her grandchildren for whom she functions as the main caregiver and role model.

The definition of the black family in *Jazz* starts with the lack of a mother, as described in the story of True Belle. She is a slave woman who lives apart from her husband and daughters to take care of Miss Vera Louise in Vesper County. When Vera Louise gets pregnant and has to leave her parents and the plantation, for the father of the child is a slave, she takes True Belle with her to help her take care of the child: “True

Belle was the one she wanted and the one she took” (141). At this point the narrator, from whose perspective the incident is told, wonders how hard it must have been for True Belle to leave her family behind. “Perhaps it wasn’t so hard” (142) after all, since the family had never been a coherent unit anyway under the conditions of slavery. The narrator’s speculations about True Belle’s state of mind end up being pointless, since the important point is that she *had* to go: “Anyway, choiceless, she went, leaving husband, sister, Rose Dear and Mary behind” (142). Morrison stresses here the issue of the absence of choice, or freedom of desire, a thread that leads through all of *Jazz*. Being a slave, True Belle is by definition and by law choiceless in leading her life. Vera Louise wants her, and True Belle does not have the option of staying with her own family, a husband and two daughters who are at an age where the presence of a mother would be crucial. In light of this lawful choicelessness, the question of True Belle’s feelings seems almost cynical, certainly painful, and in any case without relevance, which is why the narrator pushes it aside with a resigned “anyway”. Morrison here also stresses the impossibility of correct historical recovery and stresses the role of fiction and imagination in the creation of Black history at hindsight. Nobody will ever be able to know how it was for these slave women to be forced to leave their families. Morrison acknowledges this uncertainty, thus opening up the discourse.

True Belle’s trauma is one of internalized racism. Morrison uses the woman’s fixation on the blond child of her mistress as a symbol for her displaced sense of beauty. Even though True Belle is given the opportunity to go to “a great big city” (142), Baltimore, the descriptions of her urban life with Vera Louise and the child are exclusively of domestic nature. True Belle’s life entirely revolves around the shining sun in the house: Golden Gray. As the sun is the center of the universe, the boy is the center of True Belle’s universe, and like the sun, he shines his light upon her and gives her a reason and the energy to live: “[H]e was like a lamp in that quiet, shaded house. Simply startled each morning by the look of him, they vied with each other for the light he shed on them. [...] the light of both their lives” (139/140). The black woman’s perception of the blond boy as the ultimate source of light and joy signifies her internalized racism. She equates whiteness and blond hair with beauty and sunshine, and thereby displaces the sense of her own beauty and worthiness onto the child. She does not shine a light of her own, but needs the light coming from the external source of the blond boy to make her life of value.

In Foucaultian terms, Morrison thus shows the transformation of juridical power under the system of slavery into disciplinary power during Reconstruction. Slavery and colonialization have become naturalized within True Belle. She does not recognize her condition as exploitative and traumatizing, since she has internalized it as the norm. The Black woman thinks of her mistress as kind and generous, whereas Vera Louise sees her only as a cheap nanny and maid. She keeps a tight regime over True Belle, holding back the money she earned after the war was over, “lest her servant get ideas” (143). True Belle’s memories of Vera Louise and Golden Gray are pleasant throughout, and it is only between the lines that the true character of the relationship shines through. She thinks of Golden Gray as her light, he thinks of her as a “black and nothing [...] nigger” (149). She thinks of Vera Louise as generous for initiating wages, Vera Louise keeps the wages back for fear of losing her slave.

The subjection of the black body was an important factor in the slavery system, an extension of the Euro-centric system of colonization and capitalistic expansion: “the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body (Foucault, 464). True Belle exemplifies the workings of disciplinary power, in which the actual exercise of power is unnecessary since the disciplined subjects have internalized the omnipresent gaze of the surveillant, so that they themselves become the bearers of the power over themselves: “[T]he exercise of power is not added on from the outside, like a rigid, heavy constraint, [...] but is so subtly present in them as to increase their efficiency by itself increasing its own point of contact” (Foucault, 471). Although True Belle is officially free to go home and be with her family, she stays with her white. She is not aware of her freedom and does not question her status since she does not perceive her racist exploitation and subjugation as such. Her unawareness of the racism surrounding her might be her saving grace as well, since True Belle does not suffer from traumatic pain in the way the following generation of women does.

Having arrived back home in Vesper county, True Belle takes on the role of the mother for Rose Dear’s children: “True Belle was there, chuckling, competent, stitching by firelight, gardening and harvesting by day, pouring mustard tea on the girls’ cuts and bruises, and keeping them at their tasks with spellbinding tales of her Baltimore days and the child she had cared for there” (101/102). Her stories help to keep together the family itself traumatized by the Jim Crow South. Nevertheless, by telling the children about the perfect white boy, she passes her trauma of internalized racism onto them. She manages to “fill Violet’s head with stories about her whitelady and the light of both

their lives – a beautiful young man whose name, for obvious reasons, was Golden Gray.” (139). The children do not know that True Belle had no choice but to care for Golden Gray. To them it must seem as though the blond child was more worthy of True Belle’s love than her own daughter. Thus, the children, among them Violet, learn to love an image of beauty that they can never achieve. The lesson Violet learns from the behavior of her mother figure is that another child, with blond hair and light eyes, has won the heart of the mother and that she, being black, is not able to win it back. Thus, Violet inherits the grandmother’s internalized racism and carries it with her on her journey north.

Violet’s most immediate trauma is caused by her mother’s suicide that leaves a void she experiences as an “inside nothing”. As mentioned before, in order for the victim of trauma to heal, she must recognize the trauma as such and integrate it into the context of her narrative memory. For Violet, the integration of these racist traumata into her existing mental framework, has indeed a healing effect. It allows for her to feel the pain and work through it, thereby reconstructing her fragmented identity. Sitting in the ice-cream parlor in Harlem, Violet looks back and muses as to the final reason for the suicide. Up to that point she has tucked the traumatizing events surrounding her mother’s suicide away in the depths of her subconscious, since the horror of it is invisible in its omnipresence and at the same time too overwhelming for her to integrate it into her memory. It is through the act of narration, following what Dori Laub calls “the imperative to tell” (Laub 63), that she comes to own her history, to make it real. Thereby she makes an important step towards healing her own trauma. When Violet takes the journey of remembrance back to her Southern roots, she does not recollect fond memories of childhood as described in Tuan’s idea of home. Whereas the home according to Tuan is a place of privacy, stability and intimacy, Violet’s family home does not protect against violation or dispossession. The modern concept of a homely space does not account for the colonized black space depicted in the novel. In an environment where the concept of home does not even ensure mere physical shelter and survival, it is hard to attach an emotional value to the space. Tuan’s description of “the curve of the human arm” as the formation of a place of “comfort and security absolute, made all the more delectable by the threatening wolf in the storybook” (Tuan 137), does not hold true for Violet’s family and by extension Black society as a whole. As a child, she suffers from extreme poverty based on the economic inequalities of the Jim Crow South. This economic hardship constitutes an immediate trauma for Violet, apart from

the trauma she inherited through True Belle's stories. The first thing she remembers is their dispossession by white men who deprives them of the basic means agricultural production and therefore physical survival:

[...] men came, talking low as though nobody was there but themselves, and picked around in our things, lifting out what they wanted – what was theirs, they said, although we cooked in it, washed sheets in it, sat on it, ate off it. That was after they had hauled away the plow, the scythe, the mule, the sow, the churn and the butter press. Then they came inside the house and all of us children put one foot on the other and watched (97/98).

Violet and her family are not even perceived to be there by the white invaders. Residing on the margins of society, they are both invisible and constantly observed as the racial Other. In the words of Homi Bhabha, they are “amongst those whose very presence is both overlooked – in the double sense of social surveillance and psychic disavowal – and, at the same time, overdetermined – psychically projected, made stereotypical and symptomatic” (Bhabha, 236).

Rose Dear's trauma is one of continuous economic frustration and eventual hopelessness in the face of the ever-present unhomeliness that pervades the Jim Crow South. The intruders do not stop at taking away the material basis for Violet and her family to survive, they do essential damage to Rose Dear's sense of self by treating her just like an animal:

When they got to the table where our mother sat nursing an empty cup, they took the table from under her and then, while she sat there alone, and all by herself like, cup in hand, they came back and tipped the chair she sat in. She didn't jump up right away, so they shook it a bit and since she still stayed seated – looking ahead at nobody – they just tipped her out of it like the way you get the cat off the seat if you don't want to touch it or pick it up in your arms. You tip it forward and it lands on the floor. No harm done if it's a cat because it has four legs. But a person, a woman, might fall forward and just stay there a minute looking at the cup, stronger than she is, unbroken at least and lying a bit beyond her hand. Just out of reach. (98)

Again, Morrison describes an unhomely moment in the African American South of the Reconstruction Era. Unwilling or unable to let go of her hope of preserving a home for her family, Rose Dear clings to the chair and her cup as symbols for domestic normality. The china cup represents Rose Dear's only connection to stability and safety. Clinging to it even when it is empty, it offers a sense of familiarity and normality in the

otherwise insane environment she lives in. It connotes a world of family rituals, of niceties incorporated into daily routines. Here, it seems out of place, an ordinary object with an extraordinary significance. Just like the cup, the feeling of hope is empty of content, but she keeps reaching for it nevertheless in order to survive. When she is tipped out of her chair, the cup lands out of reach for her to hold on to, symbolizing the cutting off of the last source of stability for Rose Dear. After continuous frustrations of her ambition to love a successful life, her hope turns into an unspecific craving. It gets “out of hand”, slips beyond her control. This craving, or longing, finally takes hold of her and “tosses her” out of control. Unhomeliness is present in this ordinary event, it is an ordinary event, a fact of life, which makes it the harder to bear. It is Rose’s recognizing “bleak truth in an unbreakable china cup” (101), the omnipresence of racism inside the supposed privacy of her own home, that might have made her decide to withdraw from this world.

The domestic, which under “normal” – Tuanian – circumstances represents ultimate safety and refuge, is presented as a vulnerable space that becomes a site of trauma. Morrison’s description of the domestic space as open to intrusion is infused with Bhabha’s notions of the “world-in-the-home” and the “home-in-the-world”:

In a feverish stillness, the intimate recesses of the domestic space become sites for histories most intricate invasions. In that displacement the border between home and world becomes confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting (Bhabha 1992, 141).

The faceless intruders represent the intrusion of historical reality in the deepest recesses of the home and the mind. In the aftermath of the Civil War, there had been a drastic erosion of Black rights and economic opportunities. Although legally free of bondage, many blacks were still under the economic domination of white creditors who essentially owned the land, the seeds and the tools used to farm the land. Thus, they kept Black sharecroppers in a state of permanent economic peonage. As such, their life did indeed resemble the slavery they thought they had left behind. The men intruding in Violet’s home are able to take everything away from them, since legally it is theirs. In the end, when her family has no material goods for them to take away, they take the house, the physical shelter for Rose Dear and her five children. Here, Morrison redefines the political as something that does not only happen on the battlefield or in the

government as it is usually presented. On the contrary, the power of the political seems most effective when it is exercised in the privacy of the domestic sphere, not visible to the judging eye of the public. In this context, Hannah Arendt's definition of the difference between the private and the public as "the distinction between things that should be hidden and things that should be shown" (qtd. in Bhabha, 10) becomes very much germane. She thereby defines the domestic space of the oppressed as the most convenient space for normalizing racist displays of power and police. Thus deeply embedded in the everyday life of the victims, this kind of power is made naturalized and invisible, which explains why Violet is at first not able to connect it to her mother's suicide and her own trauma.

As Violet now sees, Rose is physically and mentally paralyzed in the face of the economic dispossession and racial contempt displayed by the white intruders. Her inability to speak is symptomatic of the intensity of the trauma, since the memory of the event is so shameful and painful that she is not able to pronounce it. Her mind as well as her home have been invaded by a violent external force and thus has been injured dramatically. The reading of the house as a metonymy of the mind is reflected in Kai Erikson's definition of trauma: "Something alien breaks in on you, smashing through whatever barriers your mind has set up as a line of defense. It invades you, takes you over, becomes a dominating feature of your interior landscape – 'possesses' you [...] and in the process threatens to drain you and leave you empty" (Erikson, 183). Like the strangers breaking through the boundaries of the actual house and emptying it of its contents, on a metaphoric level, white power invades the mental space of Rose Dear, leaving her with an "inside nothing" (37) that signifies the loss of her own sense of self. Thus, in Morrison's rendition of history, Reconstruction entails a de-construction of Black space and identity. True Belle's internalized racism as well as Rose Dear's inside nothing and emotional paralysis are passed onto and perpetuated by Violet. The racial traumata of the Jim Crow South manifest themselves as an inherited, yet invisible pathology in the young woman.

In Violet's urban present, she is able to connect the everyday horror that was the Jim Crow South to her mother's suicide, even though the actual cause is hidden from her. As a consequence, she connects it to her own trauma:

What was the thing, I wonder, the one and final thing she had not been able to endure or repeat? Had the last washing split the shirtwaist so bad

it could not take another mend and changed its name to rag? Perhaps word had reached her about the four-day hangings in Rocky Mount: the men Tuesday, the women two days later. Or had it been the news of the young tenor in the choir mutilated and tied to a log... Might it have been the morning after the night when the craving (which used to be hope) got out of hand? When longing squeezed, then tossed her before running off promising to return and bounce her again like an India-rubber ball? Or was it the chair they tipped her out of? (101)

Here, Violet recounts several racist events that might have been impossible for Rose Dear to bear. Some of them are banal everyday humiliations, like the shirt that is so old it rips while being laundered. Yet, in its banality it points to the omnipresence of the feeling of not belonging in the world. The unhomey has entered deeply into the space of the home, and Rose Dear is reminded of it even when doing the laundry.

Violet's memories are still fragmentary, a sign of her PTSD, and show that she has not quite understood their meaning either. Why, for example, do the four-day-hangings take four days if the men are hanged on Tuesday and the women on Thursday? One is left to speculate. Maybe it took the men and the women each two days to die, but the implications of that thought are so grueling and inconceivable that Violet cannot let herself go there. Morrison leaves it to the reader to read between the lines and recognize the indescribable terror and fear as well as the quotidian anxieties and displacements the family was faced with in the South. Morrison's Reconstruction is one marked by senseless lynchings, deaths that lasted over days.

Similarly, the young tenor who was mutilated and tied to a log is only brought up in passing, in a way that points to the everyday nature of such events. He is also the only mention of anything referring to music in the Reconstruction South. One would expect images of the Blues that is connected to the field workers of the American South. But Morrison's vision of the area at that time is completely devoid of music and almost devoid of words as well. On the one hand, this silence is symptomatic for the lack of expressive freedom and discursive power of the subaltern in the Reconstruction South. On the other hand, it hints at the traumatized souls of the Blacks, who are stunned and overwhelmed by the everyday humiliation and oppression ruling their lives. The only bluesy elements in Morrison's description of the South are the tales of True Belle. Tellingly, True Belle is the only sane woman in the family, since she has found a way to break the silence surrounding Rose Dear and the children and, since the family is to be read synecdochically, the silence surrounding the Black population of the South.

Homi Bhabha, paraphrasing Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, defines violent acts of murder and self-mutilation to be “the core psychological dynamic of all resistance” (16). Escaping what Laura S. Brown (110) calls “cultural toxicity”, Rose Dear commits the ultimate act of resistance against her oppressors: She jumps outside of reach, into the well. Rose is able to “to push back the boundaries of the slave world” (17), she not only removes herself as a means of economic exploitation, she also poisons the well and thus sabotages the system of slavery. As the meanings multiply, Morrison describes the well in paradoxical terms. On the one hand it is “a place so narrow, so dark it was pure, breathing relief to see [Rose Dear] stretched in a wooden box”, on the other hand she mentions “the limitlessness beckoning from the well” (101). The suicide is the ultimate liberation from unhomeliness, from a life ruled by forces she cannot influence. The well is narrow and dark only in a mere physical sense. Yet, for Rose Dear it is limitless since it releases her body and mind from traumatic assault. For the first time she is able to assign a place for herself, thus her voluntary displacement is in the end an act of replacement. According to Melvin Dixon (1987), “the underground [...] becomes, in modern texts, a stage for self-creating performances”(4). In *Jazz*, the underground presents the place of withdrawal from the colonizer’s grip. Like Wild’s cave, Rose’s well simultaneously recalls the womb and the grave. Signifying the beginning and the end of every human life, these spaces are by definition out of reach of the oppressor’s power. Unhomeliness stops here.

Moreover, in the trope of the well, Morrison reverses spatial values of upward and downward from a subaltern perspective. Morrison reverses the traditional meaning and liberates Rose Dear via her descent into the well. Rose’s hopes of economic ascent in the fashion of the American Dream are constantly frustrated and in the end she abandons them. Thus, her final fall is in the end her ultimate uprising beyond the narrow confines of the oppressive, toxic society. In a seemingly paradoxical way, the boxy confines of the well offer her a freedom that she had been denied all her life. The walls of her home that were supposed to offer protection and intimacy have always been porous and left her vulnerable to racist intrusions. Her domestic space did not allow for her to set the kind of personal boundaries that are necessary for anyone’s sanity. Only within the protective boundaries of the well does she experience the spiritual and physical transcendence of the oppressive society. In this sense, the paradox of the limitless well is dissolved in an act of post-colonial re-valuation of space.

In her personal narration of her own Southern past, Violet re-encounters the horrors of racial contempt, internalized racism and the ever-present economic dispossession and poverty that she has suppressed. She now remembers the immense poverty of her childhood: “huddled in an abandoned shack, they were thoroughly dependent upon the few neighbors left in 1888” (98). She recalls the most immediate effect of the economic oppression upon the physical condition of her family, and even that is often only mentioned in passing, like the rickets of her older sister: “[...] the shape of [the] oldest girl’s legs” (138). This disease, resulting from a deficiency in Vitamin D, calcium and an insufficient exposure to sunlight, points to the devastating, debilitating effects of the family’s poverty especially on their children. It literally deforms the child, thereby making its marginal status visible from the outside. On a metaphorical level, if we read the black family as a synecdoche of black society as a whole, the deformed leg signifies the crippling effect of the white exploitation on the black body.

Remembering her mother’s suicide, Violet recognizes her own traumatization. She connects motherhood with Rose Dear’s terrible burden and decides never to have children: “The important thing, the biggest thing Violet got out of that was to never have children. Whatever happened, no small dark foot would rest on another while a hungry mouth said, Mama?” (102). She even rejects the idea of becoming like *her* mother: “Her mother. She didn’t want to be like that. Oh never like that” (97). Her miscarriages – or abortions – symbolize this internalized rejection of pregnancy for fear of turning into her mother. Adrienne Rich has coined the term “matrophobia” to describe this phenomenon:

Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mothers’ bondage, to become individuated and free. The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr. Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap with our mothers’; and, in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery (Rich 236).

In a sense, Violet indeed performs radical surgery, depriving herself psychologically from the biological possibility of having children. For Violet, this matrophobia is the most immediate trauma she takes away from her childhood in the South. After stabbing Dorcas, Violet recognizes that, with her light skin and straight hair, the girl triggered in her the memory of Golden Gray. All three of them, Dorcas, Joe and herself, have

displaced their best outside of themselves and loved an ideal picture that could never be achieved:

Who was he thinking of when he ran in the dark to meet me in the cane field? Somebody golden, like my own golden boy, who I never saw but who tore up my girlhood as surely as if we'd been the best of lovers? Help me God help me if that was it, because I knew him and loved him better than anybody except True Belle who is the one made me crazy about him in the first place (97).

It is then that Violet realizes she has forever wished for the golden boy to fill the gaping void inside her, taking Joe merely as a substitute. She recognizes that the golden ideal is the myth she focuses all her love and hopes on and within which she finds a space of solace from the dreary reality of her life as a violated black girl in the South. This psychological refuge is negative though, since it is unachievable and displaces her sense of beauty onto that which she can never achieve. She thus succumbs to a very efficient instrument of power of white America: the American beauty ideal. The tale of Golden Gray is a signifier of “those forces in society that constantly displace individuals by offering negative refuge” (Dixon 144). Her grandmother’s tales instill in Violet the idea that in order to be loved by a mother you would preferably have to be white, blond and male, she ends up wanting to be the golden boy. Having inherited True Belles internalized love for the blond white beauty ideal, Violet carries on the communal trauma of racial inferiority. By stabbing Dorcas, she metaphorically commits an ultimate act of resistance against the possessive powers of internalized racism.

Violet realizes that she has taken Joe to be a substitute for Golden Gray. Joe is able to fill the nothingness inside her. She now remembers that, after Rose Dear’s suicide, she had been haunted by a sense of placelessness and a lack of direction: “The well sucked her sleep, but the notion of leaving frightened her” (102). After being sent off to Palestine by True Belle and meeting Joe, Violet is able to overcome the immediate symptoms of her unhomey trauma, her nightmares and restlessness haunted by visions of Rose’s suicide: “Never again would she wake struggling against the pull of a narrow well. Or watch first light with the sadness left over from finding Rose dear in the morning twisted into water much too small” (104). Thus, the night has lost its ghostly power.

Here, Violet also experiences for the first time the power to make a choice. She immediately claims Joe to be her man, simply because she can. Away from the prison of

the unhomely society, Violet is free to love whom she want. Yet, her determination has a frantic quality as well. She is so eager to fill the void within her that she immediately abandons her family and prepares for a life with her new man. Joe has replaced Golden Gray as the light of Violet's life. Again, she displaces the best of her outside herself and onto Joe Trace. From the indecisive girl turned static by the horror of death and abandonment, she turns into a determined woman who has found something worth living for. She even fights definition and devaluation from the outside. When the straw boss does not see her fit to work for him, "she was highly and suddenly vocal in her determination" (105). In the common space she created by claiming Joe to be her man, Violet grows to be the strongest she had ever been, though "all for Joe Trace" (105). In a reaction adverse to the draining effects of trauma, Violet actually gains physical strength and literally develops a shield to potentially adverse influences from the outside: "It was there that she became the powerful young woman who could handle mules, bale hay and chop wood as good as any man. It was there that the palms of her hands and the soles of her feet grew shields no gloves or soles could match" (105).

Under the tree, in the metaphorical transcendence of society, the two find a way to form their own space in the safe, un surveilled environment of the wilderness. The tree is also a motif connected to Joe's mother Wild, who is herself represented as a tree, both during Joe's search for her and during her encounter with Golden Gray, who sees her naked, with leaves in her hair. This tree is not only a natural, but also a maternal space and thus shelters and protects Joe and Violet. It is at that point of apparently fateful encounter beyond the limits of the unhomely society, that Morrison lets the protagonists share the first lengthy dialogue of the novel. All signifying and playing the dozens, Morrison creates the dialogue in black vernacular. Thereby she is able to show that in this untouched space in nature, white discourse has lost its power and the two black people have a voice of their own, to express feelings of their own, to create a discursive space of their own.

Shaken out of her stasis and strengthened by the love she has with Joe, Violet is focused on leaving the South, following the dream of the big city that had been planted in her head by True Belle. Still wanting to follow the light of Golden Gray, she wants to move to her utopian city of Baltimore, "where she said all the houses had separate rooms and water came to you – not you to it" (106). On the journey North, she takes with her several undetected traumas suffered during her childhood and adolescence in the Reconstruction South. The internalized racism and hierarchy of beauty she has

inherited from True Belle will leave her longing for the golden ideal even in New York. The lack of a mother, especially Rose Dear's suicide will leave her with a Matrophobia that will prohibit her from being a mother herself. Both traumas will remain hidden in the depths of her psyche until Dorcas will trigger them both. The continuous economic frustration and poverty that had made her early life a misery will leave her hunting the American Dream of upward mobility in the Northern metropolis. But even her achievement of relative prosperity will not be able to heal her trauma of placelessness. Violent racist intrusions into her physical and psychological space have left her with a remaining sense of the confusion of private and public, which will make it impossible for her to rest in a homely place – unless she is able to detect the reasons for her being adrift.

4.2.2 Maternal Shame and Abandonment – Joe

Like Violet, Joe, too, has no conscious recollection of his life in the South. As is symptomatic for traumatic events, they have not been integrated into his narrative memory. In Harlem, he is seduced into leaving his past behind. But Joe learns that in order to overcome the misery of his childhood, he has to experience its traumas on a conscious level and thus gain power over them. To speak with Cathy Caruth, Joe is “possessed”, or owned, by the shame connected to his mother, and he has to integrate the traumatic memory into his personal narrative in order to regain ownership of himself. In a manner that is symptomatic for latent trauma, he reenacts the shameful search for his mother that dominated much of his youth. Joe's memory surfaces in fragmented accounts of the hunt for his mother and the economic oppression faced during Reconstruction.

Talking of a race riot taking place in the Harlem of 1917, he is reminded of violence experienced earlier in the Jim Crow South. In the most fragmented way, the experience of familial violence in his childhood surfaces: “I have seen some things in my time. In Virginia. Two of my stepbrothers. Hurt bad. Bad. Liked to kill Mrs. Rhoda. There was a girl, too. Visiting her folks up by Crossland. Just a girl. Anyway, up here if you bust out a hundred'll bust right along with you” (128). These fragments hint at the oppression faced by Black families in the South. The young men's continuous frustration and hurt caused by a racist society make them “hurt” so bad that they “bust out” and nearly kill their own mother. Again, political oppression does not manifest itself mostly in the public sphere, but finds its way into the intimate space of the home

and the family, where it is able to wreak havoc. If Mrs. Rhoda was saved from her sons' blind rage, the girl was not. The reader does not know if the girl was white or black, it is merely important that the brothers "hurt bad" enough to be able to harm "just a girl". The rendition of this particular memory in ellipses and through signifying points to Joe's not having it integrated into his narrative memory. Immediately, it is dismissed with "anyway", and Joe takes up his narration of the Harlem riot. The event is still too painful to remember in its details, and although the causes of the racial violence still remain obscure to him, he is able to connect them to their effects in the present day. He senses that the economic and social frustration that causes the Harlem riot has the same source as his stepbrothers' violence. Only, in Harlem, racial violence erupts on a much grander scale than in the South.

Joe experiences the rampage as an act of cultural annihilation, the whites trying to erase every sign of the existence of Blacks, "when Vienna burned to the ground. Red fire doing fast what white sheets took too long to finish: canceling every deed; vacating each and every field; emptying us out of our places so fast we went running from one part of the country to another" (126). Unhomeliness manifests itself in a powerful immediacy, described by Joe as their being emptied out of their places. Again, Morrison describes the intrusion of the political into the home, into the intimate places of the oppressed. Thus being dispossessed, Joe is forced to run away for his life and that is how he ends up in Palestine. His account of his meeting Violet is much more somber and matter-of-fact as Violet's: "That's where I met Violet. We got married and set up on Harlon Ricks' place near Tyrell" (126). In fact, as Joe realizes only later, he married Violet merely in an attempt to fill the huge void inside himself, left there by his mother's rejection.

Like Violet, Joe is also an abandoned child. He has never been able to establish a love for himself, since this process requires a mother figure or least a parental figure to install in him the feeling of being worthy of love. He has never been claimed by parents as their own, a process significant in establishing a sense of self. As a child, Joe always waits for his parents to come back and claim him. Since his adoptive mother tells him that his parents went off without a trace, that is what he names himself: "They got to pick me out. From all of you all, they got to pick me. I'm Trace, what they went off without" (Morrison, 124). The name "trace" signifies what haunts him throughout his life: the presence of absence. A trace is both the evidence of the former existence of something, which is not there any longer, and a path or trail that is beaten out by the

passage of an animal or a person. Both definitions indicate the absence of something, and it is that absence, the “inside nothing” (37) Joe yearns to fill his whole life. This void indicates the displacement or loss of a sense of self. His continual following of trails is symptomatic for his being possessed of an absence, a void inside himself, that he seeks to fill. In this sense, the presence of absence is his personal trauma, and on his hunt for his mother, he is simultaneously on the hunt for his own identity.

The process of naming is important in this context, since the last name indicates the belonging to a family and a family history. The lack of such familial roots leave him floating through life without ever establishing a sense of belonging to a specific place. His physical placelessness manifests itself also in an internal placelessness, a void he describes as an “inside nothing” (37). The inside nothing signifies the lack of a stable self-identity. Whereas Violet displaced her sense of self outside herself after her mother’s suicide and after hearing True Belle’s stories of Golden Gray, Joe never had a sense of self to begin with. That is why it is so easy for him to change: “Before I met her I’d changed into new seven times. The first time was when I named my own self, since nobody did it for me, since nobody knew what it could or should have been” (123).

Already when Joe is born, he is reluctant to leave the protective womb of his mother: “This baby was not easy. It clung to the walls of that foamy cave, and the mother was of practically no help” (170). It seems as though he knows from the beginning that the maternal womb is the only protected space he is ever to live in. At this point, his mother rejects him right away – a parallel to Rose Dear’s abandonment of Violet. Whereas Rose Dear tries herself at being a mother under the most oppressive of conditions and frees herself through suicide only when her efforts are continuously frustrated, Wild has already withdrawn herself completely from toxic society and culture when she gives birth to Joe.

The figure of Wild in *Jazz* can be read both literally and metaphorically. In a literal sense, Wild is a traumatized woman driven into the safe sphere of nature by the oppressive forces of Southern society. The impact of such forces is described in Violet’s recollections of her childhood. These events she recounts are not to be taken as individual incidents, but represent the daily violence and terror most black families are faced with during Reconstruction. Here, as elsewhere in African-American literature, the space of nature signifies a place of refuge beyond the restrictions of the unhomely society. Thus, Wild’s retreat into the woods is a reaction similar to Rose’s suicide: an ultimate

abandonment of society, the transcendence of the unhomely. Her withdrawal from the cultural sphere is also signified in her refusal or inability to speak. Language is taken to be a primary tool for the colonization of the mind. Therefore Wild's speechlessness, positioning her beyond the confines of the colonized discursive space defies unhomeliness since her spirit cannot be oppressed. The reasons for her abandoning Joe are left to speculation. If she indeed has retreated into the wild to leave society behind, she must know about the trials and tribulations facing black mothers in the South. Joe, looking back at his childhood from his present life in Harlem, remember overhearing a woman in the hotel saying: "I am bad for my children. [...] as long as they're by my side nothing good can come to them" (125). This statement shows how mothers are not able to see the faults of the system as being responsible for their children's having a hard time. They take the blame upon themselves, not seeing that it is when the children leave the unhomely *place* that they are able to do well. It might have been a similar reasoning that motivated Wild. The near impossibility of providing for a child's economic and spiritual well-being might have led her to leave her son with someone else – again a parallel to Rose Dear.

Joe's yearning to fill the gaping void inside of him, to heal the trauma of absence, sets him out on a frantic search for his mother: "All in all, he made three solitary journeys to find her. In Vienna, he had lived first with the fear of her, then the joke of her, finally the obsession, followed by the rejection of her" (175). His obsession manifests itself in his following her traces, obeying the hunter personality he has adopted. His quasi-adoption by the hunter's hunter, Henry Lestory, prepares him for this quest. He takes great pride in the fact that Henry Lestory picked him to go hunting with him. The importance of this act of claiming is stressed by Joe's mentioning three times that the hunter "picked" him, thereby being the first person to ever claim Joe. The hunter is from thereon his primary parent, Joe is imitating him and adopting a hunter's identity as well. It is then that the wilderness becomes his home: "It was because of him, what I learned from him, made me more comfortable in the woods than in a town. I'd get nervous if a fence or a rail was anywhere around" (126). Joe himself feels more at ease in the woods than anywhere else, since that is the environment he feels safe in and that speaks a language he can decipher – trails. The wilderness becomes his retreat. Paradoxically, he feels less lonely in the emptiness of the woods than in the company of the people in his community: "[...] loneliness was a thing couldn't get near me" (129).

In the woods, Joe is able to experience great freedom away from the enslavement to the soil, and more importantly, the enslavement to the white oppressor. His lifestyle resembles that of a hunter and gatherer who is by implication free in his movement. In his book *The Good Life*, Yi-Fu Tuan describes the nomad as someone who “thrives on the freedom to move. [...] to the pastoral nomad the life of the sedentary farmer lacks appeal. From the nomad’s viewpoint, the farmer is enslaved to soil; his world, teeming with people, is without power to stir the spirit which, to the nomad, has its natural home in the great open spaces” (116). Indeed, here, Joe is safe from the intrusions of the unhomely, which is bound to the oppressive society and cannot reach beyond the confines of it. Thus, the woods are his true home away from home.

Like a hunter follows his prey, Joe follows the trails Wild leaves on her journeys through the woods. He is obsessed by the presence of absence, the trace of his mother in the wilderness. He feels this trace as the “inside nothing” which he yearns to fill with the knowledge of his mother’s existence. At the same time he has internalized the trauma of racial shame that is connected to Wild as the ultimate Other:

And even though the confirmation would shame him, it would make him the happiest boy in Virginia. If she decided, that is, to show him it [...] so he would *know*. And how he was willing to take the chance of being humiliated and grateful at the same time, because the confirmation would mean both. [...] Just a sign, he said, just show me your hand, he said, and I’ll *know* don’t you *know* I have to *know*? (36/37, italics mine)

Once he learns about his connection to Wild, though, the woods “were full of her, a simple-minded woman too silly to beg for a living. Too brain-blasted to do what the meanest sow managed: nurse what she birthed” (179). According to J. Brooks Bouson, Wild represents “the stigmatized racial and sexual Otherness of black female identity” (166). Wild’s stigma is defined by the norms of modern white society and is a marker of the oppressive system of colonization. Here, the discursive power lies with the white male and thus the black female is the ultimate Other indeed. His choice of words when talking about her is infused with white racist discourse, a sign of internalized racial shame: “She was powerless, invisible, wastefully daft. [...] this indecent speechless lurking insanity” (179). His feelings towards Wild are determined by white modern ideals of what is normal and acceptable, as a human being and in particular as a mother. They are therefore the symptom for his trauma of internalized racism.

In search of his mother, he yearns to return to the maternal “cave”, looking to complete himself. By using his hunting skills, Joe is able to read the wilderness for tracks of Wild: “ruined honeycombs, the bits and leaves of stolen victuals and [...] redwings” (176), and finally he is able to track her down. The third time Joe sets out to find Wild, he actually finds her home in the wilderness. The scene is described by Morrison in powerful symbolism. Wild’s habitat in nature provides a powerful metonymy of her retreat from society. Wild’s tracks lead her to “the tree – the one whose roots grow backward as though, having gone obediently into the earth and found it barren, retreating into the trunk for what was needed. Defiant and against logic its roots climbed. Toward leaves, light, wind” (182). The tree symbolizes Wild herself. At one point in her life, she had tried to find energy, be it physical or spiritual, in the soil of community. Like any “normal” member of society, she aspired to grow and prosper by fulfilling the role ascribed to her, by obeying the ideal of hard and honest work in order to achieve a certain status and find a home, a place in society. Yet, like Rose Dear and most African American women at the time, she had her illusions shattered by a racist culture that did not provide her with the bare essentials to live as a dignified human being. In an act of defiance, she retreats from society and the life in her community and becomes self-sufficient, creating her own safe and homely space inside herself. In this way, Wild transcends her toxic environment and finds a home in the generous spirit of nature, in leaves, light and wind. Like Rose Dear, she found the greatest freedom in the complete rejection of civilization.

Below the tree was the river whites called Treason where fish raced to the line, and swimming among them could be riotous or serene. But to get there you risked treachery by the very ground you walked on. The slopes and low hills that fell gently toward the river only appeared welcoming; underneath it vines, carpet grass, wild grape, hibiscus and wood sorrel, the ground was as porous as a sieve. A step could swallow your foot or your whole self (182).

The river Treason symbolizes the dangers that lurk for whites in the seclusion of the wilderness. Although it offers the opportunity of exploitation as symbolized by the fish that are abundant and eager to be caught. Yet, its generosity is a mere illusion, the river does not reach the barren soil of the trees growing at its margin, and the pathway to prosperity is bound to mutilate or kill anyone who dares to walk it. Apart from the civilized space that is defined by whites in their own terms and is therefore conducive to

the exploitation of Blacks, this space in the wilderness is actually a place of refuge for those oppressed by white society. It presents as a text that can be read by Wild and the likes of her, but is illegible and treacherous for those not used to the language of wilderness. As such, it represents the equivalent of the city space for Blacks. Like the wilderness fakes welcome to Whites, yet at the same time presents a danger to the wholeness of their identity, the City presents equal dangers of illegibility to Blacks.

Joe's journey to the cave is a journey back to his mother's womb. Reluctant as he was leaving the maternal cave, now he makes his way back into it: "He went into it on his behind until a floor stopped his slide. It was like falling into the sun" (183). Again, Morrison reverses spatial values in way similar to the image of Rose's descent into well as being an actual ascent, a transcendence of lowly conditions. Similarly, his physical descent into Wild's cave is presented as an actual ascent into the light. In Morrison's terms, the emancipation from social unhomeliness is an ascent towards the light. This, too, is reversal of traditional modern white imagery. Usually, the retreat from civilization would be represented as a movement towards the dark, away from the light of reason into the shadow of ignorance. But, in Morrison's rendition of the history of the Reconstruction Era, civilization is always connected to darkness and depression for the Blacks. Represented most powerfully in the image of the dark and decaying shack of Violet's childhood, Black place inside the confines of the hostile white-defined society is deeply unhomely and has a corroding effect on Black identity.

Wild's cave is extremely well hidden deep inside the wilderness and protected from any intrusion of the unhomely from the outside, which signifies how far she has removed herself, both geographically and psychologically, from the cultured modes of human existence. Once inside, Joe is able to read the place thanks to his ability to interpret the tracks of animals. The space symbolizes her mind, which is similarly well protected against the intrusion of the unhomely: "Although it was a private place, with an opening closed to the public, once inside you could do what you pleased: disrupt things, rummage, touch and move. Change it all to a way it was never meant to be" (184). By reading the domestic space of Wild's cave, Joe gives an exact account of her defense mechanism against the forces of colonization. Also, he describes the effect of these forces, should the defense mechanism fail: complete havoc in the psychological space of the victim. Morrison describes here the damaging effects of internalized unhomeliness, the intrusion of the political into the mind of the oppressed subject. Once inside it, the mind and spirit of the victim is molded in a way that suits the purposes of

the white master. Seen in this light, Wild's motives for removing herself so drastically from society become clear as her strategy for psychological survival: she refuses to wear clothes since they would connect her to civilization, she refuses to use language, for language is a main tool for the manipulation of the mind, she refuses the child, since it would force her to perform the socially determined role of the mother.

Among the things that clutter Wild's home, Joe discovers clothes that belong to a man: "Also, a pair of man's trousers with buttons of bone. Carefully folded, a silk shirt, faded pale and creamy – except at the seams. There, both thread and fabric were a fresh and sunny yellow" (184). The reader recognizes these clothes to belong to Golden Gray, which leads us to assume that the traumatized mulatto has overcome his racial shame and fear of the Other and lives with Wild in the cave. This hypothesis suggests that Gray has actually abandoned civilization and has himself "gone wild". This would be a kind of reverse colonization, in which the extremely marginalized other invades and defines the mental space of the hegemonic master.

According to Cathy Caruth, "Our memory repeats to us what we haven't yet come to terms with, what still haunts us" (184). The victim suffering from PTSD tends to reenact the traumatic event until it is able for him to integrate it into his narrative memory. In the present of Harlem in 1926, Joe realizes his hunt for Dorcas as a continuation of his hunt for his mother. The memory of his discovery of Wild's cave is intertwined with his hunting down Dorcas in the present-day Harlem. Since Joe has found in Dorcas that which fills the void inside of him, she triggers the memory of his mother. Thus, while hunting for Dorcas, he is actually once again hunting for his mother, and the language he uses brings the reader back to Joe's youth as well:

As he puts on his coat and cap he can practically feel Victory at his side when he sets out, armed, to find Dorcas. He isn't thinking of harming her, or, as Hunter had cautioned, killing something tender. She is female. And she is not prey. So he never thinks of that. He is hunting for her though, and while hunting a gun is as natural a companion as Victory (180)

By using Dorcas and Victory in the same context although they are not in Joe's life at the same time, Morrison shows the mixing up of past and present in the hunt for Dorcas. At hindsight, Joe realizes that his trauma of being motherless has left him with a hole inside himself that he tried to fill with the presence of Violet. Not being capable of love as a result of not being mothered, he uses Violet to replace his mother, just like Violet

used him to replace Golden Gray. He has never been claimed by someone to be theirs, and he can use this love from the outside as a substitute for a sense of self: “Young people fly off the handle. Bust out just for the hell of it. Like me shooting an unloaded shotgun at the leaves that time. Like me saying, ‘All right, Violet, I’ll marry you,’ just because I couldn’t see whether a wildwoman put out her hand or not” (181).

Despite countless frustrations and arbitrary exploitation by white landowners, Joe does not give up his hope for a place in society. His hopes seem to get real “in 1901, when Booker T. had a sandwich in the President’s house” (126). Booker T. Washington, the Black educator and spokesperson for the Black cause at the time, is most famous for his compromise speech of 1895. In this address, he urged Blacks in America to accept their inferior status for the moment and try to uplift themselves through vocational training and gaining economic self-reliance. This quiescent attitude certainly pleased whites at the time who were able to continue their economic exploitation of Blacks that now was even positively sanctioned by their leader. Washington’s theories might well have stemmed from being brainwashed himself into believing the white myth of the American Dream and its being achievable for the oppressed as well. He thus was himself a tool of the colonial system, since he propagated its ideas and made them more acceptable to members of his own social group.

Booker T.’s dinner with President Theodore Roosevelt sparks new hope in Joe as to the success of Washington’s ideas of economic self-reliance. After all, he was the first Black leader to be invited to the White House and this move was perceived as a big step towards the establishment of racial harmony. Yet, both Booker T. and Joe have fallen prey to the treacherous river Treason, the capitalist white society, that made them believe they could be part of the success story, when in fact they could only ever be the servants of capitalism, never the masters. Joe buys into the illusion and buys a piece of land, striving for economic self-reliance: “Like a fool I thought they’d let me keep it. They ran us off with two slips of paper I never saw or signed” (126). Once more, he has been frustrated, humiliated in his strife for a place in this society that does not want to have him at all.

Finally, he escapes the placelessness of the South, or believes to escape, for the prospect of unlimited possibilities in the free space of the metropolitan North. With him he takes the shame trauma connected to his being unmothered, the uncertainty of his maternal roots. Like Violet, Joe is deeply traumatized by the economic deprivation and social placelessness that dominated his Southern life. In Harlem he will strive

vigorously to achieve a better socio-economic status for himself and Violet. But he, too, will need to revisit the past in order for him to find a place in the present.

4.3 Longing for a Right to Be in this Place – Golden Gray

At the center of the circle of trauma and shame that confines the existence of Joe and Violet is the tale of Golden Gray and his journey to find his father. Set at the center of the novel, Golden Gray represents the joint root for Violet and Joe's traumatized existence. He is the light that simultaneously warms Violet's heart and displaces her sense of self. She wants to have him, be him even, because he is so beautiful that he was able to capture True Belle's heart and never give it back. Joe is connected to Golden through his mother, Wild. The clothes Joe finds inside Wild's cave belong to Golden Gray, which hints at the possibility of them living together outside society.

In the story of Golden Gray, Morrison depicts the intrusion of the unhomeliness of racial trauma into the bourgeois life of an ex-white man. Growing up in Baltimore, Golden had been able to reap the benefits of whiteness and maleness to the fullest. Yet, the shameful of his identity as a mulatto child is made clear even before he was born. In a reversal of the stereotypical miscegenation between the white slave master and the black slave woman, Golden Gray is the child of the white daughter of the plantation owner Colonel Wordsworth Gray and the slave Henry Lestory. The feeling of shame and panic upon learning of his daughter's pregnancy manifests itself physically in the colonel, who starts sweating profoundly, "for there were seven mulatto children on his land" (141). As it was common at the time, the colonel himself has fathered children with slave women, but the shame of the mulatto child born by a white woman would expose the double standard ruling on the plantation. Since the fathering of a child is not as immanently visible as the mothering, the colonel's children follow the condition of their mother and stay slaves. The dark child fathered by Vera Louise would be a visible result of an act of racial impurity and thus proves a far greater problem to the patriarchy on the plantation. Moreover, as Hazel Carby observes, "Within the economic, political, and social system of slavery, women were at the nexus of its reproduction" (in Grewal 130). This was certainly true for the slave women themselves who gave birth to children who would serve as slaves as well. But also the white women played a part in that system, for they "were viewed as the means of consolidation of property through the marriages of alliance between plantation families, and they gave birth to the inheritors of that property" (130). Obviously, women were also seen as mere pawns in the game of

capitalism. In the figure of Vera Louise, Morrison shows that the unhomely pervades not only the homes of Blacks, but of other marginalized groups as well, one of which are women. Here, the unhomely is symbolized by the main master of society, the white slave owner, as the epitome of the colonial rule within America. In a violent act of excommunication, Vera's father does "an appropriate thing: slap Vera Louise into the serving table" (141). The presentation of Vera's beating as being an appropriate sanction for her relationship with a slave shows the corruption of morality under the rule of capitalism, where Vera Louise has become unusable as a means of production.

Originally, Vera Louise had planned to give her child away because as a white woman with a mulatto child she would have faced complete ostracism in society. But after he is born, it turns out to be "completely golden" (148), and thus being able to pass him for white, she names and keeps him. Although Golden Gray grows up adored by Vera Louise and True Belle, he nevertheless is a motherless child. In his own account of his childhood, he not once refers to Vera Louise as his mother. He calls the two women in the house "the whitewoman and the cook" (149), thereby defining them merely as to their physiognomy and their role in the household. He does not develop a mother-son relationship with the whitewoman and is admired by Vera Louise and True Belle solely for the peculiar golden color of his hair and skin. They give him the name "Golden Gray" so as to manifest and stabilize his white identity. Thus not given an identity apart from his beautiful whiteness, Golden must experience the opening of a great gap inside of him when this whiteness is taken away from him by True Belle who reveals to him the identity of his father. The revelation shatters his essentialist view of race and forces him to rethink: "True Belle just smiled, and now he knew what she was smiling about, the nigger. But so was he. He had always thought there was only one kind – True Belle's kind. Black and nothing. Like Henry LesTroy. Like the filthy woman snoring on the cot. But there was another kind – like himself" (149).

Morrison's rendition of the passing narrative obviously destabilizes the logic of essential and received racial categories. According to Valerie Smith, "The light-skinned black body [...] both invokes and transgresses the boundaries between the races [...] It indicates a contradiction between appearance and 'essential' racial identity within a system of racial distinctions based upon differences presumed to be visible" (qtd. in Bouson, 178). Morrison's destabilizing of essential racist identities is voiced by the Hunter's Hunter who tells Golden: "Be what you want – white or black. Choose. But if

you choose black, you got to act black, meaning draw you manhood up – quicklike, and don't bring me no whiteboy sass" (173).

Golden Gray's internal conflict between his black and white identity materializes outside of himself in his encounter with the quintessential Black Other – Wild. Morrison's rendition of this encounter is to be read both as an individual's coming to face his own racial shame, and as a historicization of the first encounter between the black and the white race in the New World. Her account of that encounter is given from many different angles, so as to present the subjectivity of historical discourse.

He is eighteen when he learns about his African heritage and the sudden intrusion of the despicable savageness into his life leaves him furious and determined to find his father and kill him, since he is the reason for his disgrace. By killing his Black parent, Golden might hope to kill the Black inside himself, the only connection between him and the dark race. On his literal and metaphorical quest for his black identity, he encounters Wild, described by him as "a naked berry-black woman. She is covered with mud and leaves are in her hair. Her eyes are large and terrible" (144). His first impression is one mixed between sexual desire and fearful repulsion. Her description in terms of berries recalls the saying "The blacker the berry, the sweeter the fruit", which is charged with sexual innuendo. At the same time, Golden is repulsed by her terrible eyes. Wild runs away, apparently scared to death by his whiteness, and in the process she is knocked out: "Her terror is so great her body flees before her eyes are ready to find the route of escape" (144).

Golden himself is afraid of the girl's blackness, perceiving it as something dirty and potentially lethal: "He leans down, holding his breath against infection or odor or something. Something that might touch or penetrate him" (144). Gray's nausea and disgust at the sight of Wild point to the pathology of racism that manifests itself not only inside the oppressed but also in the oppressor itself. As Homi Bhabha puts it: "The stir of emancipation comes with the knowledge that the racially supremacist belief 'that under every dark skin there was a jungle' was a belief that grew, spread, touched, every perpetrator of the racist myth" (Bhabha 16). Indeed, Wild stirs Golden's fear of the jungle underneath, the unknown, the unknowable. For him this unknown is particularly problematic, since it is a part of him as well, which is why he is simultaneously appalled and attracted. His ambiguous reaction to the eruption of the ultimate Other into his life – both literally and metaphorically – refers back to his own state of mind. According to

Toni Morrison, “the subject of the dream is the dreamer. The fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary meditation on the self. [...] It is an astonishing revelation of longing, of terror, of perplexity, of shame, of magnanimity” (Morrison, 1993 17). Here, Morrison refers to the dominant rendition of the new American man in fiction. In the greatest part of American fiction, so Morrison theorizes, the immigrant in the New World of the novel is identified in opposition to an invisible, yet abiding, presence of the racial other. The new American man is presented as a deliberate construction by means of establishing a racial difference against which he is to be defined. Thus, “this Africanism, deployed as rawness and savagery, that provided the staging ground and arena for the elaboration of the quintessential American identity” (Morrison, 1993, 44). This process is signified through the figure of Golden Gray, whose quintessential American identity consists of his being Golden and light, as opposed to the Black Otherness represented by Wild. By learning about his mixed race, Golden Gray’s assumed stable identity collapses, he is made “loose, lost” (159) and he sets out to kill that person that is responsible for shattering his safe home within himself.

The encounter between Golden and Wild is presented from different angles, making it the most consciously narrated episode in the novel. In a manner typical for post-modern literature, the passage is extremely self-reflexive as to the role of the author. The narrator, starting out omniscient in the rendition of the event, even bursts into the narrative to question her ability to give a correct account: “I like to think of him that way” (150). By bringing her own bias into the narrative, the narrator admits to her constructing the story in a certain way, to make it end in a way she can agree with. After disliking Golden Gray at the outset of the scene, describing him as self-centered cold “gentlemen” more concerned with his horse than with the injured woman, she finds herself sympathizing with his trauma: “How could I have imagined him so poorly? Not noticed the hurt that was not linked to the color of his skin, or the blood that beat beneath it. But to some other thing that longed for authenticity, for a right to be in this place” (160). The hurt that the narrator now recognizes inside Golden Gray is the trauma of his paternal loss. He is the only character in the novel that openly mourns the lack of a parent, and the only one whose lack is the father and not the mother.

In Golden Gray’s monologue of grief and rage at the loss of his father, Morrison thematizes the aim of *Jazz* itself: “to heal the collective body stricken by memory that has not been worked through” (Grewal, 119). Gray imagines his absent father as an

amputated arm. Before he learned about the existence of his father, he did not feel the pain but assumed it was the norm only to have one arm. But now he feels the loss: “Only now, he thought, now that I know I have a father, do I feel his absence: the place where he should have been and was not” (158). Golden can only heal after he has acknowledged the horrendous pain inflicted by the amputation of the arm, just like Violet and Joe have to acknowledge and relive the loss of their mothers and the intrusion of the unhomely into their lives. Morrison here signifies upon the need for the African-American community, the body, to acknowledge its traumatic past, defined by economic dispossession, psychological trauma and displacement. She does not ask for the healing of the trauma, though, only wants its memory to be freshened so that something new can grow out of it:

I am not going to be healed, or to find the arm that was removed from me. I am going to freshen the pain, point it, so we both know what it is for. [...] I will locate it so the severed part can remember the snatch, the slice of the disfigurement. Perhaps then the arm will no longer be a phantom, but will take its own shape, grow its muscle and bone, and its blood will pump from the loud singing that has found the purpose of its serenade. Amen (159).

The serenade, a music piece performed in honor of or to express love for someone, is the narrative of loss and trauma in the African American body that needs to continue loud and clear. It will keep the pain fresh and prevent the flesh from scarring, thus concealing the wound. The trauma of unhomeliness, the “inside nothing”, will thus stay tangible but in the process will lose its power to paralyze. In Morrison’s vision, the serenade of pain and loss will bring the traumatized black body back to life.

Golden Gray’s ceremonial conjuring up of the demons of the past foreshadows the process Joe and Violet will have to face after they try to escape them to Harlem.

4.4 History’s Over – Harlem and the Myth of the New Negro

“Let us smother all the wrongs we have endured. [...] Let us forget the past” writes one essayist in Alain Locke’s anthology *The New Negro*, and this plea is symptomatic for the mindset of African Americans during and after the Great Migration. Traumatized by slavery, economic dispossession and racial violence, the temptation of the escape north was mainly to leave all that behind and start anew, with a clean slate. According to Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in his essay *The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of*

the Image of the Black, the metaphor of the New Negro embodied both “an eighteenth-century vision of utopia with a nineteenth-century idea of progress to form a black end-of-the-century dream of an unbroken, unhabituated, neological self” (Gates, 132). Thus, this myth follows exactly the rules of a modern world-view demanding constant evolution and progress towards a higher state of being. In the case of the African American, this evolution demanded a looking forward and moving away from the past – at the cost of self-negation, by “turning away from the ‘Old Negro’ and the labyrinthine memory of black enslavement” (Gates, 132). The process and effect of this self-negation is shown by Toni Morrison in the characters of Violet and Joe Trace. Their journey from the rural South to metropolitan Harlem indeed represents a move away from the Old Negro and towards the New Negro. According to Gates, this transformation constituted the real meaning of “Reconstruction” for African Americans, the erasure of the negative “Sambo” image of Blacks that was connected to the uneducated, rural strata of the Black population: “The ignorant, uncivilized and empty-handed man of 1865 has become a man of culture, a man of great force and a man of independence. We shall have to look to this man to complete the great work of reconstruction” (Williams qtd. in Gates, 148). The sophisticated urban philosophers look with shame down upon the simple rural migrants and like the city, urge them to leave their country ways behind. In Morrison’s Harlem, forgetfulness comes easy in the face of the city’s modern grandeur which makes the pleasures of the country seem simple and small: “He forgets a sun that used to slide up like the yolk of a good country egg, thick and red-orange at the bottom of the sky, and he doesn’t miss it, doesn’t look up to see what happened to it or to stars made irrelevant by the light of thrilling wasteful street lamps” (35). Just as the rural newcomers replace the country’s natural sky lights for the city’s artificial street light that seem to outshine them, they replace their simple but traumatized country identity with the artificial construct of the New Negro. With the erasure of their past comes the erasure of a big part of Black identity, as exemplified in Violet and Joe, with disastrous consequences. Since it covers up the trauma of the Southern past, the City carries on and solidifies the de-construction of Black identity.

According to critic Anne-Marie Paquet-Deyris, “the metropolis in 1926 is a vast receptacle of actual, historical, vocal, and memorial traces” (219). In Morrison’s Harlem, this receptacle is covered by an almost impenetrable shiny layer that has to be removed. The protagonists have to recognize these memorial traces, for their spiritual survival is at stake. At this zero point in African American history, somewhere between

the end of something old and the beginning of something new, their identities have to be negotiated against the vast modern force of the urban space. At this time of the celebration of newness, there is likely to occur a tug and pull between the forces propelling them forward and those pulling them back to the past that constituted much of their traumatized identities: “the Harlem Renaissance might also be seen as a time of rupture, when ‘newness’ became a cultural dominant that marked not only progress but trauma” (Peterson 207). This rupture is visualized by Morrison in the trope of cracks Violet stumbles into on several occasions.

In *Jazz*, Morrison examines the cost of the New Negro myth for the rural migrants. Her vision of Harlem is ambivalent. On the one hand she criticizes its space as being covertly colonial while posing as the quintessential post-colonial refuge for the oppressed Southerners. On the other hand, she values its providing space for improvisation. As opposed to the overtly violent space in the South, Harlem actually allows for transgressions off its controlling tracks. Yet, for its inhabitants to start building a place of their own, to emancipate themselves from the colonizing power, they have to open up the traumatized space of their mind for memory to take place. Again, she calls for remembrance of the traumatic past in order to heal the Black soul and body. Only through memory can unhomeliness be transcended.

Violet and Joe willingly answer the city’s call for self-negation, since their selves are connected to the unspeakable pain and horror of earlier days. Lured into the City with the promise of freedom and economic opportunities, the migrant couple on the train to Harlem has the illusion of dancing, yet in reality their feet are already controlled by the plan the City has laid out for them:

They weren’t even there yet and already the City was speaking to them. They were dancing. And like a million others, chests pounding, tracks controlling their feet, they stared out the windows for first sight of the City that danced with them, proving already how much it loved them. Like a million more they could hardly wait to get there and love it back (Morrison 32).

Here, Morrison depicts the irresistible force with which Harlem captures the hopes and hearts of the migrants desperate to escape the oppression of their home towns in the South. It mirrors the excitement of Joe and Violet, who imagine the city dancing with them. Already, Harlem is much more than just a city, an urban backdrop for the story of the Traces, it is rather another character, arguably the one pulling the strings in their

transformation from their traumatized rural into their sophisticated urban self. It teaches them to love their “stronger, riskier selves” so much that “they forget what loving other people was like” (33). They have to leave the controlling tracks of the city to find their own way, their own pace. Only when they stop dancing to the rhythm of Harlem can they begin dancing with each other.

The City is deceptive and blinds the newcomers – and the narrator – with its splendor. Here, it is not necessary to cope, one is bedazzled by “the wide streets and the wasteful lamps lighting them” (33) and does not have to think about the shadow. It is as though the artificial lighting in the City fills the minds of the present and erases the shadows the past might cast. The wide streets lighted by the street lamps offer an illusion of freedom and limitless space. In the South, Blacks had only been able to experience space and freedom in the seclusion of the wilderness, in Harlem they are promised freedom within the confines of society. Yet, the City is putting up a performance for the newcomers in order to outdo the country in its spectacle:

I have seen the City do an unbelievable sky. [...] It can empty itself of surface, and more like the ocean than the ocean itself, go deep, starless. [...] Looking at it, this night sky booming over a glittering city, it's possible for me to avoid dreaming what I know is in the ocean, and the bays and tributaries it feeds: the two-seat aeroplanes, nose down in the muck [...] They are down there, along with yellow flowers that eat water beetles and eggs floating away from thrashing fins; along with children who made a mistake in the parents they chose; along with slabs of Carrara pried from unfashionable buildings. (35/36).

Here, the City is clearly a subject, an active protagonist. It produces a sky that hypnotizes, that makes you forget about what is underneath the surface of the ocean. The horrors of death and aborted children buried in the depth of the ocean are as easily overlooked as the horrors of racial violence and dispossession in the depth of the New Negro's past.

The City stages a performance to make its citizens comply with the game of modernity. According to Morrison, the people of Harlem are aware of the trick the City played on them: “he would know right away the deception, the trick of shapes and light and movement, but it wouldn't matter at all because the deception was part of it too” (34). The seductive deception staged by the city of Harlem is depicted rather visually in the city sketch drawn by the narrator: Adding to the picturesque of the urban space is

the way the buildings form a backdrop for the images of music and love taking place in its embrace:

A colored man floats down out of the sky blowing a saxophone, and below him, in the space between two buildings, a girl talks earnestly to a man in a straw hat. He touches her lip to remove a bit of something there. Suddenly she is quiet. He tilts her chin up. They stand there. Her grip on her purse slackens and her head makes a nice curve. The man puts his hand on the stone wall above her head. By the way his jaw moves and the turn of his head I know he has a golden tongue. The sun sneaks into the alley behind them. It makes a nice picture on the way down (8).

In an image recalling magical realism, the floating saxophonist hints at the omnipresence of Jazz in the city, the music that fills the air everywhere you go. In its presence, people seduce and are seduced willingly by golden tongues, words of promise: “It is this collective, interactive reciprocity of sight and sound, a shared space constituted by and constituting human behavior that makes for the narrator’s fascination with the city with a capital C” (Grewal 125). The man in a straw hat knows which words to use to make the girl loosen her grip on the purse, to give up her defense and let herself be seduced by his sweet and cool voice. The purse might well be gone in the end. Likewise, the people in Harlem slacken the grip on their heads and hearts and let themselves be deceived by the sweetness of Jazz and the City, by its promise of freedom and its cooling waters of Lethe washing away the painful memories of the past. The scene stresses the carefully staged visual power of the City. The girl’s neck makes a nice curve, the sun makes a pretty picture, it all adds to the superficial but agreeable flawlessness of the city space.

The first impression of Harlem shows the narrator’s unrestricted enthusiasm:

I’m crazy about this City. Daylight slants like a razor cutting the buildings in half. In the top half I see looking faces and it’s not easy to tell which are people, which the work of stonemasons. Below is shadow where any blasé thing takes place: clarinets and lovemaking, fists and the voices of sorrowful women (7).

It is significant that the City’s physical architecture, as well as the architecture of its society, is horizontally divided into the “top half” and what is “below”. The people in the top half are residing in the light of the sun. Their complexion resembles marble, clearly they are white. Their position in the light and on the upper floors of the buildings

signifies their position in society. Only they inhabit the upper floors of the business buildings, where they direct the money ruling the world. Truly, the light of success shines on them, they have arrived on top. Below them, in the shadow of their economic success, live the Blacks, as signified by characteristic blues elements such as clarinets and voices of sorrowful women. Yet, Harlem has its way of making people “dream tall” (7), making them buy into its modern illusion of progress and wealth. Its visual spectacle of steel seemingly overcoming the rules of gravity makes Blacks believe that they, as well, can overcome the rules of gravity in American society: “It’s the bright steel rocking above the shade below that does it. When I look over strips of green grass lining the river, at church steeples and into the cream-and-copper halls of apartment buildings, I’m strong. Alone, yes, but top-notch and indestructible” (7). The strong and sturdy architecture of the City represents a stability that is in turn assumed by its population. Like the bright steel that is able to rock above the shade, Blacks assume that the City makes them strong enough to transcend both the shade at the bottom of society and the dark shadow of their past.

Only in passing, the narrator touches on loneliness as a characteristic of urban life, but claims that despite the lack of community, the city dweller can reach the top and be indestructible. Yet, according to urban anthropologist Louis Wirth, “the urbanite does not develop deep personal connections with these people but only interacts with them in terms of their roles. Personal relations become superficial and transitory. Urban life is marked by utilitarianism and efficiency” (qtd. in Palmisano 714). As a consequence of the loss of personal relations, the former solidarity that was based in the folk tradition of the black country people is corroded. As the story of Violet and Joe shows, the lack of community as an effect of urban life does indeed destroy people since it does not offer points of connection and identification in the way that country life does: “Twenty years after Joe and Violet train-danced on into the City, they were still a couple but barely speaking to each other, let alone laughing together or acting like the ground was a dance-hall floor” (36).

The myth of Harlem as a space of unlimited opportunities for the Black population is a simulacrum, a black myth manufactured and upheld by the white dominant culture – a dream constantly deferred. Behind the myth lurks an oppressive history that manages a metamorphosis from rural to urban and remains as stealthy as ever. The overt, violent dispossession that constituted the daily horror in the South, is now replaced by a covert, naturalized form of dispossession that fakes opportunity and

thus even gains the support of the oppressed. Thus naturalized, the myth of Harlem gets perpetuated and ultimately accepted as a reality: “everything you want is right where you are: the church, the store, the party, the women, the men, the postbox (but no high schools), the furniture store, street newspaper vendors, the bootleg houses (but no banks)...” (10). Harlem sells the illusion of freedom, but still within the oppressive system that hides the real opportunities for social and economic mobility, education and finance, from the oppressed. It is indeed the northern type of unhomeliness, if we remember that unhomeliness refers to the everyday denial of freedom.

Indeed, after the short period of the Harlem Renaissance, poverty was worse in Harlem than in any other part of New York. Even Alain Locke, the optimistic promoter of the New Negro philosophy, admits that “the rosy enthusiasms and hopes of 1925 ... were cruelly deceptive mirages” (qtd. in Osofsky 187). It goes to show that the theories being thought up by the “smart ones”, the urban intellectual elite, are not fit for the realities of the uneducated rural poor streaming into the City, following the gospel of the New Negro. Locke’s experience of disappointment might well be the general experience of the New Negro in Harlem, at least it is mirrored in Morrison’s account of the lives of Joe and Violet Trace.

4.4.1 Cracks in the Mask – Violet in Harlem

For Violet, the escape of her choice would have been Baltimore. Having internalized the glorious stories her grandmother told her about that City, it embodied the ultimate relief from the traumatizing dispossessions of her childhood: “Baltimore, where she said all the houses has separate rooms and water came to you – not you to it. Where colored men worked harbors for \$2.50 a day [...]” (106). Moreover, her dreams were certainly influenced by her love for Golden Gray, the boy that lighted up True Belle’s life in Baltimore. Violet’s desire to be with him, even to be him – although he had left Baltimore a long time ago – fueled her desire to move to his homestead. Therefore, she was initially disappointed at the prospect of going to New York, but the City made sure it won her over right away and convinced her that “perfect was not the word. It was better than that” (107). The City offers a genuine opportunity to move upward on the social ladder, and after less than modest beginnings in the Tenderloin district of Harlem, Violet is able to butt “their way out of the Tenderloin district into a spacious uptown apartment promised to another family by sitting out the landlord, haunting his doorway”

(23). This shows Violet's determination and strength when it comes to make a home for herself and Joe.

The years of being encultured her grandmother's beauty ideal of blond hair have left Violet forever yearning to be near that kind of beauty, as if by proximity she could obtain it herself. The image of Golden Gray is always present, guiding Violet's life still in the City:

Maybe that is why Violet is a hairdresser – all those years of listening to her rescuing grandmother, True Belle tell Baltimore stories. The years with Miss Vera Louise in the fine stone house on Edison street, where the linen was embroidered with blue thread and there was nothing to do but raise and adore the blond boy who ran away from them depriving everybody of his carefully loved hair (17).

It is important to note that both Violet and Joe achieve a better social status by working in the beauty industry. Thus, Morrison again subtly points both to the superficiality of life in Harlem and to the beauty standard the Traces are working towards. Indeed, the beauty industry was among the most flourishing and profitable businesses in Harlem at the time, with beauticians like A'lelia Walker gaining unprecedented fame and wealth among Negroes, and especially women. This success came at a price though. "The Mecca of the New Negro" was operated very much under the rules of white hegemony, the efforts to approximate whiteness prove the power of that hegemony. Still, self-worth and self-love were displaced onto an unattainable standard of beauty, which paradoxically led to an unprecedented Negro success for those who were willing and able to exploit it. The industry's main source of profit, hair straightening and skin brighteners point to the hierarchy of the races and the power of gradations of color prevailing in Harlem. Violet is a far cry from the ranks of those famous beauticians who ruled the social world of Harlem. Rather, Morrison stays true to her aim of portraying the histories of ordinary people that are not mentioned in any traditional renditions of Harlem, thus Violet is a beautician without a license, a small-business woman who "can only charge twenty-five or fifty cents anyway" (13). Moreover, her city job as a beautician has taken a toll on her bodily strength. An outward sign of the City's degenerative power, "twenty years of doing hair in the City had softened her arms and melted the shield that once covered her palms an fingers" (92). Also, the hips she had once been proud of have withered as a result of the urban comfort of the last twenty years. Violet's physical demise is mirrored symbolically in her parrot that has "wings

grown stiff from disuse and dull in the bulb light of an apartment with no view to speak of” (93). Thus, Morrison’s *City* deconstructs Violet even on a physical level, yet the more damaging effects lie underneath the surface.

On the outside, Joe and Violet have come a long way from their impoverished roots in the South. They live in a nice apartment in a nice part of town, they have their own businesses and strive further to make a nice living. Yet, underneath their shiny New Negro surface, both of them show signs of trauma they have to work hard to keep in check. Violet needs to keep herself busy in order to keep “the seep of rage” from bubbling to the surface, “Molten. Thick and slow-moving. Mindful and particular about what in its path it chooses to bury” (16). Violet works hard at repressing her memory, or at least the symptoms of it: “it is impossible to have nothing to do, no sequence of errands, list of tasks. She might wave her hand in the air or tremble if she can’t put her hand to something with another chore just around the bend from the one she is doing” (15). But try as she might, the signs of her repressed trauma start showing anyway and point to the fragmentation, or de-construction of her identity.

Violet’s fragmented self is symbolized by Morrison via the trope of “cracks”. She displays cracks on her well-polished outside, as well as on her inside. On her outside, the cracks point to the crumbling of her New Negro mask: “I call them cracks because that is what they were. Not openings or breaks, but dark fissures in the globe light of the day. [...] Closely examined it shows seams, ill-glued cracks and weak places beyond which is anything. Anything at all” (22/23). The globe light symbolizes the smooth outside Violet has put on to perform the New Negro persona. Yet, her smooth shell is beginning to show flaws that reveal that underneath its surface lurks the horror of Violet’s past. It is assumed that what you see on her outside reflects her inside, “that at the curve where the light stops is a solid foundation. Yet, in truth, there is no foundation at all, but alleyways, crevices one steps across all the time” (22/23). Underneath Violet’s New Negro mask, there is no foundation upon which to build a solid identity. The cracks in her mask reveal the cracks in her consciousness, the “inside nothing” she has been carrying with her since her mother’s suicide. Everyday humiliations, the intrusion of history that constitutes Bhabha’s unhomeliness have deconstructed her sense of self. Moreover, Violet’s cracks are a symbolic repetition of the well her mother jumped into. The *City*’s display of cracks is Morrison’s way of showing how Violet’s trauma of the well has now caught up with her in her new urban environment. She thought she had escaped the well when she fell in love with Joe, but

the City cracks show that it calls for more drastic measures to keep Violet from getting sucked into the hole. The hole also represents the lack of knowledge about the event itself. Dori Laub describes the traumatic event as “an event in which ‘no trace of a registration of any kind is left in the psyche, instead, a void, a whole is found’” (qtd. in Caruth 6). Thus, her mother’s suicide itself quite literally left Violet with a crack in her mind. It fails to register in her mind until it repeats itself, or recurs otherwise, at a later point in her life.

Once in the City, Violet covers up her traumatized self with the mask of the New Negro and ends up showing symptoms of a split identity: “She wakes up in the morning and sees with perfect clarity a string of small, well-lit scenes. In each one something specific is being done: food things, work things; customers and acquaintances are encountered, places entered. But she does not see herself doing these things, she sees them being done” (22). Violet’s feeling of being outside of herself is symptomatic for trauma victims and points to a dissociative state of mind. “Dissociation reflects a horizontally layered model of mind: when a subject does not remember a trauma, its ‘memory’ is contained in an alternate stream of consciousness, which may be subconscious or dominant consciousness, e.g., during traumatic reenactments” (van der Kolk and van der Hart, 168). In Violet’s case, the traumatic memory is contained in the mind of *that* Violet, the strong country Violet determined to reclaim her loved one from the grip of the golden child. Violet and *that* Violet coexist in her mind, her City persona usually dominant and her country persona usually subconscious, except when she steps into the cracks the City lays out for her, “like the time when, instead of putting her left heel forward, she stepped back and folded her legs in order to sit in the street” (23). Her inappropriate behavior signifies a rising to the surface of the dissociated part of her fragmented psyche which temporarily disable her to function in the modern City of Harlem, “the traumatic southern past has become somatic” (Grewal 126).

“Between the banal act of freedom and its historic denial rises the silence” (Bhabha 15). Indeed, Violet goes silent in the City. Afraid of the things that might come out of her mouth, with her “renegade tongue yearning to be on its own” (24), Violet retreats to an almost complete silence, since she fears she might lose her love as a consequence of her craziness:

I got quiet because the things I couldn’t say were coming out of my moth anyhow. I got quiet because I didn’t know what my hands might get up to

when the day's work was done. The business going on inside me I thought was none of my business and none of Joe's either because I just had to keep hold of him any way I could and going crazy would make me lose him (97).

Apart from physical reactions, Violet's cracks threaten to rise to the surface via language. The "anything-at-all" lurking underneath her mask first begins to form in her mouth and when she opens it, "Words connected only to themselves pierced an otherwise normal comment" (23). Violet's seemingly unconnected utterances serve as examples of what Homi Bhabha calls 'colonial nonsense'. This term describes the inefficiency of the colonizer's language to convey the experience of the colonized. The colonizer's language is fit for dominant discourse at the cultural center, yet fails when used to express the experience at the cultural margin. In Violet's uttering of words connected only to themselves lies Morrison writing of cultural difference, the "enunciatory disorder of the colonial present". Violet anticipates the intrusion of Dorcas into her marriage before Joe has even met the girl: "Got a mind to double it with an aught and two or three others just in case who is that pretty girl standing next to you?" (24). Her enunciatory disorder is linguistic as well as chronological and mirrors the "narrative uncertainty of the culture's in-between: between sign and signifier [...]" (Bhabha 126/127). Thus, Morrison uses words in a way to undermine the dominance of the hegemonic discourse and point to the unspeakable nature of the unhomely: "[these words] are the inscriptions of an uncertain colonial silence that mocks the social performance of language with their non-sense; that baffles the communicable verities of culture with their refusal to translate" (Bhabha 124). This non-sense signifies to the unspeakable nature of the horrors endured. Yet it also opens the door to the articulation of cultural difference and the formation of identity at the margins of the dominant culture, at the time of the in-between, the beyond that signifies the ending of something old and the beginning of something new. For Morrison, this in-between space seems to be Harlem, a space still under the rule of the white hegemony, yet providing opportunity for improvisation, here in form of the signification of colonial non-sense. Violet's "cultural identity, the ability to put the right word at the right place at the right time" (Bhabha, 125) is at stake every time she opens her mouth to speak, because the cultural trauma she has endured has displaced that identity.

Morrison's notion of the cultural in-between is also embodied in her trope of cracks. Besides being a signifier of Violet's traumatic disorder manifesting itself in a

fragmented identity, the cracks moreover point to the linguistic impossibility to express the space “between sign and signifier”. The cracks, or the in-between, recall Derrida’s notion of the rupture occurring “in the history of the concept of structure” (Derrida, 117), a rupture that allows for freeplay, as “the disruption of presence” (Derrida, 118). Derrida claims that human existence has no stable center or fixed meaning, as western metaphysics would have you believe, but rather it is determined by discourse itself. He destabilizes Cartesian thought by rendering the concept itself open to discursive freeplay. By uttering colonial non-sense, Violet participates in freeplay herself and thus destabilizes the colonizer’s hegemonic discourse by making visible its limitations. It is when “Violet shuts up” that her marriage falls apart: “But the quiet. I can’t take the quiet. She don’t hardly talk anymore, and I ain’t allowed near her” (49). For Morrison, the only thing more harmful than the historical trauma is the silence surrounding it. In the space of sound, in language as well as music, oppressed people find a way to form a community and heal the communal body. In the space of silence, everybody is on their own and the repressed history keeps governing their beings.

Morrison’s trope of cracks is as ambivalent as her attitude towards the City. On the one hand, it symbolizes Violet’s traumatized state of being and therefore reflects back to the horrors endured in her childhood. On the other hand, it is only from the space in the cracks, the cultural in-between, that Violet can begin signifying, resisting the hegemonic discourse via the use of colonial non-sense. Consequently, Morrison is able to transform the paralyzing space of the cracks into an affirming space of cultural freeplay, which is the starting point for passing “beyond man and humanism, the name man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology – in other words, through the history of all of his history – has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, thru origin and the end of the game” (Derrida, 119). Derrida here describes an anti-modernism similar to that of Bhabha and evidently Morrison herself. Again, in a reversal of modern spatial values, Violet stepping into the City’s cracks is a prerequisite for her eventual transcendence of the limitations of modern metaphysics and thus the limitations of colonial space. Morrison describes the incredible resilience of the human spirit, which in Violet’s case assumes a life of its own, making her New Negro surface crack, making her stumble into the cracks of the City, in order to heal itself and make her whole again.

Dorcas, the light-skinned girl Joe falls in love with, triggers both Violet’s trauma of internalized racism and her trauma of Matrophobia. Violet’s overwhelming mother

hunger is a result of her matrophobic decision never to have children for fear of turning into her mother. When arriving in the City, her decision gets reinforced, since children would be obstacles for reaching their economic and social goals: “Joe didn’t want babies either so all those miscarriages – two in the field, only one in her bed – were more inconvenience than loss. And citylife would be so much better without them” (107). It is not clear if Violet has indeed miscarried all the children or if she has aborted them intentionally, “washed away on a tide of soap, salt and castor oil” (109). In any case, her maternal trauma catches up with her, and only when it is too late for her to have children “mother hunger had hit her like a hammer. Knocked her down and out” (108). In another episode of public craziness, Violet attempts to steal a baby from another woman, thinking it would fill the void inside of her and ease the pain of unfulfilled maternal desire. The joy Violet connects to the child reflects back to True Belle who described Golden Gray as being like a light in the house:

The memory of the light, however, that had skipped through her veins came back now and then, and once in a while, on an overcast day, when certain corners in the room resisted lamplight; when the beans in the pot seemed to be taking forever to soften, she imagines a brightness that could be carried in her arms. Distributed, if need be, into places dark as the bottom of a well (22)

Like Joe had once replaced Golden Gray as the light of Violet’s life, she imagines a child being able to do the same thing. Violet is not able to provide light and love out of herself, but continuously displaces herself in her desire to be someone else or possess someone else. When Violet is not able to fulfill her maternal desire, the “mother hunger” leaves her in a stasis, a kind of “deep-dreaming” (108), until Dorcas awakens her and puts her into motion.

The slashing of Dorcas “cream-at-the-top-of-the-milkpail face” (12) is Violet’s attempt at exorcising the internalized racism that has paralyzed her for most of her life. Violet’s attitude towards Dorcas is ambivalent in that she despises her for breaking up her marriage, yet at the same time loves her as much as she loved the golden boy and the child she never had: “Who posed there awake in the photograph? The scheming bitch who had not considered Violet’s feelings one tiniest bit, who came into a life, took what she wanted and damn the consequences? Or mama’s dumpling girl? Was she the woman who took the man, or the daughter who fled her womb?” (109). Dorcas triggers her traumatized subconscious, *that* Violet she had abandoned in favor of the New Negro

Violet. In Dorcas she sees the reflection of everything she wants to be: “White. Light. Young again” (208). The girl mirrors Golden Gray, and Joe’s killing her puts Violet into action and she finally tries to rid herself of the blond object of desire, the perfect white image she always desired to attain but never could.

Yet, after the act of violence is committed, Violet first becomes obsessed with the object of Joe’s desire and in an attempt to know her, be close to her, even *be* her, she takes the picture of the girl into their apartment and thus makes her the center of their existence. Morrison’s description of the apartment offers a powerful symbolism as to the couple’s unhomely existence in the City. The most important rooms of the space, “the dining room, two bedrooms, the kitchen [are] all situated in the middle of the building so the apartment windows have no access to the moon or the light of a street lamp” (12). The narrator has made a big point about the grandeur of the City, its “thrilling wasteful street lamps” (35) and unbelievable night sky that make the simple sunsets and starlit night skies of the country irrelevant. The City’s lighting outshines that of the country and symbolizes the limitless possibilities it offers to its inhabitants. Joe and Violet bought into the City’s glittering generosity, believing they would have the same access to it than everyone else. They abandoned their rural selves for a shot at the big money, the big success, the big life that is possible only in the City. As it turns out, neither the street lamps nor the moon ever shines on them, they are left out of the urban project of progress. They continue residing in the shadow where the light of success does not reach them. Again, the domestic space is the site of the intrusion of racist politics still prevalent in the supposedly post-colonial space of Harlem. Thus cut off from the City’s light, in the darkness of the rooms, Violet and Joe are not able to turn the space into a home for themselves.

In Violet, Dorcas triggers the memory of Golden Gray and her mother’s suicide, in Joe she triggers the shame and pain connected to the identity and absence of his mother. Remembering Cathy Caruth’s definition of trauma as being possessed by an event in the past, the picture of Dorcas comes to symbolize the resurfacing, the presencing of that trauma. Like Dorcas possesses them, so does the actual repressed memory of the unspeakable past. The picture of Dorcas is a symbol for that trauma, and by taking it in to her apartment, Violet has opened the door for the intrusion of traumatic history into their home. The unhomeliness felt in the apartment is not new or brought on by the City, it is the unresolved shadow of the past creeping into the supposedly homely space of the City. After bringing Dorcas’ picture into the house, the

place turns into a cold and gloomy place: “the rooms are like the empty birdcages wrapped in cloth. And a dead girl’s face has become a necessary thing for their nights” (11). The picture is the focus of both their obsession and although it “seems like the only living presence in the house” (11/12), it turns out to be merely a mirror for their respective fears or desires. Joe, who is driven to her by his guilt, looking for absolution, finds it in her face that is “calm, generous and sweet” (12), without any accusation or judgment. Violet, on the other hand, faces the displaced core of her identity in the picture of the new golden child: “You are there, it says, because I am looking at you” (12). Again, in Dorcas, Violet not only sees the rival for the love of her husband, but also the manifestation of the myth of Golden Gray, whom she loves more than she loves herself. Still, Violet is not able to make the connection between Dorcas, Golden Gray and the trauma of racial inferiority that had been passed on to her by True Belle. Violet can remove the picture only after she is able to narrate the unnarrable in her conversations with Alice Manfred.

The talks between the two women give voice to their pain, and as they talk about love and the loss thereof, they sing a blues song of their own and form a communal space for healing. The bluesy encounter between Alice and Violet is the clash of two women who could not possibly be more different: “The woman who avoided the streets let into her living room the woman who sat down in the middle of one” (73). Alice is a woman of the type of *The Bluest Eye*’s Geraldine. These middle class women are so eager to fit into the desired class of whiteness they retain themselves as much as possible to hide or extinguish the stereotypical black “funkiness of passion, the funkiness of the wide range of human emotions” (*Bluest Eye* 64). That is why Alice avoids as much as possible the space where human life takes place in the City: the street. She uses the four walls of her home to shield herself from the danger and dirtiness of what it means to be human. Passion, emotion, violence and crime are all expressed in the omnipresent vibrations of Jazz on the street: “One thing for sure, the streets will confuse you, teach you or break your head. But Alice Manfred wasn’t the kind to give herself reasons to be in the streets. She got through them quick as she could to get back to her house” (73). Interestingly, for Alice Manfred, Harlem seems indeed to represent the quintessential Black space, which is why she has to protect herself for fear of being violated. She fears the atmosphere of freedom of desire and the outbreaks of uncontrolled human emotion that comes with it: “Better to close the windows and the shutters, sweat in the summer heat of a silent Clifton place apartment that to risk a

broken window or a yelping that might not know where or how to stop” (59). Alice’s apartment is filled with a toxic silence. Instead of getting real news about real people from gossip observation on the street, she gets them from the silent medium of print. She keeps “newspapers stacked neatly along the baseboard in her bedroom” (72), as if she could contain and thereby control the irrationality and violence of human behavior in an orderly stack of dry paper. Just as contained as the emotions of the outside world are her own. Alice has her own share of trauma from a man who left her for another woman. Humiliated by the “hussy” who took her man, she still swallowed her anger, not allowing herself to be “wild” and uncivilized. Yet, underneath her neatly ordered façade burns an anger that lets her thirst for blood: “And maybe after galloping through seven months of nights on a horse she neither owned nor knew how to ride, over the twitching, pulpy body of a woman [...] – maybe she would have done something wild” (86). Alice never lived out her vision of revenge, never was an armed woman. Her husband dies before Alice can take action and this unfulfilled desire in her past has paralyzed her into a “bitter death-in-life” (Page 161). Her anger over her sexually unfaithful husband is turned in a sort of reverse logic into an exceptionally strict moral and sexual code she also imposes upon Dorcas. For fear of catching the spark of violence that seems to go around in the City, she is a prisoner of her own fear: “Seeded in childhood, watered every day since, fear had sprouted through her veins all her life” (85). Things change for Alice when violence finds a way into her sheltered life in the form of Dorcas’ murder and in the form of *Violent* herself. When Violet disturbs the funeral, it stirs Alice’s repressed emotions and “little by little, feelings [...] returned. Chief among them was fear and –a new thing – anger” (75). Whereas fear is a passive emotion that keeps her paralyzed and isolated, the anger brought on by Joe and Violet’s violence brings her back to life. Violet is the madwoman who picked up a knife to kill her husband’s already dead mistress, a deed echoing the bluesy attitude of a woman ready to go any length to fight for her man. For Alice, Violet is a Negro of “the embarrassing kind” (79), bootblack and dangerous, having in her residues of the uncivilized country: “a brutal woman black as soot known to carry a knife” (75). When she lets Violet into her prison, it allows both women to recover pieces of themselves that had been hidden in their subconscious.

Dori Laub claims that “[t]here is, in each survivor, an imperative to *tell* and thus to come to *know* one’s story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself” (qtd. in Caruth, 63). The unusual alliance of Alice and Violet only

proves the power of that imperative, which allows for trauma victims to start the healing process. Both women have been caught up in the toxic silence they imposed upon themselves, eager to fit into the social roles the City had prepared for them. In Alice's apartment they create a healing space that allows both of them to voice their pain and thus reclaim their history from the hands of the oppressor. In the form of vernacular Blues, the hurting women form their own discourse, which cannot be understood or intruded by white man. Thus, Violet and Alice overcome the silence of the quiet apartment by creating their own homely space in the dialogue of Blues.

Violet's torn up identity is mirrored in her outward appearance when she shows up at Alice's place. Obsessed with neatness and a flawless look, Dorcas' aunt takes it upon herself to mend her clothes: "Alice was irritated by the thread running loose from her sleeve, as well as the coat lining ripped in at least three places she could see. Violet sat in her slip with her coat on, while Alice mended the sleeve with the tiniest stitches" (82). Alice's mending of Violet's clothes is symbolic for the healing process. While fixing her outside appearance, Alice offers Violet much more, she helps her mend her cracks and sort out her true identity. For Violet, Alice assumes the role of mother figure and thus fills her inside nothing that is the source of her fragmented identity. In Alice's presence, she has a foundation from which to negotiate her life. In their conversations, Violet finally figures out the meaning of unhomeliness. She comes to recognize that there is nothing more to life than what she has, prompting her to ask: "Is that it? Is that all there is?" In the face of her own longing, her craving for more than this little life caught up in the machinery of progress and her inability to get there, always wanting more, she comes to realize the continuous frustration her mother had to endure: "Mama. Mama? Is this where you got to and couldn't do it no more? The place of shade without trees where you know you are not and never again will be loved by anybody who can choose to do it? Where everything is over but the talking?" (110). The "place of shade without trees" recalls the narrator's description of the City, in which the Negroes live below, in the shade of the skyscrapers symbolizing the economic and social superiority of the white people. In that space, Violet feels an unspeakable loneliness, a feeling of being unclaimed.

Like a Blues or Jazz piece embraces breaks as a way to speak the unspeakable or ends on a blue note without resolving the harmony, so does Violet acknowledge the unspeakable in the vernacular language of bluesy laughter. Violet and Alice's hurt is not undone during their conversation, but is resolved into laughter: "In no time laughter was

rocking them both. [...] laughter is serious. More complicated, more serious than tears” (113). In the face of incredible horror – the loss of love, the murder of Dorcas – their laughter is the ultimate act of resistance against the oppression threatening to keep them down. Violet is even able to laugh at herself “trying to do something bluesy, something hep, fumbling the knife, too late anyway” (114). Blues and bluesy laughter are a celebration of the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity, thus Violet transcends the unhomeliness of her life by refusing to let it get her down. Instead of fighting against the cracks in her identity, she embraces them and finds within them a space from which to signify her pain. Thus integrating her trauma into her memory, Violet reconciles her fragmented identity and settles on being that Violet, “the woman [her] mother didn’t stay around long enough to see” (208). After coming to terms with her identity, Violet is able to let go of her obsession with Dorcas and therefore Golden Gray as a symbol of her racial trauma, and she gives the picture of Dorcas back to Alice.

4.4.2 Following the Traces – Joe in Harlem

When Joe and Violet move into the City, they are “running away from something that was constricting and killing them and dispossessing them over and over and over again” (Morrison in Schappell 112). What Morrison described here as the main motivation for the rural Blacks to move North is the desire to escape the unhomely I described in Chapter 2. In the South, Joe migrated from one place to the next in order to escape racist violence and oppression. His way of telling the horrific events through signifying shows that he has distanced himself from it to shield his psyche from the painful memories. He is not able to make the connection between the violent intrusions of unhomeliness into his home and his constant need for change: “That was when Vienna burned to the ground. Red fire doing what white sheets took too long to finish” (126).

For Joe in particular, the City means an escape from the severe shame that is connected to the “indecent speechless lurking insanity” (179) that is his mother. Before learning that Wild is his mother, the notion of living in a city had been inconceivable to Joe: “Piled-up buildings? Cement paths? Me? Not me” (126). But after the comfort and refuge of the wilderness had been contaminated with racial shame and the “inside nothing” that was the absence of his mother, Joe finds the prospect of city life as the extreme opposition to the woods suddenly appealing. Moreover, the myth of the City by and by had reached even the most secluded areas of the country and triggered the hopes

of the rural Blacks to escape their economic frustration and exploitation by the hands of white people. In the City, there are supposed to be “Streets where colored people owned all the stores; whole blocks of handsome colored men and women laughing all night and making money all night” (106). This prospect of economic freedom paired with pleasure and entertainment seemed all the more tempting in the face of rising racist violence in the South.

Joe’s identity is that of a nomad. In effect, every time he is traumatized he not only migrates through physical, but also through mental space. For Joe, the transition into an urbanite is just one change among many in his life, since his way of dealing with trauma in his life consists in adapting: “Before I met her I’d changed into new seven times. [...] You could say I’ve been a new Negro all my life” (123, 129). Where Violet splits her identity into two, urban Violet and *that* Violet, Joe completely changes identities, making himself into new every time. This way, he hopes to leave the pain behind and start fresh, with a clean slate. Yet, as Morrison efficiently shows, it is not possible to escape the pain, it will catch up with you at the point when you stop moving. In the case of *Jazz*, “to move from the rural South to the city North, [...], is seemingly to move to a new position on the shame-pride axis” (Bouson 167).

Coming to the City, Joe abandons his hunter identity and changes into a business man to comply with the role the City demanded of him. Although Morrison’s vision of Harlem is more heterogeneous than the traditional view of a Mecca for the New Negro, Violet and Joe nevertheless are able to achieve significant economic success that allows them to better their living situation progressively:

[...] we left the stink of Mulberry Street and Little Africa, then the flesh-eating rats on West Fifty-third and moved uptown. [...] When we moved from 104th Street to a bigger place on Lenox, it was the light-skinned renter who tried to keep us out. Me and Violet fought them, just like they was whites. We won (127).

What Morrison describes through the distanced vision of Joe is a new, urban form of unhomeliness that nevertheless disables the couple to find a sense of peace and security in a home of their own. Remembering Homi Bhabha’s notion that “the violence of a racialized society falls most enduringly on the details of life: where you can sit, or not; how you can live, or not” (Bhabha 15), it becomes clear that Morrison’s vision of Harlem is a far cry from the monolithic liberated Black space it was made to be in

countless accounts of the Harlem Renaissance. By focusing on the lives of regular working and middle-class citizens of Harlem, Morrison is able to show that it is governed by the same rules as the rest of the nation but manages to keep up the myth of the Black Mecca.

Indeed, racial violence catches up with the couple in Harlem and Joe almost gets killed in a riot. At the end of the 19th century, Harlem had been a desirable neighborhood with nice apartment buildings and homes inhabited by whites. Only the depression in the early 20th century forced the landlords to make the space available to Black tenants. By 1910, Harlem had become a largely Black neighborhood, but it did not mean the white population was content with it: "I don't know exactly what started the riot. [...] they sent out invitations to whites to come see a colored man burn alive. Gistan said thousands of whites turned up. [...] Crackers in the South mad cause Negroes were leaving; crackers in the North mad cause they were coming" (128).

Morrison's ambivalence about Harlem is expressed in rivaling feelings of pain and joy in Joe. The same City that is socially and economically restrictive and allows for the occurrence of lynching-like riots, at the same time provides an unprecedented freedom of expression of Black pride and cultural celebration. This ambivalence goes to show that the City is not in and of itself hostile or welcoming, but that it is the mental state of its inhabitants that is reflected in either a City that dances or a City that deceives. Space can only be free for people whose mind is free, and not stuck in an unresolved trauma of the past. Joe experiences this potential freedom in a particular way in the streets of Harlem. After World War II, Joe finds a joyous community among fellow Blacks celebrating the 369th Infantry Regiment, an all-black regiment that was the first Allied regiment to reach the Rhine River: "Can't remember no time when I danced in the street but that one time when everybody did. [...] the colored troops of the three six nine that fought it made me so proud it split my heart in two. [...] I had it made. In 1925 we all had it made" (129). He thinks he has it made, until Violet starts sleeping with the dolls. Yet, abiding the rule of the New Negro myth that history is over, they had never told each other the traumatizing memories of their past but had repressed them. In the silence that built up between them, they drifted apart and when their respective pasts catch up with them, they are so isolated they have to look for community elsewhere.

When he starts the affair with Dorcas, he does not recognize that he is still controlled by the past he thought he had escaped. He believes in the myth of free choice in the City, that he is able to love whom he wants, since he has overcome the overtly

oppressive conditions of the South: “because he selected that young girl to love, he thinks he is free. [...] free to do something wild” (120). Yet, this freedom is part of the game of deception the City plays so well. Morrison’s narrator gives a powerful account of the ways the City is able to control the ways of its inhabitants:

Take my word for it, he is bound to the track. It pulls him like a needle through the groove of a Bluebird record. Round and round about the town. That’s the way the City spins you. Makes you do what it wants, go where the laid-out roads say to. All the while letting you think you’re free; [...] You can’t get off the track a City lays for you. [...] you always end up back where you started: hungry for the one thing everybody loses – young loving (120).

Indeed, Joe is bound to the track the City apparently has laid out for him. Yet, I would argue that within this track, there is room for improvisation. The narrator compares the ways of the City to the grooves of a Jazz record. But even if the needle stays within this groove, within the piece itself, the musicians are able to improvise upon the musical theme. But in order to improvise, one has to recognize the choices one has, and Joe is not able to do so. His actions are so fully bound to repeat the trauma of maternal abandonment and lead to its resolution, that he has no room for choice at all. In Dorcas, Joe finds a mirror image of his mother. He even describes her as “Wild” (182). And like his mother, Dorcas chooses not to love or be loved by him, she rejects him in favor of someone else. For Joe, this rejection ultimately sets in motion a deadly repetition of his maniacal hunt for his mother, desperate for maternal recognition. The choice to love Dorcas has not been made by Joe the New Negro selling beauty products in the City, but by Joe the Hunter who has not yet resolved the trauma of racial shame and abandonment inflicted upon him by his mother, and moreover, white racist perceptions of her. Having bought into the fabricated myth of freedom, Joe does not realize that he has to free his mind in order to free his actions. The City indeed does not leave him a choice but to find Dorcas, fall in love with her, and repeat and resolve his shame trauma.

“Dorcas” is the Greek word for deer and that is what she turns into in the end. Joe is lead to her on actual tracks, or rather marks on her face he perceives as such: “Little half moons clustered underneath her cheekbones, like faint hoofmarks. [...] Take my little hoofmarks away? Leave me with no tracks at all? In this world, the best thing, the only thing, is to find the trail and stick to it” (130). It is clear that Dorcas triggers

Joe's hunter instinct. Thus, she gives him meaning and direction in an urban environment that is otherwise confusing, like a maze. In the country, Joe had been able to read his environment, especially the woods by their traces of deer, of prey. In the beginning, he sees in her "hoofmarks" the same presence of absence, the inside nothing he has been carrying around with him since the fruitless hunt for his mother. Dorcas triggers his feeling of loss and since she is a motherless child as well, they find in each other a temporary remedy for the pain:

[...] the inside nothing he traveled with from then on, except for the fall of 1925 when he had somebody to tell it to. Somebody called Dorcas with hooves tracing her cheekbones and who knew better than people his own age what that inside nothing was like. And who filled it for him, just as he filled it for her, because she had it too (38).

According to Cathy Caruth, it lies in the nature of the traumatic event itself, that it is not experienced at the moment it actually occurs, but only at the point of its return. It is the latency of the event that let the victim escape apparently unharmed from the extremely overwhelming situation. In this sense, Joe truly did not experience the pain of maternal abandonment until he is able to share it with Dorcas: "I told her things I hadn't told myself" (123). Besides providing a space for communication for Joe that he cannot have with his silent wife, his affair with Dorcas allow him for the first time to make a choice. He had been claimed by Violet under the tree where they met and he had let it happen because he had not been claimed before by anyone, not even his mother. Dorcas is the first person in his life he actually chose to love, and this freedom of choice, to claim someone to love, is for him the ultimate abandonment of unhomeliness: "I chose you. Nobody gave you to me. Nobody said that's the one for you. I picked you out. [...] Don't ever think I fell for you, or fell over you. I didn't fall in love, I rose in it. I saw you and made up my mind. My mind. An I made up my mind to follow you too" (135). This much is true, he made up his mind. But his mind at the time is the same mind that suffered the terrible humiliation in the woods of Virginia, crawling in the mud to get some sign of recognition from his wild mother. History indeed repeats itself, and while Joe thinks he made up his mind to follow Dorcas, at the same time he follows Wild.

Morrison's description of Joe's hunt for Dorcas is a powerful image of a dissociative state of mind, where two of Joe's personas, Joe the hunter and Joe the salesman, perform a parallel act of obsessive traumatic repetition:

[...] he can practically feel Victory at his side when he sets out, armed, to find Dorcas. He isn't thinking of harming her, or, as Hunter had cautioned, killing something tender. She is female. And she is not prey. So he never thinks of that. He is hunting for her though, and while hunting a gun is as natural a companion as Victory" (180).

Morrison clearly shows the intertwinement of past and present as Joe envisions himself hunting with Victory who had been his adopted brother and companion throughout his youth. While Joe the salesman truly does not intend to kill Dorcas, Joe the hunter intends to kill Wild and thus rid himself of the shame trauma that keeps him bound to the track and controlled by subconscious pain he does not even know. He does not possess the memory, it possesses him; and to break free from it means to repeat the event that led to the trauma in the first place, yet come up with an ending that breaks the chain.

Whereas the City at times presents itself as a maze that makes it hard to find one's way to where one needs to go, on this particular occasion, it is a willing accomplice to Joe's hunt: "He stalks through the City and it does not object or interfere" (180). Again, this shows that the City does not actively lay out its tracks for Joe but that it simply mirrors his compulsion to follow his predetermined path. The narrator evokes the image of the grooves of a record: "The streets he walks are slick and black" (181), to emphasize the way Joe is guided through the tracks without a choice of his own. Even the train conspires in the City's scheme: "The train stops suddenly, throwing passengers forward. As though it just remembered that this was the stop where Joe needs to get off if he is going to find her" (181).

His jealousy about Dorcas choice of a "rooster" instead of him brings back memories of Wild, who also had chosen someone else over him: Golden Gray, with whom she shared her cave outside human civilization: "I never have, never would, mistreat one. Never would make a woman live like a dog in a cave. The roosters would. [...] When I find her, I know – I bet my life – she won't be holed up with one of them. His clothes won't be all mixed up with hers" (182). His thoughts, though not vocalized, still belong to the sort of colonial nonsense described by Homi Bhabha. His mingling of colonial past and present signify the impossibility to fully depict either, but the words rather symbolize his mind as "the echochamber of memory" (Bhabha, 126). Like an echo reverberates in the hollow of a cave, Joe's memory reverberates inside the void

that the traumatic event of his maternal abandonment and shame has ripped in his mind. In Bhabha's words, the verbal jumble signifies to Joe's being situated in the "culture's in-between" that is well symbolized by Derrida in his concept of the hymen: "It is neither desire nor pleasure but between the two. Neither future nor present but between the two. It is the hymen that desire dreams of piercing, of bursting in an act of violence that is (at the same time or somewhere inbetween) love and murder" (qtd. in Bhabha, 127).

Morrison represents Joe as being caught in the colonial space of cultural difference that is neither past nor present, and indeed he bursts the hymen in-between in an act of violence that is simultaneously love and murder. The past and present collide when he is looking for Wild: "But where is *she*?" and finds Dorcas: "There she is" (125,127). And in a compulsive act of exorcising the ghosts of the past, Joe has to shoot Dorcas: "But if the trail speaks, no matter what is in the way, you can find yourself in a crowded room aiming a bullet at her heart, never mind it's the heart you can't live without" (130).

What laughter does for Violet, tears do for Joe. After he has killed Dorcas and thereby relived his painful maternal rejection, he can mourn both the loss of Dorcas and of his mother and thus begin to look forward. Both Violet and Joe have made essential steps in not only remembering their history, but creating it in the first place. Instead of the void inside their minds that had been caused by unhomely events to overwhelming to grasp, they have created a history, one that is painful but necessary nonetheless. Only through the knowledge of how they became the people they are, are they able to be whole: "The historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its forgetting that it is first experienced at all" (Caruth 8). Now we know what Golden meant when he talked about the loss of his arm and how he needs to feel the pain to gain meaning out of that loss: "Only now, now that I know I have a father, do I feel his absence: the place where he should have been and was not" (158). The same is true for Joe, only now that he recognizes the loss of his mother can he mourn her and also mourn the shame inflicted upon him. Morrison also evokes the serenade of pain demanded by Golden Gray in order to freshen the pain and keep its memory alive: "Perhaps then the arm will no longer be a phantom, but will take its own shape, grow its muscle and bone, and its blood will pump from the loud singing that has found the purpose of its serenade. Amen" (159). In Joe's case that serenade is the Blues and although he does not sing it,

he *is* it. He incorporates the feeling of the Blues: “Blues man. Black and bluesman. Blacktherefore blue man. Everybody knows your name. Where-did-she-go-and-why man. So-lonesome-I-could-die man. Everybody knows your name” (119). After months of cathartic crying, both Joe and Violet have changed, and so has the City.

4.5 It eases the Pain – Reconciliation

Morrison’s final vision of the City is an optimistic outlook into the future. A far cry from the narrator’s euphoric love song in the beginning of the novel, this one is far more somber and instead of focusing on the manifold skills and artistry the City displays, it shows how the human spirit transcends its tracks. Using the metaphor of deadly winter passing into warm spring, Morrison describes the coming to life of a new way of living, a whole existence for Joe and Violet. Out of the newly awakened pain of the traumatized past grows something new, a sign that the Black body has come back to life, out of the paralysis of forgetting: “Sweetheart. That’s what the weather was called. Sweetheart weather, the prettiest day of the year. And that’s when it started. On a day so pure and steady trees preened. Standing in the middle of a concrete slab, scared for their lives, they preened” (196). By evoking the image of the tree again, Morrison again celebrates the resiliency of the human spirit against adverse circumstances. The tree has overcome the harsh winter and although it is not likely to find the necessary nutrition in the concrete slab it is planted in, it nevertheless is able to grow and display its beauty. Like Wild’s tree that was able to find the energy it needs inside itself, and in light and air, so does this tree. Just like the City trees create their own nurturing environment of whatever little the hostile surroundings can offer, so do Joe and Violet in their apartment on Lenox Avenue. Like Wild transcended her toxic environment and found a home in the generous spirit of nature, in leaves, light and wind, Joe and Violet find a home in each other and make themselves at home in the space of their apartment after the unhomely ghost of Dorcas has been exorcised.

The impression we get of the apartment is quite different from the cold, gloomy space that did not let them sleep at night. Again reading their domestic space as a synecdoche for their state of mind, Joe and Violet have overcome the unhomeliness imposed upon them by the white oppressors and by doing so, have been able to form a sense of intimacy that is the basis for the formation of place. When they came to Harlem, they danced with the City, loving it more than themselves and each other, since it offered them the opportunity to abandon the painful part of their identities for good.

Now, after they have experienced, created and witnessed their own version of history, they dance with each other and rediscover the love for their original selves – *that* Violet and Joe the hunter – that they had originally fallen in love with. They are now able to start the process of reparation and reconciliation. When they had Dorcas' picture in their house, symbolizing their being possessed by their latent trauma, they only communicated with her, not with each other. The apartment, thus also their minds, was closed off to positive vibrations such as light and music from the outside. Now that they have acknowledged their memory, they are able to perceive the world as less menacing, even to see the humor in things: "People are mean. [...] No. Comic is what they are" (214). The intrusion of Felice into their apartment signifies the intrusion of happiness into their lives, for that is what her name means: "Somebody in the house across the alley put a record on and the music floated in to us through the open window. Mr. Trace moved his head to the rhythm and his wife snapped her fingers in time. She did a little step in front of him and he smiled. By and by they were dancing" (214).

"What's the world for if you can't make it up the way you want it?" (208). This question of Violet signifies to the power of discourse to shape the world, in this case to shape history in a way that is meaningful for either the oppressor or the oppressed. After going through the pain and resolving their trauma with tears and laughter, Violet and Joe have come to terms with who they are, and have re-constructed a stable identity for themselves. In return the City has lost its power to dominate, to keep them bound to its tracks. After rejecting the continuation of their historical trauma, they are able to lead their lives in a way that is conducive to their happiness. Violet and Joe have to discover that both Reconstruction and the New Negro myth are concepts that support a view of history conducive to the oppressors' objective. It is *his* world that is reconstructed, and the Negro is made new to adapt to *his* view of the world. By witnessing their own individual histories for the first time, the couple is in the position to re-write history from the viewpoint of the margin of society and thus fill it with a meaning that will allow them to determine the world in new way. Thus, their past is not "an abused record with no choice but to repeat itself at the crack" (220), but a Jazz piece that is continually played and improvised upon to give it new meaning and expression.

In their newly found intimacy, Joe and Violet can begin creating a home for themselves. Tuan mentions "the curve of the human arm" as the place of "comfort and security absolute" (Tuan 137) and the starting point of the formation of place, and it is

exactly there that the couple is able to create a homeliness in the City that they had not known before:

[...] until it was time to go to bed under the quilt they plan to tear into its original scraps real soon and get a nice wool blanket with a satin hem. [...] He wants to slip under it and hold on to her. Take her hand and put it onto his chest, his stomach. [...] that avenue of no-question about it satin cools their lava forever (224).

The quilt that is about to be torn up represents a way for Morrison to signify their resisting an inflexible writing of history. The scraps in a quilt often represent particular episodes or events. Sewn together, they tell a story. Their tearing up the quilt into its pieces signifies an undoing of an inflexible history, thereby opening it up for re-interpretation. Violet and Joe intend to leave the scraps as such and buy themselves a new blanket under which they can find comfort in each other.

The couple has overcome the Bhabhaian unhomeliness at least in the space of their apartment that has indeed turned into a home for themselves. It is a space of intimacy as well as conversation, and in abandoning the repressive silence, they are able to heal their minds as well as their relationship: “A lot of the time, though, they stay home figuring things out, telling each other those little personal stories they like to hear again and again[...].” (223). Thus, they have made themselves and each other masters over their histories. Their silence in the past had been a sign of surrendering to the hegemonic discourse that determined their unhomely past as well as their New Negro present. By turning their unhomely apartment, and thus their minds, into an open space for conversation and music, they have taken the power of definition out of the hands of the white oppressor and onto themselves. In this space of intimacy, they are able to reconcile even the most horrific memories of the southern past:

Lying next to her, his head turned towards the window, he sees through the glass darkness taking the shape of a shoulder with a thin line of blood. Slowly, slowly it form itself into a bird with a blade of red on the wing. Meanwhile Violet rests her hand on his chest as though it were the sunlit rim of a well and down there somebody is gathering gifts (lead pencils, Bull Durham, Jap Rose Soap) to distribute to them all (224/225).

Thus, Morrison ends on a hopeful note, that Joe and Violet will be able to happy life in the City. I would suggest that Morrison presents it not as an oppressive space per se, but

rather as a mirror of the state of mind of its inhabitants. The unhomeliness the City displays is only partly actual, such as the actual economic oppression and race riots, but also partly a reflection of the unhomely state of mind of its inhabitants. The City's cracks and tracks clearly reflect Violet and Joe's traumatic pathology that they have carried along as a burden from the South. Instead of being a hostile space, I would argue that Morrison's city is as ambivalent and open to interpretation and improvisation as Jazz, the music that pervades every nook and corner of Harlem.

The narrator points to the importance of music as a healing agent in the lives of the recovering couple. The apartment that was cold and barren before, is now being filled with Violet and Joe's newly found laughter, joy and above all, music. Morrison symbolizes the significance of music in the sick bird Violet takes into the house:

She guessed the bird wasn't lonely because it was already sad when she bought it out of a flock of others. So if neither food nor company nor its own shelter was important to it, Violet decided, and Joe agreed, nothing was left to love or need but music. They took the cage to the roof one Saturday, where the wind blew and so did the musicians in shirts billowing out behind them. From then on the bird was a pleasure to itself and to them (224)

Here, Morrison describes the significance of Jazz as a nurturing element for the lives of the people in the City. Not economic possibility, nor the opportunity for better housing can fill their lives with happiness, but they need music as a way for self-expression and self-creation in order to live happily. In the following, I will elaborate on the use and the levels of significance of Jazz music in the novel. At the same time, I will give an account of the functions of the striking narrative technique of Morrison in that context: Jazz as narrator – narrator as Jazz.

4.6 Make me, remake me – *Jazz* as Jazz

The concept of Jazz is significant for the analysis of the novel on a thematic level, as well as on the level of meta-fiction. As a theme, the music of Jazz comes to function as another synecdoche for the City, ambivalent in its providing a free space for Blacks, at the same time seducing them into forgetting their past. I argue that Morrison advocates the inclusion of the Blues element into the modern urban space, so as to stay connected to the painful past. Only in working through the trauma in laughter and tears can it be overcome and allow for a gateway into the future. On a meta-fictional level, the music

of Jazz takes on the role of the narrator. Indeed, the novel is told, or played, in the fashion of a Jazz piece. For instance, the narrator, like a musician in a Jazz combo, gives us the content of the novel on the first three pages, in order to elaborate on the theme in the course of the story. In a sense, she plays what is written down, what is accepted as the common truth about the killing of the girl Dorcas. But she has to re-interpret and improvise upon the given theme, in order to keep up with the desire for self-expression on the part of the other musicians in the band. Just one voice among many, she has to give up her monopoly on the truth about history, just as no member of the Jazz band has a monopoly on how to play the tune right. Thus, the book itself is Jazz, playing and re-playing itself according to the imagination of the reader.

The description of Harlem in the novel is infused with impressions and images of the emerging art form of urban Jazz. It was at that particular time of the Great Migration of African Americans to the metropolitan areas of the North, in particular Chicago and New York City, that Jazz emerged as a musical form of expression for the new urbanites. Morrison shows Jazz as being another urban modern force that aids the city in its seducing the new generation of African American immigrants into forgetting their past and putting on the comfortable mask of the New Negro. According to Fred Wei-han Ho, “‘Jazz’ has been about the present (‘Now is the Time’) and the future (‘Space Is the Place’)” (Ho, 285) in its tendency to constantly renew the genre and never play a piece exactly the same. In this sense, it embodies a sense of constantly moving forward as opposed to classical music, which has the tendency of repeating the same master pieces over and over again in an effort of further refinement. Thus, Jazz does have characteristics of modernity in its belief in progress and liberation from external boundaries. Modern urban Jazz builds upon the blues tradition of the rural field worker. Similarly, Violet and Joe as modern city dwellers build upon their past as rural field workers. Thus, for them to fully embrace the modern ethos of the City and Jazz is to break away from the vital lessons of their rural past: “[...] for the middle class to have gotten ‘free’ of all the blues tradition was to have been deprived of a vital sense of connection to the resistant traditions of the past” (Grewal, 16/17).

Morrison’s ambiguous attitude towards Jazz is embodied in the generational shift between Alice Manfred and Dorcas. Alice as a member of the older generation and the Black middle class still remembers the painful past and values in Jazz its militant, political attitude. Dorcas, on the other hand, belongs the younger, hedonistic generation of Harlem and is more than willing to be seduced into pleasant forgetfulness by the

“juke joint, barrel hooch, tonk house, music (59). During the protest march described in *Jazz*, Alice feels the protective power of the music, she feels that Jazz provides a safe space for expressing the opinion of the oppressed: “In was July in 1917 and the beautiful faces were cold and quiet; moving slowly into the space the drums were building for them” (53). In a sense, the musical space is a space of resistance that cannot be controlled or owned by the white master because it is built in a language that he does not understand. Alice Manfred is aware of that safety, although to her the cold faces and drums are painful, but to her pain is preferable to the fear she had felt all her life:

The drums and freezing faces hurt her, but hurt was better than fear and Alice had been frightened for a long time – first she was frightened of Illinois, the of Springfield, Massachusetts, then Eleventh Avenue, Third Avenue, Park Avenue. Recently she had begun to feel safe nowhere south of 110th Street, and Fifth Avenue was for her the most fearful of all (54).

Alice’s enumeration of unhomely spaces express the other, mostly unmentioned side of the Harlem Renaissance. Basically all places within New York City except Harlem are hostile to Blacks, especially Fifth Avenue, which represents the power of white capital and consumerism. In fact, she experiences a ghettoization of Harlem that contradicts the hopes and dreams of the New Negro. Within that context of marginalization of Blacks in the City, music is a communal space of silent understanding, support and subversion, and Alice feels its power to connect: “Then suddenly, like a rope cast for rescue, the drums spanned the distance, gathering them all up and connected them: Alice, Dorcas, her sister and her brother-in-law, the Boy Scouts and the frozen black faces, the watchers on the pavement and those in the windows above” (58). Alice finds comfort in the unifying power of Jazz and “carried that gathering rope with her always after that day on Fifth Avenue, and found it reliably secure and tight – most of the time” (58). She appreciates that part in Jazz that is orderly and provides a secure space, that presents her with a rope to hold on to, a rope of “fellowship, discipline and transcendence” (60). The part that represents disruption, disorder and emotion is unsettling to her:

Yet Alice Manfred swore she heard a complicated anger in it; something hostile that disguised itself as flourish and roaring seduction. But the part she hated most was its appetite. Its longing for the bash, the slit; a kind of careless hunger for a fight or a red ruby stickpin for a tie – either would

do. It faked happiness, faked welcome, but it did not make her feel generous, this juke joint, barrel hooch, tonk house, music (59).

The part of Jazz that cannot be marched to, that is expressive not of political protest but of individual pain and lust makes Alice lose her security and comfort found in the orderly anger of the drums: “The rope broke then, disturbing her peace, making her aware of flesh and something so free she could smell its bloodsmell; made her aware of its life below the sash and its red lip rouge” (58).

For Dorcas, Jazz is both the expression and the fuel for her blossoming sexual desire. Her repressed sexuality responds to the seductive energy seeping through the music of the City “City seeping music that begged and challenged each and every day. ‘Come,’ it said. ‘Come and do wrong’” (67). Jazz offers a seductive prospect of self-indulgence, bodily pleasure, a feeling of being part of the hipster elite of Harlem who represents the modern ethos of looking ahead and enjoying themselves:

[...] Dorcas lay on a chenille bedspread, tickled and happy knowing that there was no place to be where somewhere, close by, somebody was not licking his licorice stick, tickling the ivories, beating his skins, blowing off his horn while a knowing woman sang ain’t nobody going to keep me down you got the right key baby but the wrong keyhole you got to get it bring it and put it right here, or else (60).

Jazz is a post-colonial and post-modern novel not only on the level of theme, but also on the meta-level of narration. Morrison uses the figure of the narrator in the novel to make a point about the subjectivity of history. She examines the eras of Reconstruction, Great Migration and Harlem Renaissance, and essentially rejects the dominant narrative of these periods as a discursive construct framed by modern western ideology:

Traditional narrative can be regarded as a literary inscription of the dominant values of a hierarchical system. [It] is based upon a series of discriminatory logics that empower a dominant voice to promote, demote, include, exclude, and finally, at the end, to emerge victorious over the other voices or characters of the narrative (Mayberry, 298).

Morrison introduces the narrator as the outspoken voice of modern ideology, in order to deconstruct this voice in the course of the novel. This deconstruction of narrative authority is paralleled by a re-construction of Black identity and an empowerment of the voice of the subaltern. Essentially, Morrison suggests that western historiography must

be challenged from the margins of society in order to give the subaltern the power to construct her own past, her own present, and thereby claim back her identity: "Freeing yourself was one thing, claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (qtd. in Grewal, 1). In the course of the novel, the narrator develops from an omniscient voice observing the events to an insecure participant in the quest for identity that is at the center of *Jazz*. She has to admit to her own shortcomings as to her authorial superiority and in the end gives up her discursive authority. In this sense, Morrison succeeds in deconstructing western metaphysics in favor of a postmodern epistemological uncertainty.

The novel starts out with the narrator assuming the know-it-all attitude of a gossipy neighbor, filling the reader in about the scandalous events happening in the neighborhood: "Sth, I know that woman" (3). Right from the start, Morrison's narrator refers to herself and her great understanding of the characters in the story. Yet, her knowledge is impossible in the end, based upon preconceived notions about the behavior of human beings in the City she knows so well: "Take my word for it, he is bound to the track" (120). The narrator's powerful, almost visible presence in the narrative presents at the same time as an advantage and disadvantage for her claim to omniscience. On the one hand, she can assure the reader of her trustworthiness: "Take my word for it" (120), on the other hand she presents herself so obviously as a human being that she gives away the impossibility of her knowledge right from the start: "I watch everything and everyone and try to figure out their plans, their reasonings, long before they do" (8). Here, Morrison points to the inventiveness of any historiographer, since, in figuring out human beings, the element of imagination is of crucial importance.

The narrator presents herself as an avid believer in the modern ideology of progress and freedom as embodied by the City in *Jazz*: "I'm crazy about this City. [...] History is over, you all, and everything is ahead at last" (7). She is indeed the voice of modernity, which is why she fails to account for the transgressions of Joe and Violet and writes them off as the deeds of an old fool and a crazy woman. In trying to figure out why things happened the way they did, the narrator finds herself powerless and has to follow Violet and Joe as they set off to revisit their individual past. From then on, the narrative perspective often shifts to the Traces and we get insights into their thoughts and emotions, which destabilize the hegemonic discourse as framed by the narrator. After engaging in Blues conversation with Alice, which breaks the silence around the

murder of Dorcas and the trauma underlying it, Violet takes over the discursive authority:

Afterward she sat in the drugstore sucking malt through a straw, wondering who on earth that other Violet was that walked about the City in her skin; peeped out through her eyes and saw other things. [...] NO! *that* Violet is not somebody walking round town, up and down the streets wearing my skin and using my eyes shit no *that* Violet is me (89, 95/96).

The recognition of her split self is the first step for Violet to take ownership of her story. As mentioned in chapter 3, the witnessing of her traumatized past in the South is actually a first creation of that history, since traumatizing events do not register as experiences in the mind of the victim. The impossibility of the narrator's knowing this forgotten history and its relation to the crime further deconstructs her narrative reliability.

Eventually, the narrator concedes to the problems that underlie the telling of someone else's story. Yet, she still masks her vagueness under a layer of stubborn self-confidence: "Risky, I'd say, trying to figure out anybody's state of mind. But worth the trouble if you're like me – curious, inventive and well-informed. [...] So he didn't know. Neither do I, although it is not hard to imagine what it must have been like" (137). She admits to her lack of knowledge and essentially to her actively inventing parts of the story. During the narration of Golden Gray's story, the narrator struggles with the appropriate rendition of the story, until she finally has to admit to her own unreliability. Too many questions surround the blond gentleman who is at the core of both Joe and Violet's loss of identity. At first the narrator gives a seemingly impartial, sober description of his journey into the woods, but cannot figure out his mindset the way she thinks she can with the other characters: "What was I thinking of? How could I have imagined him so poorly? [...] I have been careless and stupid and it infuriates me to discover (again) how unreliable I am" (160). Thus bursting onto the scene, emotional and self-absorbed, the narrator loses all credibility as to her desired omniscience and objectivity. Her self-doubt is so clearly human, that she becomes another character in the story, struggling with her identity as much as the others.

Again, the ideology of Jazz provides the background for the recognition and acceptance of the narrator's failure to give an account of the truth: "So I missed it altogether. [...] I got so aroused while meddling, while finger-shaping, I overreached

and missed the obvious” (220). She was so overly confident and focused on the big picture of the crime, she “missed the obvious” that lies in the unpredictability, mystery and originality of the human spirit. Morrison embraces this failure of the grand narrative on the part of the narrator. It opens up a space for counternarratives formulated from the traditionally overlooked position of the subaltern. Elsewhere, Morrison connects this authorial failure and need for improvisation to Jazz as a musical genre:

In a performance, you make mistakes, and you don't have the luxury of revision that a writer has; you have to make something out of a mistake, and if you do it well enough it will take you to another place where you never would have gone had you not made that error. So, you have to be able to risk making that error in performance (Art of Fiction, 116-117).

In this sense, the narrator goes through her own learning experience as she tries to figure out the truth from mere scraps of information available to her. From these facts, the killing of Dorcas and her subsequent stabbing, she came too soon to a conclusion, without taking into account “the ‘mystery’ of the interior lives she is trying to reconstruct” (Peterson, 213). Luckily for the narrator, the protagonists claim authorship of their story and supply its missing elements. They are like Jazz musicians soloing one after the other, thus weaving a polyphonic tapestry of narratives and counternarratives of Black American history. Morrison does not call for a complete abandonment of the search for historical truth, yet is very vocal in advocating the inclusion – more – the primacy of subaltern counternarratives.

The author opens up the historic discourse to interpretation and negotiation and in the end acknowledges the ultimate power of the reader in fabricating her own history from the multiple perspectives given in *Jazz*: “[...] make me, remake me. You are free to do it and I am free to let you because look, look. Look where your hands are. Now” (229). The narrator turns out to be the book itself, turns out to be *Jazz* and *Jazz*, and finally realizes that the final authority over the (hi)story and its interpretation lies within the reader.

In terms of its engagement in “historiographic metafiction”, *Jazz* is clearly positioned in the tradition of the post-modern novel. It is also post-colonial, since it has at its core the effects of untold subaltern histories of trauma on the identity of the individual and the community. An important characteristic of the unhomey is that it allows for the intrusion of history into the supposedly private and safe sphere of the

home. In Bhabha's elaboration on the concept, this intrusion comes also to mean the intrusion of an oppressive history into the minds of the oppressed. In this context, the separation of spheres into the private and the public suits the oppressor's cause since it makes the oppression invisible, naturalizes it within the seemingly apolitical sphere of the home. Reading the domestic sphere as a synecdoche for the mind, the oppression is equally invisible and naturalized since it is not recognized as such by the victims of the trauma. The naturalization of unhomeliness within the home corresponds on a synecdochic level to the latency of trauma within the mind of the oppressed. As a consequence, once the trauma is recognized and integrated into the narrative memory, it is no longer latent but highly visible and thus loses its grip on the victim's mind. Through witnessing the trauma and passing it on through narrative, the separation of the private and public spheres is dissolved. Thus, the naturalized oppressive history becomes public and object to interpretation. It is this history that is being negotiated within the pages of *Jazz*. Morrison goes at great lengths to show the intricate connections between the unhomely invasion into the protagonists' homes and minds and their fragmented, displaced identities. The Era traditionally known as Reconstruction is unmasked as an actual de-construction of Black identity and Black space. The silence surrounding the unknowable unhomely history of the subaltern comes to corrode the sense of self of the protagonists and the Black community as a whole. By invoking polyphonic counternarratives to the disabling hegemonic narratives of American history, Morrison engages in a therapeutic discourse to heal the unnarrable trauma of the past. She rejects the hegemonic framing of the Era of Reconstruction and thus is able to reconstruct Black identity and space.

V. PARADISE

5.1 Deafened by the Roar of History – History and Place in *Paradise*

The chronologically last novel of the trilogy I am analyzing in this dissertation, *Paradise*, continues the thematic and conceptual threads started in the previous two, but is also a departure from them in some ways. Like *Beloved* and *Jazz*, *Paradise* rewrites an era in American history from an African American perspective and in doing so, fills the spaces in the American historical and geographical landscape previously void of the African American presence. Morrison's trilogy is a "remapping of the historical terrain for African Americans, a terrain that had been previously charted by a master narrative

from the outside, rather than from the inside of their experiences, a history that even African American communities might have begun to forget, or might not want to remember” (Christian 1997, 31). In the case of *Paradise*, the history remapped is that of the American movement into the West and the settlement of the Frontier, the hegemonic historic accounts of which are remarkably lacking a Black presence. Just as the Rubyites are rejected from the all-Black town of Fairly, African Americans are rejected from the great American myth of the Frontier and its heroic explorers. And like the Rubyites stubbornly claim their place within the West, *Paradise* claims a geographical and historical place on the Frontier for those westbound African Americans heretofore left out of hegemonic histories of that place.

Concerning this remapping of African American history, though, *Paradise* takes on a different perspective on memory, narrative and history than either *Beloved* or *Jazz*. Whereas *Beloved* is concerned with the role of memory, and *Jazz* with the development of story as related to the individual formation of the self, *Paradise* takes the issue of history and memory to the broader level of culture, community and, allegorically, the nation:

In *Paradise*, Morrison no longer concentrates on the individual process of reconstitution. While the individual process is still important – and intimately related to the communal – Morrison is more interested in assessing the role of narrative in the community as a whole. The protagonist of *Paradise* is, in fact, the community of Ruby, Oklahoma – including the rag-tag band of Convent women who live on its fringes (Davidson 355/356).

Morrison explores the communities in *Paradise* in terms of their dichotomous approaches to communal memory and identity formation, achieving insights into the connection between a community’s attitude towards its past and its ability to forge a stable and thriving place to call home. Like in *Beloved* and *Jazz*, the places portrayed in the novel play a significant part in this exploration, since they serve as spatializations of the two communities’ conceptions of time and history. Ruby’s idea of history is that of a static and never-changing past, which is reflected in the town’s reluctance to open up toward the outside and toward the present, resulting in a paralyzed, xenophobic community. The Convent women, on the other hand, learn to accept history as polyphonic and ever-changing and thus achieve a spatial and communal openness that benefits them on their own individual journeys towards healing and home.

While all three novels are concerned with ways of dealing with past pain and trauma, their approaches differ. In *Beloved*, the characters have to remember the past, in order to be free of it, the trauma has to be acknowledged and worked through, but only in order to finally transcend it, not to dwell on it or pass it on. Similarly, in *Jazz*, the characters must remember the past so that they are not bound in debilitating repetitions of it, and finally in *Paradise*, the past has to be opened up for the protagonists to be able to move out of it into the present and the future: “in *Paradise*, the characters must replace their dogmatic reverence for a monologic interpretation of the past with a more balanced and flexible combination of respect for the past and the wisdom to grow beyond that past” (Page 2001, 647). Here, Morrison opts for a “layered” approach to acknowledging the past and past trauma, suggesting a multilayered tapestry of individual and communal versions of history, symbolized by the Convent and its accepting and communally interpreting the women’s different histories of trauma. Opposed to this is the monologic propagation of an authorized account of history as symbolized by Ruby.

In *Beloved* and *Jazz*, the focus is on forming individual and communal spaces of narrativisation of heretofore silenced trauma. In *Paradise*, instead of being silenced, the trauma of the Disallowing is very vocal and loud and thus dominates every aspect of Ruby’s communal, religious and economic life. For the Rubyites of *Paradise*, their traumatic memory is the foundation of their cultural identity. But without working and reworking this memory of trauma, it is emptied of meaning and deprives them of the possibility of transcending it. Whereas in *Beloved* and *Jazz*, Morrison focuses on the necessity of narrating trauma in order to transcend it, in *Paradise*, the author points to the dangers of a static narration of trauma, which leads to a debilitating institutionalization of trauma.

In terms of an analysis of place, *Paradise* is a literary exploration and deconstruction of the very concept of paradise. In addition to examining the actual places, Ruby and the Convent, that are conceived of as paradisiacal utopias, Morrison takes a step back and explores the triggers and motivations behind the conception of each of them: “In this novel Morrison is interested in what the dreams of paradise tell about the dreamer. She shows how much is revealed about a people, its history and culture, by what kind of paradise it envisions, whom that paradise includes and excludes, and where it is to be found” (Matus 156). Morrison achieves this by diametrically juxtaposing the two utopias in the novel. Both Ruby and the Convent are founded on histories of traumas of oppression and displacement and the attempts to

overcome them, “attempts to find and found a sanctuary, a refuge, and thus a true home” (Page 2001, 646). The people of Ruby, as well as the women of the Convent have been uprooted from their original places and histories, leaving them “spatially and temporarily dispossessed” (ibid). All of them are looking for a place to call home, a place where they can find safety, intimacy and nurture. The paradisiacal home places envisioned by the Rubyites and the Convent women differ vastly, though. Ruby’s ideal is one of safety from the outside and the Other, protecting its inhabitants from danger, disorder, and the external unknown: “Unique and isolated, this was a town justifiably pleased with itself. It neither had nor needed a jail. No criminals had ever come from his town. And the one or two people who acted up, humiliated their families or threatened the town’s view of itself were taken good care of. Certainly there wasn’t a slack or slovenly woman anywhere in town and the reasons, he thought, were clear. From the beginning its people were free and protected” (8). This exclusion initially is based on the Rubyites need for safety, the desire to experience space free from racial hierarchies and racist oppression. Later, though, the exclusionary credo serves to perpetuate the internal power scheme of Ruby. As Toni Morrison shows in the course of *Paradise*, the creation and preservation of a perfect place depends upon the maintenance of stasis and homogeneity, at the cost of personal and communal freedom. Agents of change and disorder have to be kept out of the perfect place at all costs, as they endanger the fragile equilibrium of the utopian time-space.

Ruby as well as the Convent is presented as utopias, Ruby as a black utopia, the Convent as a feminist utopia. As utopias go, Ruby as well as the Convent can only exist outside of the bounds of history. As soon as history catches up with them, they fall apart³¹. The Ruby men are aware of this dilemma and cling to their control of history with fierce determination and in the end, resort to physical violence in protection their vision of paradise. In the end, the two worlds clash violently, as they cannot coexist. Morrison thereby explores “the dilemma of at once representing a powerful utopian desire and at the same time representing a thoroughgoing skepticism concerning the possibility of its fulfillment” (DeKoven 1997, 112/113).

Ruby represents a kind of classical utopia in the way that it can only exist as an enclave within the surrounding time-space continuum, relying on a determinedly fixed history and a strictly regulated space. It seeks to solidify a preconceived ideal of

³¹ For more on the connection between utopian space, real social space and history, see pp. XX to XX of this dissertation.

harmony and homogeneity based on a communal agreement on the same grand narrative, in Ruby's case the story of the Disallowing:

The utopian thinker imagines an ideal society on the pattern of a city planned to perfection. It fulfills, by its political, social and spatial organisation, all the requirements of justice and goodness. It provides for the spiritual and material well-being of its population. It is not, in essence, an egalitarian conception, since some functions are more important than others, some virtues higher than others, some needs take priority. [...] The classical conception was static, fixed. It assumed an immutable order. Once the parameters of the ideal society were established, they were assumed to endure for all time (Kumar 19/20).

Indeed, the Old Fathers of Haven and the New Fathers of Ruby followed noble aspirations of providing safety from racist oppression and a space of freedom to realize a material and social wealth not available to them on the outside. To achieve this goal, the Ruby men will do anything in order to uphold the strict hierarchical order and the stability of the governing grand narrative.

The Convent on the other hand is open and welcoming to social outcasts and their histories of trauma, a space of blurred boundaries between individual and communal bodies and minds, between inside and outside, past and present, body and spirit, life and death. The Convent, on the other hand, represents a kind of postmodern utopia, a place beyond the narrow confines of grand narratives, instead celebrating individual stories. It represents a feminist counterdraft to the classical utopian desire. The utopia of the Convent compensates the women living there for the loss of power and home they experienced in the patriarchal space that is America in the 1970s. By pointing out the gaps and failure of the classical utopias these feminist utopias create alternative utopian universes to the restricted, oppressed and disenfranchised existence imposed upon them by hegemonic patriarchal society. "It provides a new map for an old territory, sketching new boundaries that do not merely cover over old fault lines but reshape their history and the desires that compose them" (Siebers 25).

Toni Morrison thus deconstructs Ruby's paradise based on essentialising grand narratives of heroic survival and purity, showing that it effects a petrified and suffocating place not conducive to communal well-being and survival. The author offers the Convent as a counterdraft to Ruby, a place based on a multiplicity of equally valid individual narratives that form layers of lived-in space-time and thus offer niches for the individual histories occupying it.

The different underlying conceptions of history and place that characterize Ruby and the Convent can be schematically illustrated via two very different theories of place by Marxist geographer David Harvey and Postcolonial geographer Doreen Massey, either one offering a conceptual handle to support my analysis of space and place in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*. In line with a postmodern, relativist stance, David Harvey's rather pessimistic concept of place starts out by portraying place as a social construct, essential to the formation of identity and politics of the respective society:

The creation of symbolic places is not given in the stars but painstakingly nurtured and fought over precisely because of the hold that place can have over the imaginary ... If places are the locus of collective memory, then social identity and the capacity to mobilize that identity into configurations of political solidarity are highly dependent upon processes of place construction and sustenance. (Harvey 2004, 322).

For Harvey, place is a sort of permanence that entities achieve in their movement through space and time. These states of stability are not really permanent though, but rather dependent on "processes of creation, sustenance and dissolution" (ibid 261). Being interested in the political implications of such a definition of place³², Harvey focuses specifically on place as it relates to opportunities to mark territories of power and influence, to erect boundaries to include one's own and exclude the other, thus critiquing place essentially as an opportunity to maximize one's power and the power of one's ideas about the world, while at the same time keeping out those elements that would jeopardize that enterprise:

The spirit of community has often been held as an antidote to threats of social disorder, class war and revolutionary violence [...] Well-founded communities often exclude, define themselves against others, erect all sorts of keep-out signs (if not tangible walls), internalize surveillance, social controls and repression. Community has often been a barrier to, rather than a facilitator of, social change (Harvey 2000, 170).

Thus, Harvey sees place in a deeply ambiguous light. On the one hand he views it as socially beneficial for people to establish a sense of rootedness and belonging in the world. On the other hand, he points out the danger of place as an exclusionary force,

³² Harvey's concept can be seen as adding a political component to Tuan's, who, while sharing Harvey's focus on the social aspect of place, displays a more strictly humanistic approach to the notion of place, stressing its connection to issues of the human being's existential belonging.

allowing people to define themselves against others who might not share their views of the world. Thus for Harvey, place bears the potential both for the formation of identity as well as the exclusion of the other. This twofold aspect of place is important for the reading of *Paradise*, a novel with which Morrison distances herself from her traditional presentation of community and communal place as the salvaging element for her displaced and traumatized protagonists, adopting a more nuanced stance on the subject. Particularly relevant for the analysis of place in *Paradise* is the connection between place and memory, as Toni Morrison presents place as the locus of collective memory, where identity is created through the construction, preservation or resurrection of memories that link a particular group of people to a common past. For Harvey, this, again, is an ambiguous concept. While the formation of place in order to solidify a particular collective memory is conducive to forging a particular collective identity, it also serves to uphold social hierarchies that manage individual and communal memories so as to maintain the hegemonic grand narrative. As Harvey puts it, “collective memory is often made concrete through the production of particular places but this production of memory in place is no more than an element in the perpetuation of a particular social order that seeks to inscribe some memories at the expense of others” (Harvey 1996, 309).

Doreen Massey’s definition of place runs in many ways contrary to Harvey’s rather critical view of place as a fixed, closed-off “permanence” in the space-time continuum, as she portrays the potential of place to function as an inclusive site of social life, more “progress” than “permanence.” She acknowledges the reactionary face of place, as “it has been part of what has given rise to defensive and reactionary responses – certain forms of nationalism, sentimentalized recovering of sanitized ‘heritages’, and outright antagonism to newcomers and ‘outsiders’” (Massey 1993, 133) Yet, Massey resists the identification of place with community, claiming that, even when communities exist in the same place, “this in no way implies a single sense of place. For people occupy different positions within any community” (ibid).

Massey also refutes the idea of place necessarily being characterized and held together by a “long internalized history,” but rather “constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together a particular locus” (qtd. in Cresswell, 69). In her view places are momentary points of intersections, “articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings” (ibid), interconnections

and layers of processes and events at a particular point in time, characterized by constant flux and openness.

As schematic illustrations, the two theories by Harvey and Massey can be seen as representative of the two concepts of place presented in the novel. Massey's emphasis on the fluid nature of places, their consisting of momentary intersections of otherwise freely moving interpersonal networks fits to the Convent's own fluid and ever-changing nature as a place. Harvey's focus on the exclusionary potential of place, its being a territorial instrument for the establishment of a rigid social order, makes his theory a fitting umbrella for an analysis of Ruby, the town whose identity as a place rests firmly on the fervent exclusion of the Other. Via the dichotomy of Ruby and the Convent, Morrison presents two visions of place, home, and history and explores the motives behind the creation of both. Morrison thus deconstructs the idea of *Paradise* as an essentialist place based on Manichean ideals of good and evils, as represented by Ruby, and discards it in favor of a vision of paradise, a polyphonous place celebrating difference and hybridity, as represented by the Convent.

I agree with Justine Tally (1999) who states that in *Paradise*, the violent action taken by the Ruby men against the Convent women is ideologically motivated: "A careful examination of the text, however, reveals that the excessive love of Paradise is an obsession with ideology, [...] with the need to define oneself from without rather than from within the self" (17). This obsession with external definition over time turns Ruby into a community calcified under the pressure of their own dogma of purity, unable to open itself up to the possibility of a future that is different from the past, because it can only exist outside the flow of history, "for in order for the utopian experiment to succeed, the men of Ruby must be in control of everything, *including* history" (ibid, 19)

At the core of Morrison's postcolonial deconstruction of the idea of paradise lies the juxtaposition of two conceptions of history and place. On the one hand we have Ruby, a colonial space governed by hegemonic ideals of purity and bourgeoisie and promoting a singular master narrative of its own history. On the other hand we have the Convent as a postcolonial space governed by a multiplicity of historical discourses and thus, similar to the unreliable narrator in *Jazz*, undermining any authorial narrative. In the end, Morrison promotes a conception of social space and place as a container of multiple histories and historical perspectives, as symbolized by the Convent.

5.2 The one all-black Town worth the Pain – Ruby

With her depiction of the town of Ruby, Toni Morrison “confronts one of African American culture’s most sacred cows, the myth of unity and perfection in black society relieved of white oppression” (Kubitschek 179). Portraying the unraveling community of this all-Black town, Morrison shows that unity can never be achieved solely on the ground of opposition to an outside enemy, but has to be achieved from within, by building a place and caring for the individual and the community, as expressed by Charles Scruggs (1992): “[T]he ideal community for Morrison is one based on common understanding and caritas, balanced between individual respect for communal ties and communal respect for individuality” (97). The neighborhoods in *Song of Solomon* or *Sula*, Bluestone Road before Sethe’s killing of her daughter in *Beloved*, and even the Convent in *Paradise* – those are place filled with the virtues that, for Morrison, are essential in carving out a home place for the individual and the community out of a vast, and often hostile space. Initially, the town of Ruby was founded on these exact virtues, they were the reason for its existence:

And if a light shone from a house up a ways and the cry of a colicky baby caught her attention, she might step over to the house and call out softly to the woman inside trying to soothe the baby. The two of them might take turns massaging the infants stomach, rocking, or trying to get a little soda water down. When the baby quieted they could sit together for a spell, gossiping, chuckling low so as not to wake anybody else (8/9).

This vision of Ruby is one of safety, intimacy and mutual care, an idealized version of Yi-Fu Tuan’s concept of place as “focus of value, of nurture and support” (29). Yet, in the present time of *Paradise*, this vision has gone terribly awry, as the community seems to be falling apart: “A mother was knocked down the stairs by her cold-eyed daughter. Four damaged infants were born in one family. Daughters refused to get out of bed. Brides disappeared on their honeymoons. Two brother’s shot each other on New Year’s Day. Trips to Demby for VD shots common” (11). Because Ruby’s sense of self does not allow for an admittance or even a consideration of societal failure, disorder such as these have to be attributed to a malevolent outside force. The stability of Ruby depends on the existence of an external and excluded other on which to project internal failure and impurity, “with this division of internal purity from external corruption, the men keep order” (McKee 200). Instead of questioning the foundations of their community, the Ruby men quickly make out the scapegoats for the series of bad luck in

the women of the Convent, whom they view as a dangerous force threatening the existence of the town, putting up a neighborly front when in reality plotting Ruby's demise:

Strange neighbors, most folks said, but harmless. More than harmless, helpful even on occasion. They took people in – lost folks or folks who needed a rest. Early reports were of kindness and very good food. But now everybody knew it was all a lie, a front, a carefully planned disguise for what was really going on. [...] The one thing that connected all these catastrophes was in the Convent. And in the Convent were those women (11).

This is the rationale for killing off the women of the Convent, as they are made out to be the scapegoats for the catastrophes crippling the town. Unable to recognize the source of the imminent social trouble in its rigid social hierarchies and inability to respond to present challenges, Ruby responds to it the only way it knows how: it unites against a perceived external enemy in an effort to fend off any threat to its internal equilibrium. Because Ruby's identity rests on an static unified history and an ideal of purity and homogeneity, any change entering from the outside means a threat to its existence: "How can they hold it together [...], this hard-won heaven defined only by the absence of the unsaved, the unworthy and the strange?" (306).

Whereas the issue in *Beloved* and *Jazz* was one of rediscovering the past and coming to terms with the trauma it contained, the inhabitants of Ruby in *Paradise* are facing a somewhat opposite dilemma of being trapped in the ever-so-present past³³ that keeps the town in its iron grip and does not release it into a present, much less a future. "Deafened by the roar of its own history" (306), Ruby has lost the ability to listen to the voices of the present. Its borders impermeable for outside influences, the town is a container of a traumatic history that is threatening to suffocate its community for lack of an opening towards the outside world for a breath of fresh air. That traumatic history is the history of the Disallowing, the event that represents the foundational moment of Ruby's self-image as "the one all-black town worth the pain" (XXX).

³³ Ruby's focus on the past in another, very harmful, instance of nostalgia, "the longing to return to a lost place" (Su 2005, 3). Clinging to the idea of the Ruby of the past as paradise for its inhabitants, the Rubyites fail to find a home place in the present. As she does in *Beloved* and *Jazz*, Morrison presents in *Paradise* the lost place of Ruby as a means to claim a common ground for the community, the place of origin for common memories upon which to base their identity and community. Still, it is only after this nostalgia for the past is replaced by the pressing need to come to terms with the tumultuous developments in the present, that Ruby has the opportunity to become a true home, a haven for its people.

5.2.1 Come Prepared or not at all – The Disallowing

Where *Beloved* has its narrative and psychological center in Sethe's murder of her daughter, and *Jazz* in Joe's murder of Dorcas, *Paradise* is centered around an event called "the Disallowing." The people of Ruby base their identity on this particular traumatic event in their past and turn it into a rigid historical master narrative that alone governs their existence, leaving no room for narrative improvisation or the inclusion of influences from the present. The story of the journey of the original families from the South to Oklahoma and the Disallowing in Fairly is passed down from generation to generation as an authorized account of history, its traumatizing effect of this "central scene of shame" (Bouson 196) still palpable in the community decades later: "[...] they carried the rejection of 1890 like a bullet in the brain" (109). Thereby, trauma, shame and the community's resilience in the face of those who humiliated them form the basis of the identity of the town of Ruby and its inhabitants: "*Paradise* calls attention to the formative impact of humiliated and traumatic memory on collective group identity and on the individual and family" (195).

Paradigmatic for her endeavors in historiographic metafiction, Morrison's description of the trauma at the heart of *Paradise* is based on an actual historical event that occurred in Oklahoma in the early 1890s. In the Reconstruction South, there arose a new wave of discrimination against and persecution of Blacks that lead up to the installment of the Jim Crow rule in the 1870s. This resulted in the migration of a large number of Blacks to the metropolitan areas in the North, primarily to Chicago and New York³⁴, and to the West where these Blacks founded and successfully governed All-Black towns like Haven and Ruby, as described in *Paradise*: "The community's history can be traced to the collapse of Reconstruction. As the white South revoked African American's civil rights in the 1870s and 1880s, talented black men in Mississippi and Louisiana were thrown permanently out of work" (Kubitschek 165). During the subsequent migrations of the ex-slaves into Oklahoma after the Civil War, a newspaper column entitled "Come prepared or not at all" ran from 1891 to 1892. In it, the ex-slaves planning to emigrate to Oklahoma were warned to bring with them enough resources to last them for two years – or to stay where they were. While Morrison was doing research on that period, she read about a case in which two hundred freedmen and

³⁴ In *Jazz*, Morrison renders a vivid description of the Great Migration and its effect on the Black psyche and its ability to find a home place, as described on pp. xxx to xxx of this dissertation.

their families traveling West were not allowed entry into an all-black town. The ex-slaves who founded the town rejected them because they lacked the necessary resources. Reading this account of intraracial antagonism and lack of solidarity, Morrison wondered “what on earth that must have felt like, to have come all the way and look at some other Black people who said you couldn’t come in” (McKinney-Whetstone 3, qtd. In Bouson 192).

In the fictionalized account of this in *Paradise*, the black families of the “original fathers” leave their home in the South to move westward, hoping to join one of the western all-black towns. Arriving at a prosperous town in Oklahoma called Fairly they had chosen to make a home in, they are sent away by the town’s inhabitants, apparently because “they did not have enough money to satisfy the restrictions the ‘self-supporting’ Negroes required. In short, they were too poor, too bedraggled-looking to enter, let alone reside in, the communities that were soliciting Negro homesteaders” (14). After the traumatizing incident, subsequently labeled “the Disallowing” the freedmen first settle in a town called Haven and later move to found the town of Ruby, where the present day action takes place in the novel.

The collective identity of the townspeople is firmly founded on the trauma of the Disallowing: “Everything anybody ever wanted to know about the citizens of Haven or Ruby lay in the ramifications of that one rebuff out of many” (189). making the ancestors react with growing pride, becoming “stiffer, prouder with each misfortune, the details of which were engraved into the twins’ powerful memories” (14). Like True Belle in *Jazz* passes on her displaced sense of beauty and her internalized racism on to Violet through her storytelling³⁵, the Old Fathers manage to pass on the trauma of racist rejection and reactive pride on to their successors in Ruby, via a meticulously crafted and preserved historiographic grand narrative.

Over time, the New Fathers come interpret the Disallowing as an issue of race rather than class: “They must have suspected yet dared not say that their misfortune’s misfortune was due to the one and only feature that distinguished them from their Negro peers. Eight-rock” (193), although in the different accounts of the event that Morrison sprinkles throughout *Paradise*, not one hints in that direction. As Justine Tally points out: “One might surmise that in founding the new towns on next to nothing, the black homesteaders could ill afford to take on responsibility for a ‘bedraggled-looking’ group

³⁵ See page XX of this dissertation.

of 79 travelers, no matter what their color” (28). Yet, in order for the essentialist narrative of the Disallowing and the founding of Ruby to work, the element of race needs to be included, as it enables the community’s dogma of racial purity that is one of the cornerstone of the exclusionist universe. Making the Disallowing about race allows for the creation of an essentialist racist discourse within which the Rubyites establish themselves on the upper tier and subsequently are able to judge and exclude outsiders simply by assessing the purity of their Blackness³⁶.

“Eight-rock” refers to a “deep deep level in the coal mines,” a name the Rubyites give themselves as a reaction against the racial shaming to proudly allude to their being a “Blue-black people, tall and graceful, whose clear, wide eyes gave no sign of what they really felt about those who weren’t 8-rock like them” (193). Descendants of people who held important political and legislative positions during Reconstruction, they were reduced to “begging for sweatwork in cotton, lumber or rice” (193) after the failure of Reconstruction and the installment of the Jim Crow Rule in the 1870s. Thus disenfranchised, disowned and displaced from their prominent positions in American society, the Old Fathers decide to move westward, leaving their old world of oppression towards a new world of greater freedom and autonomy. Toni Morrison herself writes in *Playing in the Dark* that the “flight from the Old World to the New is generally seen to be a flight from oppression and limitation to freedom and possibility [...] Whatever the reasons, the attraction was of the ‘clean slate’ variety, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity not only to be born again but to be born again in new clothes, as it were” (34). But instead of escaping their shameful situation and being able to start fresh in the West, the Black families are faced with new shame and are ousted from the black community of Fairly, apparently on account of their dark skin. “In being ‘disvalued by the impure,’ the 8-rock people discover that their dark skin, which they view as a sign of ‘racial purity,’ has instead become a racial ‘stain’ (194): that is, a sign of a stigmatized and impure racial identity” (Bouson 198).

In turn, in order to be able to live with the shame, even profit from it, Zechariah Morgan elaborates a master narrative that turns the shame into pride. Turning the

³⁶ Morrison effectively deconstructs this essentialist racist discourse throughout the novel, starting with the first sentence: “They shoot the white girl first” (3). After provoking the reader’s curiosity as to who the white girl is, her identity is never disclosed, in fact, it is the only instance in the text that the race of any of the Convent women is alluded to. Thereby Morrison undermines the emphasis that is put on matters of race by the Rubyites, as she shows the interactions of the Convent women among each other and with the outside world to be determined by a host of other characteristics and issues beside the color of their skin.

narrative of the Disallowing around, they from now on define pure blackness as the sign of inclusion into Paradise, and equally turn the one-drop rule around to exclude anyone whose “coal blackness” has been tempered with. As a protective reaction to the Disallowal, the patriarchs establish a regime of exclusion and binary opposites, thus allowing them to be the ones in charge of defining what’s good and bad, who is in and who is out. Whereas the light-skinned blacks of Fairly have internalized the White Master’s racist light/dark-dichotomy: “In consolidating their own sense of racial superiority by devaluing the dark-skinned 8-rock people, the Fairly people reproduce the rigid racial and economic demarcations and the polarizing binarisms of white/black and us/them found in the dominant culture” (Bouson 197), the Old Father’s emulate them in a way that they merely turn racism on its head, effectively promoting it in its essence:

Haven’s patriarchs did not invent bi-polar opposition, of course. The racism that ousted Zechariah from his position in government and the racism that barred his group from Fairly also rest on a bi-polar opposition: white = good; black = evil. Importantly, then, the Haven/Ruby patriarchs have not invented a new way of thinking. By exalting blackness, they have only inverted the values of the old way (Kubitschek 182).

This reversal of values is supposed to establish a sense of black pride and an “us versus them” attitude, thus having an empowering effect on the community. But by merely turning light vs. dark racism around and defining superior as dark and inferior as light, the people of Haven/Ruby inadvertently adopt the same kind of short-sighted agenda of hatred as the Whites and the people of Fairly. They reverse the racism of the light-skinned blacks by constructing “light skin as a stain and view light-skinned blacks as impure and corrupted” (Bouson 193). By subscribing to the same essentialist racist discourse that shamed them in Fairly, the townspeople preserve the trauma as the foundation of their identity and carry this “lethal inheritance” (Bouson 200) of racist shame and reactive pride with them for generations to come.

After the Disallowing, Zechariah leads the people on their journey to Haven like a prophet, a journey that is later being retold as “an amalgam of the Old Testament exodus and search for the promised land and the New Testament story of the journey of Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem” (Bouson 198). The passage to Haven had in reality been a shameful retreat from Fairly, an arduous journey by rejected, hungry and lost

wayfarers: “Young ones time-sharing shoes. Stopping only to relieve themselves, sleep and eat trash. Trash and boiled meal, trash and meal cake, trash and game, trash and dandelion greens” (96). In his retelling of the journey, though, Zechariah depicts the 8-rocks as God’s chosen people, guided by the walking man with a satchel, an angelic apparition or ancestral spirit, summoned by Zechariah himself to guide them to their safe haven: “‘He is with us,’ said Zechariah. ‘He is leading the way.’ From then on, the journey was purposeful, free of the slightest complaints” (97). The introduction of the Walking Man into the narrative of the journey provides it with a sense of purpose and guidance, making the selection of Haven as their place seem less like coincidence than a hint from God. When the Walking Man stops walking and disappears before the eyes of the travelers, Zechariah leans down, touches the earth with his hands and says “Here, [...] This is our place” (98). Presenting the discovery of “their place” as their fate, a chosen spot they were guided to by an angelic being, “Zechariah Morgan’s master narrative [...] seeks to define the essential nature and collective destiny of the 8-rock people” (Bouson 198), thus turning the shame of the Disallowing into the pride of being God’s chosen people living on God’s chosen land.

The Old Father’s narrative of the journey to Haven is thus told and retold over the years, thus cementing its function as Haven’s and later Ruby’s identity-forming creation myth. By establishing this narrative, Zechariah satisfies several needs of the travelers. He turns the shameful experience of the Disallowing into a tale of fate and divine guidedness, thereby establishing the identity of the future Rubyites as God’s chosen people and also establishes an us-versus-them-mentality, by turning their “8-rock” skin, previously branded unworthy by the people of Fairly, into a sign of purity: “They have locked into the need to preserve the status quo, which is based in a rigid adherence to the past. Their interpretation of their history and their sacred role in that history generated their ideology of the quest for home and freedom, and ideology very similar to the Israelites’ flight from Egypt and to the American Dream” (Page 2001, 643).

5.2.2 Like a Bullet in the Brain – Internalized Trauma as the Foundation of Community

What prompts the families of Haven to pack their bags and move once again, finally founding Ruby, is dubbed “the Disallowing, Part Two” and constitutes the second time those Black families are denied entrance to the American Dream they so desperately want to be a part of. Upon returning home from fighting in World War II, the men of

Haven find their town run down, its people impoverished: “From Haven, a dreamtown in Oklahoma Territory, to Haven, a ghosttown in Oklahoma State. Freedmen who stood tall in 1889 dropped to their knees in 1934 and were stomach-crawling by 1948” (5). Further adding to the shame caused by the economic decay of the once promising town is the racism encountered by those who risked their lives to fight for a country that evidently does not value them:

Those that survived that particular war came right back home, saw what had become of Haven, heard about the missing testicles of other colored soldiers; about medals being torn off by gangs of Rednecks and Sons of the Confederacy and recognized the Disallowing, Part Two. It would have been like watching a parade banner that said WAR-WEARY-SOLDIERS! NOT WELCOME HOME! (194).

Thus once more excluded and displaced, 14 8-rock families separate from Haven and move further west to eventually settle down and found the town of Ruby.

In another tragic instance of Disallowing, Steward and Deacon’s sister Ruby dies on the journey West, away from Haven, because they couldn’t find a doctor willing to attend to her on account of her skin color: “She died on the waiting room bench while the nurse tried to find a doctor to examine her” (113). When they find out that the nurse had been trying to reach a veterinarian, it adds another layer of reactive pride in the face of an inhumane racist shaming³⁷, and the New Fathers make a covenant with God: “Ruby was buried, without benefit of a mortuary, in a pretty spot on Stewards ranch, and it was then that the bargain was struck. A prayer in the form of a deal, no less, with God [...]” (113). From that point on, the New Father’s view themselves as God’s chosen people and the town they named in memory of the girl as their very own City upon a Hill, destined to serve as an example of purity and righteousness in the face of the moral failure of its enemies.

The men of Ruby, led by the Morgan twins Deacon and Steward, propagate this historical narrative of terror and abuse as the moral foundation of their communal life, utilizing “the power of narrative to establish moral authority” (Davidson 358) and thereby to maintain their status quo. History, for the Ruby elders serves as an ideological underpinning for their actions. Therefore they have to guard it and fix it by any means, as it legitimizes any action of theirs to fight back any real or imaginary

³⁷ The incident recalls schoolteacher’s treating of Sethe as an animal in *Beloved*, an incident that also set in motion a spiral of shame trauma, which ultimately leads to Sethe’s killing of her daughter.

danger for Ruby. Although Ruby's historiography is solely based on memory and oral history, it has been solidified and turned into a political dogma, "an ideology that allows them any measure of violence so long as it defends (what they deem) the town's common interest" (Davidson 360). The Ruby men have to be in control of their town's grand narrative at all times for their moral authority to be upheld. At the same time, this narrative has to be presented as objective, "unauthored" so to speak, for it to remain unchangeable and fixed, as Linda Hutcheon writes: "Ideology – how a culture represents itself to itself – 'doxifies' or naturalizes narrative representation, making it appear as natural or common-sensical ... it presents what is really constructed meaning as something inherent in that which is being represented" (1989, 49).

Because Ruby relies so heavily on the knowledge of its historical narrative, it exists solely in the past, the time-space of the Disallowing, as it forms the basis of their self-perception. Rev. Misner is worried about this and blames the town's "unraveling" on its insistence on permanently repeating the past in their narratives and actions:

Over and over and with the least provocation, they pulled from their stock of stories tales about the old folks, their grands and great-grands; their fathers and mothers. Dangerous confrontations, clever maneuvers. Testimonies to endurance, wit, skill and strength. Tales of luck and outrage. But why were there no stories to tell of themselves? About their own lives they shut up. Had nothing to say, pass on. As though past heroism was enough of a future to live by. As though, rather than children, they wanted duplicates (161).

The fear of change and challenge of the status quo turns Ruby into a static space disconnected from the flow of time and disconnected from the outside world. Extracting all guidance from history, they miss out on life, though, avoiding new experiences in favor of old lessons: "[...] nothing passes from people's lives into their history, which, because they are shut up, passes them by, merely reproducing the past in the present and future" (McKee 201). The town's disconnection with the present and the impossibility to venture into a future is expressed in the childlessness of the Morgan twins. Steward and Dovey are infertile, Deacon and Soane's sons died in Vietnam. These circumstances symbolize the lack of a future for the Morgans and – because the twins stand at the center of the Ruby patriarchy – for the town itself. Its fixation on the past and its frantic refusal to allow any kind of opening up to new ideas and new social developments has turned Ruby into a sort of ghost town, frozen in time and therefore unable to participate

in the cycle of life and death. While initially they oppose change and otherness in order to protect their community from the dangers of the outside world, this petrified place ends up crippling its community: “They think they are protecting their wives and children, when in fact they are maiming them” (306).

Ironically, by adhering to an essentialist racist discourse, even though it values the purity of their Black bloodlines, the Rubyites imitate whites. Instead of transcending the division of humans along the lines of skin color, the men of Ruby simply reverse it, thereby continuing the master narrative of race with the same destructive force and consequences. The very essentialism inherent in Ruby’s notion of a pure Blackness is in fact not opposed to the rigid color lines set up by Whites in order to differentiate themselves against and gain power over blacks, but represents a perpetuation of it: “They think they have outfoxed the whiteman when in fact they imitate him” (306). Another expression of Ruby’s aping of white society, is its obsession with money, with economic success. One morning, Deacon Morgan sees Sweetie Fleetwood walking toward the Convent, clearly not in a good condition. Caring for her four sick children without cessation has exhausted her to the point of madness. Seeing her this way, Deacon considers for a second to go after her and offer his help, but decides against it, since he is on his way to open the bank: “After considering letting Poole wait and driving on to catch up with Sweetie, Deek cut off his motor. July, his clerk and secretary, was not due until ten. There should be no occasion when the bank of a good and serious town did not open on time” (114). Deacon has adopted the values of the white male society, its emphasis on money and the economy over everything else. Thus, as Justine Tally (1999) points out, Ruby’s definition of Blackness is aimed at racial purity instead of racial solidarity (26), thereby corroding the foundations of the black community. The damaging effect of the town’s adoption of white values of material wealth and social standing on the town and the individual is expressed by Dovey Morgan, who notices Steward’s deterioration that lies in sharp contrast to the high economic standing he has acquired:

[...] when Dovey Morgan thought about her husband it was in terms of what he lost [...] Contrary to his (and all of Ruby’s) assessment, the more Steward acquired, the more visible his losses. [...] In 1962 the natural gas drilled to ten thousand feet on the ranch filled his pockets but shrunk their land to a toy ranch, and he lost the trees that had made it so beautiful to behold. His hairline and his taste buds faltered over time.

Small losses that culminated with the big one: in 1964, when he was forty, [...] they learned neither could ever have children (82).

The more property Steward acquires, the more empty and barren his life gets. The loss of the trees on his land and the loss of the possibility to have children represent a moral bankruptcy and a sterility that is directly related to his adoption of white values and his renunciation of black solidarity. By essentializing race in a way that only the darkest skin color but not a common history of oppression and displacement qualifies for inclusion into the race, the Rubyites subscribe to the same short-sighted, exploitative economic agenda as their oppressors: “It is this skin-color issue that so blinds the Ruby men that they lose sight of their true enemy. Instead, they become the enemy. Blinded as they are, they set up the same economic structure that was responsible for their own enslavement” (Drummond Mbalia 136). Thus, the trauma of slavery cripples them long after they assume they have left it behind. It turns out it is not merely the particular white racism against Blacks that is harmful, but the underlying essentialist division of people along color lines in order to establish hierarchies of power and privilege.

The town is located “off the country road, accessible only to the lost and the knowledgeable” (186), isolated from the rest of the world, which is how the townspeople like it. Inaccessible to intruders from the outside, it is easier for them to preserve the 8-rock purity and defend themselves “from the temptations and moral failings of the larger American society” (Bouson 193), such as “Television. [...] Disco. [...] Policemen. [...] Picture shows, filthy music. [...] Wickedness in the streets, theft in the night, murder in the morning. Liquor for lunch and dope for dinner” (274). Their paradise is defined by the evils kept out of it, it thus functions through a “politics of inclusion and exclusion” (Bouson 192), which is easier to uphold when the town is hard to get to. The place of Ruby is governed by a strict spatial policy of positioning interior versus exterior, and my space versus yours. Inside this place, this “storehouse of memory” (Su 592), there is room for only one authorized version of history, one common past that does not allow for variation or change. Any unauthorized version of events, any interpretation of the past that does not conform to the New Fathers’ has to be disregarded, preferably forgotten: “vital to the national community enacted by *Paradise* is a dialectic between memory and forgetting” (Gauthier 398)

Ruby’s erasure of unwanted or subversive people and memories follows a colonial policy of nationhood described by Homi Bhabha:

It is the will to nationhood that unifies historical memory and secures present-day consent. [This will] is itself the site of a strange forgetting of the history of the nation's past: the violence involved in establishing the nation's writ. It is this forgetting ... that constitutes the *beginning* of the nation's narrative. [The discourse of national community requires a forgetting of] the perplexed histories of the living people, their cultures of survival and resistance (149, 159-61).

It is true that the community of Ruby in *Paradise* is founded upon an emphasis on memory as much as on forgetting. The memory of the ordeal of the forefathers is as important for maintaining their utopia, as is the forgetting, the purposeful omitting of the stories and people that do not fit in the picture, those that would subvert the very ideology they so frantically are trying to protect.

Ruby's approach to history is presented in the chapter "Patricia" in which the town's unofficial historian, Patricia Best, attempts to forge a history of Ruby from its inception until the present day, runs into opposition from the town members when she tries to interrogate them about their families' histories, yet discovers the mechanisms of remembrance and forgetting at work in the creation and preservation of Ruby's grand historical narrative.

As Marni Gauthier observes, the women in *Paradise* disrupt and undermine the meticulously crafted fabric of the town's authorized mythic history (408). Be it the Convent women, who reinstate the authority of individual small narratives against the stronghold of hegemonic grand narratives, or Pat Best, who, as somewhat of an outsider in Ruby herself, takes it upon her to put together a counterhistory of Ruby to include those individual stories and voices silenced in its official version.

Patricia is the daughter of Roger Best and Delia, his "wife of sunlight skin, of racial tempering" (197). When Roger brings Delia to Ruby, the townspeople are scandalized as to this blatant disregard of their demarcated lines of color. Steward Morgan, ever the blunt spokesmen for the Rubyites, vocalizes his contempt for the whiteness in Delia that threatens to dilute their racial purity: "He's bringing along the dung we leaving behind" (201). Because she is the offspring of this union of 8-rock and sunlight skin, Patricia is marginalized in the community and from this margin, claims an objective standpoint from which to re-evaluate Ruby's history: "Pat had wanted proof in documents where possible to match the stories, and where proof was not available she interpreted – freely but, she thought, insightfully because she alone had the required

emotional distance” (188). Patricia claims for herself a role similar to the omniscient narrator in *Jazz*, and similar to that narrator, she experiences the impossibility of being outside of history, outside of narrative. From her position on the margin of Ruby’s universe, her view of the mechanisms at work in its historiographic creation is less obstructed by vested interest than that of those at its center. Still, she is a part of that history and because of her ancestry also its object, a victim of Ruby’s exclusionary politics. Her struggles with writing her supposedly objective counterhistory underscore the point Morrison is trying to make, and has made in *Jazz* as well: any narration, any history is relative and perspectival, there is not one grand historical narrative. You can be thorough in gathering the bits and pieces available to you to forge a reliable account of history, but it is still an account from your own specific perspective. Similar to the “Golden Grey” chapter in *Jazz*, the “Patricia” chapter in *Paradise* illustrates the unreliability of any kind of historical source and its narration. Furthermore, when Pat Best undertakes her own personal historical archaeology, she has to employ her own imagination to fill the historical gaps in the story and infer her own conclusions from the limited material available to her. Thus, she represents Morrison’s own approach to historical truth, in which the imaginative construction of narrative plays a major role: “On the basis of some information and a little bit of guesswork you journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply” (Morrison 1987, 112). Like in *Beloved* and *Jazz*, Morrison here stresses the important role of the imagination when it comes to the creation and remembrance of history. To the author “the crucial distinction [...] is not between fact and fiction but the distinction between fact and truth. Because facts can exist without human intelligence, but truth cannot” (ibid 113). Because Morrison is looking to fill gaps in the historical discourse that deliberately left out the lives of the oppressed and silenced slaves and ex-slaves, she relies on her imagination “to yield up a kind of a truth” (ibid 112) that is truer than the mere facts available via that hegemonic historiography. Through a knowledge of and an almost mythical connection to her ancestors, Morrison is able to access interiors, theirs and her own, that she compares to “archaeological site,” where images float – memories, remains – that she accepts as her “route to a reconstruction of a world, to an exploration of an interior life that was not written and to the revelation of a kind of truth” (ibid 122). This approach is fundamental to Pat Best’s writing of Ruby’s historiography, thereby undermining the Rubyites’ postulation of a fixed and objective historical account.

Patricia starts out her history project as “a voluntary act to fill empty hours” (188), drawing family trees to visualize the genealogies of the families “as a gift to the citizens of Ruby” (187). But as it turns out, those families are not all too keen to have someone, especially not an outsider like Patricia, digging around in their family histories, reacting with silence and more or less polite rejection: “Things got out of hand when she asked to see letters and marriage certificates. The women narrowed their eyes before smiling and offering to freshen her coffee. Invisible doors closed, and the conversation turned to weather” (187). Frustrated with the town’s unwillingness to cooperate, Patricia becomes more and more curious as to what the Rubyites are trying to hide and turns her communal history project into a personal mission: “[...] she gave up all pretense to objective comment. The project became unfit for any eyes except her own” (187). During this highly personal venture she discovers truths about Ruby’s history in the gaps left by the official, orally transmitted history that is present in the Rubyites’ lives in school, in church and in all areas of public life: “The town’s official story, elaborated from pulpits, in Sunday school classes and ceremonial speeches, had a strong public life” (188). Tapping into her own “archaeological site,” the memory of her dead mother, Patricia connects with the interiority of Ruby heretofore closed to her as an outsider, and thus is able to read between the lines of Ruby’s official history to discover the mechanisms of exclusion and forgetting at work: “Pat went to the window and raised it. Her mother’s grave lay at the edge of the yard. [...] Pat closed the window, returned to her desk to prepare for another entry in her log” (190). Writing from a space of imaginative truth, Patricia gets into the interior lives of the Rubyites and even of the Old Fathers, “All of that would fit nicely for Zechariah Morgan. [...] The scattering would have frightened him. [...] He would not have had trouble imagining [...] He would have been frightened [...] Zechariah would have hated that” (192/193). Patricia continues to explore the interior historical spaces of Ruby to finally arrive at the connection between her own family’s outsider status and the repercussions of the Disallowing, a line she had not drawn before. Addressing this epiphany to her father, she again breaks down Ruby’s history to a personal level and thus undermines his all-encompassing claim of a grand narrative to create a counterhistory from Ruby’s margin: “Daddy, [...] They hate us because [Mama] looked like a cracker and was bound to have cracker-looking children like me” (196). Patricia goes on to explain in detail the Ruby practice of “takeovers,” in which men take over fellow Ruby men’s widows or widowers take over unmarried girls. Aimed at securing pure 8-rock bloodlines, and to avoid more “cracker-looking

children, this practice of intermarrying allows for a tight control of the town's women that is necessary for the men to secure their ideology of racial superiority. Yet, what is suppose to strengthen Ruby is in fact weakening it, since these incestuous or near-incestuous relationships endanger the future health and growth of Ruby's population³⁸.

Patricia's final moment of understanding comes after watching the children of Ruby perform the town's version of the Christmas play. Here, the history of the Disallowing is embedded in the framework of the Nativity, conflating Mary and Joseph's rejection at the inn with the Old Father's rejection at the borders of Fairly. The yearly recurring Christmas play serves as the main vehicle for the Rubyites to promote and perpetuate the communal memory of the Disallowing. Repeating the narrative year after year, they are able to institutionalize it and keep it relevant for generations to come, thusly securing their patriarchal authority that is based on the narrative.

Richard Misner points out to Patricia that the Christmas play displays 7 holy families, whereas there were 9 original families that founded Ruby. Because of her deep immersion in the town's history and her own experience as an outsider, Patricia is now able to see the mechanism of willful erasure of unwanted elements in the historical narrative of Ruby. She recognizes that it was her own family and the Jury family that were omitted because their men married into lighter blood. Patricia's "cracker-looking" mother and Menus Jury's fiancée, "the pretty sandy-haired girl from Virginia" (195/196) are "disallowed" from the town's history, as they present a danger to its dogma of racial purity and their inclusion would discredit the very narrative on which their (nationalist) authority is based: "The play manifests Ruby's active perpetuation of their mythic history of 8-rock purity: the missing (we might say, 'forgotten') families represent the town's internal disallowings of lineages whose members have sought light-skinned partners" (Gauthier 406).

Paradise can be read as an allegorical critique and deconstruction of American nation building via its depiction of Ruby's institutionalized dogma of memory and forgetting. Ruby's identity, much like America's national identity, rests on an ideology of exceptionalism. Its identity is necessarily fragile, as it is based on impossible assumptions of exclusivity, purity and a fixed origin. To bolster this identity, it is

³⁸ Although it is not explicitly hinted at, the harmful effect of intermarriage might be reflected in Sweetie and Jeff Fleetwood's four "damaged" children, as incestuous relationships often result in genetic defects. Another reason for the children's illnesses might be a genetic defect as a result of Jeff Fleetwood's coming into contact with Agent Orange during his time serving in the Vietnam War. Agent Orange was used as a defoliant in the War and has been known to cause numerous diseases ranging from Spina Bifida to cancer, and damage the genetic makeup of the victims.

necessary to maintain a rigid control of communal history, which Ruby achieves via its balance of memory and forgetting, and the rigid exclusion of the impure other of its historic discourse. Similar to Toni Morrison's argument in *Playing in the Dark* that White America comes to know itself through the historical and metaphorical presence of Blacks, the Other it so fervently tries to hide and silence, Homi Bhabha addresses the precariousness of nationalist ideals of purity and claims that although a society might believe it possible to conserve homogeneity, be it cultural, ethnic or other, "the other is never outside or beyond us; it emerges forcefully within cultural discourse, when we *think* we speak most intimately and indigenously 'between ourselves'" (Bhabha 1990, 4). Indeed, the Rubyites define their identity via their forced exclusion of the light-skinned element from the historical discourse of their town, and thus paradoxically confirm and strengthen its presence. Like, according to Morrison, Americanness depends on the presence of Blacks, "Rubyness" depends on the presence of the light-skinned, morally bankrupt Other upon which to project that which is feared and unwanted inside themselves, against which they can define themselves as opposite, and against which they can unite to protect their communal values.

For Bhabha, nation-building is a never-ending process of negotiation, and therefore the nation is characterized by a "cultural temporality," an intrinsic openness to change and a "transitional social reality" (ibid). Proposing the narrative formation of the nation like this entails a view of it and its symbols as constantly changing and open to interpretation. Thusly, the nation organically grows and changes within its narrative; it is not the hermetically closed end product of a premeditated political ideology. Hence, Bhabha "contests the traditional authority of those national objects of knowledge – Tradition, People, the Reason of State, High Culture, for instance – whose pedagogical value often relies on their representation as holistic concepts located within an evolutionary narrative of historical continuity" (qtd. In Dalsgård 239). In *Paradise*, Ruby's national object of knowledge is its creation myth that is reiterated and solidified from year to year. A closed narrative system within the town's heroic history, the fixity of Ruby's concept of self is symbolized by the Oven.

5.2.3 Beware the Furrow of His Brow – The Oven as a Symbol of Stasis

In the middle of the town of Ruby stands a communal stove that the townspeople refer to as The Oven. It was built in 1890, during the founding of Haven, when Zechariah Morgan ordered some of the townsmen to build it. It served as a community kitchen at a

time when not every house had its own oven. Thereby it becomes the symbol of communal nurturing and group solidarity, as the townspeople gather around it every day to cook and be together.³⁹ Already back then, though, it was more than just a useful item used for providing food for the Haven families. It was the first thing they built when they arrived at their future hometown, putting “most of their strength into constructing the huge, flawlessly designed Oven that both nourished them and monumentalized what they had done” (6/7). It is as though the Old Fathers new right from the start of their community building enterprise, that their town needed a monument, a symbol to remind them and the following generations of the magnitude of their task. From that time onwards, the Oven became Haven’s and later Ruby’s central place of communal memory and commemoration.

Like 124 Bluestone Road was an open and nurturing home place before Sethe’s murdering of her daughter, in the early days of the Oven, it was a truly communal place as well, a place for gathering and socializing:

On crates and makeshift benches, Haven people gathered for talk, for society and the comfort of hot game. [...] Whenever livestock was slaughtered, or when the taste for unsmoked game was high, Haven people brought the kill to the Oven and stayed sometimes to fuss and quarrel with the Morgan family about seasonings and the proper test for ‘done.’ They stayed to gossip, complain, roar with laughter and drink walking coffee in the shade of the eaves (15).

Apart from its function as a historical monument, the Oven here functions as a venerable symbol of home. If Haven is a home, the Oven is the kitchen where the family gathers for physical and spiritual nourishment. The Oven thus symbolizes a sense of “topophilia,” a concept by Yi-Fu Tuan referring to the “affective bond between people and place” (Tuan 1974, 4). Being a place used by the townspeople to stop and rest, to listen to each other’s stories and sorrows, the Oven fits Tuan’s humanistic definition of place as a “field of care” (ibid). This view is supported by the fact that, even as Haven was deteriorating, “when everything else about the town was dying; when it was clear as daylight that talk of electricity would remain just talk and when gas lines and sewers were Tulsa marvels, the Oven stayed alive” (15).

³⁹ Also, the Oven is a sign of pride over the fact that none of the 8-rock women had to work as a slave in a white kitchen, meaning they also weren’t exposed as much to the threat of being raped by the white master, meaning their offspring was still purely 8-rock African blood.

Thus functioning as a symbol of the townspeople's sense of community and resilience, the Oven is taken apart and packed up when the people leave Haven to move further westward: "like the ex-slaves who knew what came first, the ex-soldiers broke up the Oven and loaded it into two trucks even before they took apart their own beds" (16), and took it with them to their new destination. While the men of Haven thus valued the Oven for something beyond its utility, even beyond its symbolism as communal center, the women of Haven "resented the truck space given over to it – rather than a few more sacks of seed, rather than shoats or even a child's crib. Resented also the hours spent putting it back together – hours that could have been spent getting the privy door on sooner" (103). The women's concerns are pragmatic, focused on the bare necessities for physically surviving the strenuous trek westwards with their children, some of them very small. In their eyes, the Oven had become useless with the advent of cook stoves for every household, with the change from eating big game that was hunted and cooked in the big Oven, to eating domesticated chickens and pigs that were small enough to be prepared in regular stoves. Thus having lost its function as a place for communal cooking and gathering, Soane Morgan contents that in the case of the Oven, "a utility became a shrine [and] destroyed its own self" (103), thus unveiling its significance as a place of worship, the deity being Ruby's own mythic history which is embodied in the Oven.

The inscription of the Oven is an issue of discontent between the old and the new generation of Ruby men, with the older generation insisting on the inscription being "Beware the Furrow of his Brow," directed as a warning, a "threat to those who had disallowed" (195), although over time the letters fell off and those left standing read "... the Furrow of His Brow." The Ruby youngsters want to change the inscription to read "Be the Furrow of His Brow," but the Ruby patriarchs insist that "Beware" is the only correct inscription, because their history of trauma and overcoming embodied by the Oven and expressed via this inscription serves to legitimize their rigid patriarchal grip on the town. The ordeal of their journey, the sacrifices they made and most importantly, the Disallowing that lies at the foundation of the fierce sense of pride in their pure blackness, is the backbone of Ruby's isolationism. This story and the Oven as the symbol for it are not to be tempered with because, as Rob Davidson (2001) points out, the Ruby patriarchs "understand, on some level, the power of narrative to establish moral authority, and this is why communal historiography – that is, a tightly controlled version of the town's history – becomes paramount" (359).

The Oven symbolizes a solidification of the myth of the Disallowing and the subsequent building of Haven and thus, as Katrine Dalsgård (2001) points out, functions as what Homi Bhabha calls “national objects of knowledge... whose pedagogical value often relies on their representation as holistic concepts located within an evolutionary narrative of historical continuity” (239). The whole philosophical underpinning of the community is embodied in the Oven, both of which are unable to change and adapt to changing times and circumstances. It stands as a symbol for the failure of static epistemological systems to support a functioning social and cultural life, a petrified signifier of traumatic history and pride. “Once an actual oven for cooking, the capital ‘O’ Oven became a totem invested with the history of suffering at the hands of whites and with the hope and utopian anticipation for a community forever safe from persecution/lynching” (Kearly, 11). Like in *Beloved*, one question in *Paradise* seems to be how to fill the newly freed black identity with meaning, how to make it one’s own.⁴⁰ In clinging to their traumatic history and their isolationist, exceptionalist agenda, the people of Ruby unwittingly perpetuate their unfree existence as slaves to a racist trauma.

This stasis is expressed by the fact that, when the people of Haven decide to leave for greener pastures, they take the Oven apart and clean it “of its many layers of dust and grease – that is, layers of lived experience and cultural temporality” (Dalsgård 239), thus working to deny the fact that history and its symbols are socio-cultural products and change their meaning and interpretive value over time and along socio-cultural lines. By cleaning the signs of time and aging from the Oven, they want to bring it back to its original state, to let its message shine brightly for the generations to come. In preserving the Oven, the symbol of their historically based ideology, the Ruby men intend to preserve the original state of their community as well.

The controversy around the Oven’s inscription is part of Toni Morrison’s postmodern narrative strategy. The rudimentary inscription of “... the furrow of his brow” is one of the few written texts indicating the forefathers’ heroic undertaking. Like the people of Ruby, the readers do not know the original inscription and join the community in their attempts at trying to deal with this gap. Because the Rubyites depend on a rigid, continuous history for their communal sense of self, they need to fix this gap in order to reestablish the communal order. The missing inscription and the

⁴⁰ “Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another” (*Beloved*, 100)

discussion in the community surrounding this erasure represent a postmodern moment of destabilizing the hegemonic discourse. By introducing an insecurity into the historiography of Ruby, Morrison points to the basic unknowability of history and the impossibility of essentializing historical accounts. Around Ruby's quest for meaning, Morrison builds a virtual menagerie of mirrors, reflecting the different points of view prevalent in the community as they are splitted along lines of generations, religious affiliation and gender. The resulting ideological standpoints are then expressed in the way these different strata of the community want to fashion and substitute the missing part of the oven text. "Beware the furrow..." "Be the furrow..." and "We are the furrow..." are the three suggestions given, displaying an increasing agency of the self.

Instead of the commanding, fear-inducing "Beware the Furrow of His Brow," the young generation of Ruby wants to replace the missing letters to read "Be the Furrow of His Brow." Yet, although they contests the words on the inscription, "But what kind of message is that? No ex-slave who had the guts to make his own way, build a town out of nothing, could think like that" (84), they do not contest the meaning of the inscription as the key to the town's exceptionalist status, as Destry Beauchamp's plea shows: "What's so wrong about 'Be the Furrow'? [...] It's not being Him, sir, it's being His instrument, His justice. As a race – [...] If we follow His commandments, we'll be His voice, His retribution. As a people –" (87). Although they want to rewrite history, to open it up to include them and their current lives, they do not want to undermine the concept of history, of the past as the basis for Ruby's exceptional moral responsibility. Still, rewriting the community motto in the way intended by the town's young men would open up Ruby's discourse for new narratives, and new interpretations of old ones, thus opening up a discursive gateway into a future that is different from the past, one that is adapted to the challenges and changes of the present instead of merely regurgitating the victories of the past. Moreover, the town youth "attempts to integrate the Motto debate into a larger discussion of race and the global black community," (Flint, 602) by asserting the power of the "we," of the community in writing and rewriting the historical narrative. Although the exceptionalist agenda would have remained, had the young men had their way, the signifier would have received a new signified outside of the self-referential Ruby discourse. By including an element of agency in the Oven's inscription, the individual and communal identities of Ruby would have become connected to the greater fight evolving around race ideologies and imperial agendas during the Civil Rights movement at that time.

Refusing to even consider the young people's plea, the New Fathers are adamant to leave the Oven and its inscription unchanged, thus solidifying the past's grip on the present. However, by hermetically closing off Ruby's historical discourse from the present, the Ruby men render it insignificant, almost meaningless: "Reified and canonized, like the community's exceptionalist self-narrative" writes Katherine Dalsgård, "it has become a signifier emptied of content" (239). The inscription on the oven is "the community's final signified" (ibid), the final reference to which all signifiers in the town's discourse refer, but that does not refer to anything outside of itself. It is viewed as a command directly from God. Therefore, to challenge it is to challenge His authority and because the New Fathers occupy the space of God's voice within Ruby (Flint 601), it means a challenge to them as well. This is expressed by Reverend Pulliam who is enraged when Reverend Misner refers to the inscription as a "motto": "Motto? Motto? We talking command!" (86) Hence, no debate is allowed.

Dovey Morgan – presumably speaking for the women of the community – rejects the idea of pinpointing any sort of officially sanctioned general meaning of the Oven's inscription. In her opinion, this undertaking is futile, since God and his teachings are the only reference point of meaning the community needs: "'Beware the Furrow if His Brow'? 'Be the Furrow of His Brow'? Her opinion was that 'Furrow of His Brow' alone was enough for any age or generation. Specifying it, particularizing it, nailing its meaning down, was futile. The only nailing needing to be done had already taken place. On the Cross" (93). Through Dovey's assessment, Morrison rejects the possibility of fixing the meaning of any given symbol or narrative and, as Nancy J. Peterson points out, by focusing on the debate around the Oven's inscription, "at the narrative level, *Paradise* follows *Jazz* in emphasizing the need to make and remake the story, the history" (88). The Oven and the debate around its inscription are principal symbols for the town's rigid grip on its mythical history. Any attempt to tell a new story or even to view the old story from a new perspective is condemned as blasphemy.

Thus housing only a singular version of history, one narrative of mythical proportions, the discursive and social space is ordered, but strangely empty of life. Void of difference and complexity, Ruby is a one-dimensional space and thus hostile to the development of a thriving social life. For Morrison, space is social if it allows for a simultaneity of layers of histories and narratives: "Social space in *Paradise* is shared space, and freedom is found in spaces radically occupied rather than empty, with multiple subjects, objects, presences, and pasts admitted within any location" (McKee

199). In a spatial paradox, a freedom of space is only possible when it is crammed with heterogeneous histories and subjectivities, rather than emptied of everything not conforming to the dominant historical discourse.

Morrison presents her conception of such an ideal social space via her depiction of the Convent, the other utopian space of *Paradise*, yet one based on a philosophy fundamentally different than the dogma of purity controlling Ruby.

5.3 Bitches and Witches – The Convent

Ruby is a strictly patriarchal town, in which women are loved and revered but oppressed and silenced, ostensibly in order to protect them. Control over women is the key to preserving the town's isolationism and dogma of black purity, for if they stray, they might get involved with lighter-skinned black men or even white men and thus undermine the carefully preserved foundations of Ruby's existence. In Ruby, the women are kept under tight male control in order to keep blackness pure, to uphold the homogeneity of their paradise. The Convent on the other hand is a space of the female other, the wild and unknown and as such, represents a feminine utopia, a maleless space outside the patriarchal sphere. The Convent in *Paradise* is a prime social space in the Morrisonian sense, "new space ... formed by the inwardness of the outside, the interiority of the 'othered,' the personal that is always embedded in the public" (Morrison, Home, 12).

Whereas Ruby is a homogenous space, the Convent is heterogeneous, housing layers of individual histories. According to Michel Foucault's theory of discourse in "The Archaeology of Knowledge", discourse is never homogeneous but consists of disparate, conflicting meanings that nevertheless form the discursive whole. These conflicting meanings exist in layers and, like archaeologists, we can uncover layer after layer of meaning and learn how they are interrelated and form new meanings: "To reveal in all its purity the space in which discursive events are deployed is not to undertake to re-establish it in an isolation that nothing could overcome; it is not to close in upon itself; it is to leave oneself free to describe the interplay of relations within it and outside it" (Foucault 1969, 32). Foucault is not interested in discovering the "fixed origin" of the discourse, or even the sign, he rather sees the interplay and interrelatedness of the historical layers of discourse to compose the discursive space. Likewise, in her novels Morrison refutes the idea that narrative space can be or should be kept "pure," meaning homogenous and fixed in its meaning. Rather, she promotes a

discursive space constituted of layers upon layers of history and meaning, changing over time but not cancelling each other out in the process, rather profiting off one another. The spaces that form home places in Morrison's novels do so by allowing a multiplicity of pasts and presents, a simultaneity of inside and outside, and by layering individual and communal histories in a way to allow the exploration and interpretation of their meaning. Whereas the Ruby men's removing the Oven's many layers of grease before their move to Ruby symbolized their trying to get rid of the multiple layers of historical discourse that add up in a community over the years, the Convent fully embraces Morrison's vision of home as a space of layered histories and meanings, and thus comes closer to the novel's postulated ideal of a paradise than Ruby ever could. By acknowledging a multiplicity of minority discourses, the Convent women "re-situate minority in safety and freedom by entering into responsive relations with persons of different moral and political positions" (McKee 208), thus creating a home for themselves and other women seeking refuge from male oppression and abuse.

The Convent is a space of women and a space of the other and thus represents what Elaine Showalter would call a "wild zone": "We can think of the 'wild zone' of women's culture spatially, experientially, or metaphysically. Spatially it stands for an area which is literally no man's land, a place forbidden to men [...] In this sense, the 'wild' is always imaginary; from the male point of view, it may simply be the projection of the unconscious. [...] men do not know what is in the 'wild.'" (262). The female space of the Convent indeed represents an unsettlingly mysterious place for the Ruby men. Positioned by Morrison as a counterdraft of a paradisiacal home place to that of Ruby, the Convent stands for that which is heterogeneous and thus potentially disruptive to the forced homogeneity of Ruby. The disturbances in Ruby's utopia, the rebellious youth, the barrenness, the sick and dying children, are blamed on the "rag-tag band of Convent women" (Davidson 355), because the women are the perfect foil for the Ruby men's rage and insecurity upon facing their town's unraveling. Their fierce independence from men, be it economically, sexually or emotionally, contributes to the growing discomfort and hatred among the Ruby men. The women represent the opposite of the nineteen Negro ladies Steward and Deacon saw when they visited a prosperous all-Black town a long time ago:

They wore summer dresses of material the lightness, the delicacy of which neither of them had ever seen. Most of the dresses were white, but

two were lemon yellow and one a salmon color. They wore small, pale hats of beige, dusty rose, powdery blue [...] Deek's image of the nineteen summertime ladies was unlike the photographer's. His remembrance was pastel colored and eternal (110).

Those ladies represent the feminine ideal of purity and grace that serves as a model for the women of Ruby. The Convent women, on the other hand, are the polar opposite of this vision of demureness, showing up at Arnette and K.D.'s wedding "looking like go-go girls: pink shorts, skimpy tops, see-through skirts; painted eyes, no lipstick; obviously no underwear, no stockings. Jezebel's storehouse raided to decorate arms, earlobes, necks, ankles and even a nostril" (156). The women present a mockery of those pure, pastel-colored Negro ladies and threaten Ruby's hard-won utopian space of racial and moral purity and therefore, they have to die: "He Could not abide... this new and obscene breed of female... for sullyng his personal history" (279).

It is noteworthy that Morrison situates her most radically feminist space inside the domestic space of a former convent. The women of the convent cook, preserve fruit and vegetables, tend to their garden and do all other sorts of traditional women's work and yet, by doing so, they transcend the narrow boundaries of traditional female roles and emancipate themselves from the patriarchal discourse prevalent in Ruby. As in the other two novels of the trilogy, Morrison locates the freedom of modernity inside experiences of domesticity and home, although usually "the vocabulary of modernity is a vocabulary of anti-home. It celebrates mobility, movement, exile. [...] the discourse of contemporary feminism speaks enthusiastically of migrations, boundary crossings, nomadic subjects" (Felski 23). Morrison finds liberating borderlessness in the "multiple occupations of space" (McKee 198), which are often located in houses and homes. Morrison thereby concurs with those theorists of African American cultures who claim that "concepts and experiences of home cannot be separated from discourses of freedom" (McKee 198). Eminently among those, bell hooks has theorized the homeplace as a site of resistance:

Despite the brutal reality of racial apartheid, of domination, one's homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist. Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world (hooks 42).

Yet, whereas one might expect such a homeplace to be radically closed, so as to protect its inhabitants from the hostile outside world, Morrison propagates a radical openness with the Convent and thus concurs again with hooks who claims that the meaning of home changes with the experience of decolonization and radicalization: “Home is that place which enables and promotes varied an everchanging perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference. [...] For me this space of radical openness is a margin – a profound edge” (148/149). The Convent is such a radically open space on the boundary that allows for the simultaneity of layers of history, open to interpretation and reworking by its inhabitants. Therefore, it represents hooks’ new, postcolonial vision of home, providing a safe space for the women to confront and work through their histories of trauma.

Located 20 miles away from Ruby, the Convent is situated on the margin of the town and on the margin of society. In many ways, the Convent is positioned as the polar opposite of Ruby, as a “liminal space where the monolithic categories of religion, race, class and gender converge and make cultural hybridity possible” (Fraile-Marcos 244). It thus posits a threat to Ruby, a town depending on homogeneity and exclusivity to preserve its vision of Paradise.

Like Ruby, the Convent is filled with history. Unlike the former, it continually accepts and integrates new individual histories into its spaces and thus continually changes its communal historical quilt by incorporating new patches to form new patterns. To symbolize this, the Convent’s interior has never lost the signs of the different inhabitants before the Convent women. The convent used to be the house of an embezzler, who originally built it as his mansion and had decorated it to reflect his own sensual, but slightly tasteless aesthetic: “The female-torso candleholders in the candelabra hanging from the hall ceiling. [...] The nursing cherubim [...]. The nipple tipped doorknobs. [...] brass male genitalia [...] alabaster vaginas [...]” (72). After the embezzler left it, the Convent was taken over by nuns who used it as a Catholic school for Indian girls. In the present of *Paradise*, it is lived in by Consolata and Mother Mary Magna. Consolata is from Brazil, where she was found living on the street, was taken under their wing by the Catholic nuns on a visit to Brazil and brought home to the Catholic school. The only one of those nuns still living at the Convent is Mother Mary Magna. After taking over the embezzler’s mansion, the Catholic nuns tried their best to

whitewash the building from its indecent past and remove as thoroughly as possible the traces of the embezzler's sensual lifestyle:

Isinglass holds yesterday's light and patterns walls that were stripped and whitewashed fifty years ago. The ornate bathrooms fixtures, which sickened the nuns, were replaced with good clean spigots, but the princely tubs and sinks, which could not be inexpensively removed, remain coolly corrupt. The embezzler's joy that could be demolished was, particularly in the dining room, where stilled Arapaho girls once sat and learned to forget (3-4).

The whitewashing does not just concern the walls of the Convent, but metaphorically refers to the nuns' stripping the Arapaho girls of their past, their memory of their own culture, language, home and roots. The girl's Christianization and reeducation constitutes an act of colonization and thus the Convent is an example of the Bhabha's "World within the Home," as it shows the domestic space as housing "the normalizing, pastoralizing, and individuating techniques of modern power and police" (Bhabha Location, 11). Under the cloak of Christian charity, the nuns eradicate the girls' sense of self, of belonging and home:

It was an opportunity to intervene at the heart of the problem: to bring God and language to natives who were assumed to have neither; to alter their diets, their clothes, their minds, to help them despise everything that had once made their lives worthwhile and to offer them instead the privilege of knowing the one and only God and a chance, thereby, for redemption (227).

What is described here is the trauma of the master narrative, the trauma of patriarchal discourse that entails the loss of minority culture and as such, a loss of self.

The Convent is occupied with forgetting as much as Ruby is occupied with remembering. Yet, it cannot be whitewashed, the past is always within the space of the present, as symbolized by the Isinglass that "holds yesterday's light and patterns walls that were stripped and whitewashed fifty years ago" (3). As a female space at the margins of hegemonic society, the Convent is filled with minority discourse undermining the grand narrative of monolithic linear history: "Signs of joy, of wealth, of sensual indulgence, of theft, of destruction, of corruption – all these abandoned or repressed parts of the nun's lives and of Church history, as well as of the embezzler's past" (McKee 209) are hidden "beneath the cellar stairs" and "packed away in a chest of

sawdust” (72). But these remnants of earlier days do not stay hidden forever, eventually they are found. The former inhabitants of the Convent did not succeed in whitewashing its spaces from the traces of its former frivolous owner, and today’s Convent women do not succeed in whitewashing their own psychological spaces from the traces of their former abuse. Like the sensual memories of the embezzler’s carnal pleasures rise to the surface in the present day, so do the traumatic memories the Convent women try to forget. Yet, since the women in the Convent do not need to uphold a monolithic master narrative in order to maintain control of their world, they can move towards acknowledging and working through their own personal histories of pain and trauma. They can uncover and live inside the many layers of history present in the Convent, acknowledge and ponder them and find within those layers a place in the present to situate themselves.

5.3.1 A Communal Healing of Trauma

Whereas Ruby constantly reiterates and reifies its traumatic history and its heroic overcoming of circumstances, the women of the Convent are at first silenced by the burden of their personal traumata.

The women arriving at the Convent one after the other in the course of the novel all experienced pain and trauma connected to living in a society that rigidly controls them. Abused by men, abandoned by parents, these women are adrift in a world that provides no safety for them. Mavis, the first woman to arrive at the Convent, is presented at first as a stereotype of a victimized, battered woman. Her husband Frank is a brute who regularly rapes and beats her. One day, as she rushes to buy dinner for him, she forgets her infant twins Merle and Pearl in the car in the summer heat, where they die of asphyxiation. Labeled criminally insane by the media, convinced her own family conspires to kill her for her shameful deed, Mavis escapes. She originally intends to drive all the way to California, but when she runs out of gas, she arrives at the Convent and stays. Trying to escape the unbearable memory of killing her children, she is greeted by the ghosts of their spirits, when she gets the “sensation that the kitchen was crowded with children – laughing? singing? – two of whom were Merle and Pearl” (41). The fact that Mavis senses the presence of her dead children hints to the Convent being a liminal space of blurred boundaries, not only between the world of the living and the dead, but also between interior and exterior, past and present.

Gigi, the second woman to arrive at the Convent, used to be an idealistic woman with a fighting spirit. As a member of the Black Power movement, she took part in a demonstration during which she witnessed a little boy getting shot by the police. Disheartened by her experiences, Gigi abandons her political ideals and reverts to an overt sexuality, thriving on the longing gazes of men. Led to the Convent on her quest to find a rock formation in the shape of a man and a woman “fucking forever” (63), Gigi holds on to this vision because it is primal, lying “underneath gripping dreams of social justice, of an honest people’s guard – more powerful than her memory of the boy spitting blood into his hands” (64). Thus reducing her world to corporeality and herself to her body, she hopes to escape the haunting image of the boy spitting up blood, but ends up losing herself in the process: “she had not approved of herself in a long, long time” (257).

Seneca’s arrival at the Convent is the third. When she is five years old, her teenage mother Jean, whom Seneca believes is her sister, abandons her in the public housing project they had been living in. Having nothing left of her than a letter, Seneca spends four days and nights waiting for Jean to come back, searching for her behind every door in the building. On the fourth day, Seneca sees a tall crying woman pass her window, and because this sight coincides with Seneca’s realization that Jean will not come back to her, the crying woman becomes forever connected with the loss of Jean: “She thought about the crying woman briefly then, more later, until the sight of her became an occasional heartbreaking dream” (128). Raised in foster homes and sexually abused by a foster brother, Seneca turns into an introverted woman who takes abuse quietly and never cries. She learns the habit of self-cutting by accident but continues it because “it thrilled her. It steadied her. Access to this under garment life kept her own eyes dry, including a serenity rocked only by crying women, the sight of which touched off a pain so wildly triumphant she would to anything to kill it” (261). Hurting her body is a way for Seneca to distract herself from the hurt her soul feels, left there by her mother’s abandonment. Having survived a series of exploitative relationships, the last of which as a sort of hired prostitute for a rich woman, Seneca drifts along the country on the backs of trucks until the sight of the distraught Sweetie Fleetwood touches her and, following the woman along, she ends up in the Convent.

Another girl abandoned by her mother, Pallas grows up living with her rich but inattentive father. Finding love with Carlos, the older maintenance man at her high-school, they elope to New Mexico, where they stay with Pallas’ mother Dee Dee, who

is a painter. Carlos and Dee Dee soon start an affair, and when Pallas discovers them in act of having sex, she flees in a panic, is driven off the road and raped by some boys. Afterwards, she tries to hide from her tormentors and holds out in the darkness in a nearby lake. This traumatic experience haunts her to this day, rendering her silent for fear of the horror that might come out of her mouth: “This was her second day at the Convent and the third day of having said not one word to anybody” (162). In the safe space of the Convent, Pallas is able to regain her speech and thus work towards a narrativisation of her traumatic scene: “She had opened her lips a tiny bit to say two words, and no black water had seeped in. The cold still shook her bones, but the dark water had receded” (163). Being tended to by the women in the Convent, Pallas is finally able to talk about her pain: “It was wine-soaked and took an hour; it was backward and punctured and incomplete, but it came out – little one’s story of who had hurt her” (173).

These four wounded women, Mavis, Gigi, Seneca and Pallas, end up in the Convent after drifting around in a world that has no place for them. Abused by men, abandoned by mothers, betrayed by an unjust society, they find in the Convent a space of freedom to express themselves, to voice their stories and by doing so claim a place for themselves and discover their inner being freed from the constraints and oppression of the patriarchal sphere: “The whole house felt permeated with a blessed malelessness, like a protected domain, free of hunters but exciting too. As though she might meet herself here – an unbridled, authentic self, but which she thought of as a ‘cool’ self – in one of this houses many rooms” (177). The self-discovery happens for the women in a communal scene of loud dreaming, initiated by Consolata, who functions as a healing figure, a medium who travels between the worlds of the living and the dead. Consolata opens up a space of memory and mourning, in which the women externalize their pain and help each other to work through their traumatic memory. It is a classic Morrisonian scene of remembering, in which previously silenced histories of trauma are voiced and narrativized, in order to be transcended.

To perform the healing ritual, Connie orders the women to descend to the cellar of the convent and scrub the floor to prepare the “template” (263). She makes the women lie down on the floor, in their most comfortable position, so they would be able to stay like this for a long time, and in the silhouette resembling most their natural being. Consolata then draws lines around their bodies and speaks to them in a cryptic, poetic language: “My child body, hurt and soil, leaps into the arms of a woman who

teach me my body is nothing my spirit everything. I agreed her until I met another. My flesh is so hungry for itself it ate him” (263). Consolata here describes the effect of neglecting her body in favor of her spirit for the longest time of her life. Having been taken in by nuns at the age of nine, she never experienced the bodily pleasures of sexuality – a decision that was made for her but welcomed after being raped at the age of nine. When she meets Deacon, her suddenly awakened physical desire completely dumbfounds her. She recognizes in him a connection to her past, to her own true self, and the desire for communion with him leads her to bite his lip, a gesture so primal and wild that it drives him away.

Similar to Baby Suggs’ “love your body” speech in the Clearing, Consolata’s message is one of the integrity of body and spirit. She wants to create “a contact zone, where dualities come together, creating rich hybrids” (Nada 131) for the Convent women, whose bodies have been continually abused, whose spirits have been broken. The cellar of the Convent becomes such a contact zone, allowing for the dualities of body and soul, past and present, self and other, individual and collective, conscious and subconscious to be overcome⁴¹. Symbolizing the transcendence of these dichotomies, the Convent women reconcile their actual physical bodies with and the drawn versions on the cellar floor. On their drawn body on the floor they mark the hurt of the past, thus externalizing the traumata that keep them bound to the past: “As in *Beloved*, the body becomes the tableau for the inscription of trauma” (Tally 42).

Consolata tells the women of “a woman named Piedade, who sang but never said a word” (264), hinting to the need to avoid the narrow boundaries of language to express their deepest truths. And indeed, the women start telling their stories, but instead of talking, they engage in “loud dreaming. How the stories rose in that place. Half-tales and the never-dreamed escaped from their lips to soar high above guttering candles, shifting dust from crates and bottles” (264). In an act that reminds us of Joe Trace’s descent into his mother’s cave and Paul D’s retreat into the church cellar, the Convent women symbolically go back to the womb, the place of roots and interconnectedness. Their dreams take shape in such a way that all the women can take part in each other’s history and “In spite of or because their bodies ache, they step easily into the dreamer’s tale” (264). Closed off from the outside world and the hostilities of

⁴¹ Nada Elia (2001) points out that Consolata herself is a „contact zone, a young Native American child brought over from South American into the United States by Catholic nuns, and her behaviour articulates the duality she lives” (131), thereby hinting at Consolata’s being torn between adhering to Mary Magna’s teachings, but nevertheless using her gift of “stepping in”, using magic.

the community, the Convent women see each other's primal traumatic scenes, taking part in the working through of those individual stories of pain by offering new interpretations, other perspectives: "They spoke to each other about what had been dreamed and what had been drawn. Are you sure she was your sister? Maybe she was your mother. Why? Because a mother might, but no sister would do such a thing" (265). Having the Convent women actively shaping and reshaping their own histories of trauma, Morrison opens up the discourse of those histories of oppression and abuse silenced in rigidly controlled master narratives like the one governing Ruby.

5.4 The Men take Aim – The Massacre at the Convent

After ritually exorcizing the ghosts of their pasts, the Convent women dance in the rain, washing away the traumata they previously externalized, thus cleansing their bodies and minds from the debilitating influence of past pain:

Seneca embraced and finally let go of a dark morning in state housing. Grace witnessed a successful cleansing of a white shirt that never should have been stained. Mavis moved in the shudder of rose of Sharon petals tickling her skin. Pallas, delivered of a delicate son, held him close while the rain rinsed away a scary woman on an escalator and all fear of black water (283).

The women first face their fears, then let go of them. Seneca embraces, Grace witnesses, Mavis is touched and Pallas holds close her son as both a reminder of the past trauma and a symbol for her new future. They all transcend trauma without forgetting, but without holding on either, thus finding the balance between remembrance of the past and openness towards the future. The Convent women free themselves in preparation for a self-determined future in a way the Rubyites cannot, since their being is wholly founded on the monolithic remembrance of the past: "unlike some people in Ruby, the Convent women were no longer haunted. Or hunted either, she might have added. But there she would have been wrong" (266). Indeed, it is after the exorcism of the ghosts of their own past that the Convent women are being hunted by the ghosts of Ruby's past – possessing the Ruby men in the here and now.

While the women of the Convent are working towards psychological and physical wholeness, the Ruby men notice their town further unraveling, making out the scapegoats in the Convent women. Lone DuPres "listens" to the Ruby men talking themselves into a righteous rage towards these women who live in this big house all by

themselves, without the protection, or rather supervision, of men: “Something’s going on out there, and I don’t like any of it. No men. Kissing on themselves. Babies hid away. Jesus! No telling what else” (276). What starts as merely nasty gossip soon develops into a call to arms, as their narrative shapes into making the Convent women responsible for Ruby’s decay: “Can’t say they haven’t been warned. Asked first and then warned. If they stayed to themselves, that’d be something. But they don’t. They meddle. Drawing folks out there like flies to shit and everybody who goes near them is maimed somehow and the mess is seeping back into our homes, our families. We can’t have it, you all. Can’t have it at all” (276). The Convent women are a threat to Ruby, not merely because they appear to possess supernatural powers, because they are loose, promiscuous and of mixed blood. The primary threat is their independence and their autonomous ability to heal the traumatic wounds suffered from a patriarchal society inside their own “strong maternal space of community” (Kearly 12). This reflects the illegitimacy of the Ruby men’s authority because, if these women are happy and free all by themselves, how do the men justify their patriarchal grip on their own women and the town?

In the end, the Ruby men’s ultimate act of violence grows out of a deep fear of losing control. The women in the Convent cannot be controlled and their ultimate freedom threatens to destroy the carefully maintained equilibrium of Ruby and, even more importantly, its carefully maintained historiography. When Steward thinks about all the ills the Convent women supposedly have brought upon Ruby, their role in Arnette aborting her child, Connie’s role in jeopardizing Deacon’s marriage and thus the Old Father’s blood law, the one insult he could not forgive them was the insult on their memory, their history:

He could not abide them for sullyng his personal history with their streetwalkers’ clothes and whores’ appetites; mocking and desecrating the vision that carried him and his brother through a war, that imbued their marriages and strengthened their efforts to build a town where the vision could flourish. He would never forgive them that and he would not tolerate this loss of charity (279).

One particular “pastel colored and eternal” (110) vision that is threatened is the twins’ memory of the nineteen negro ladies posing on the steps. They represent the Ruby ideal of women: coy, clean, gracious – trophy wives that are the polar opposite of the vivacious, untamed women at the Convent. For the Ruby men, that vision and the

promise of order and prosperity it holds is at stake when they set out to kill the Convent women.⁴²

The scene of the men's arrival at the Convent represents a clash of violence into a paradisiacal space of peacefulness:

Sunlight is yearning for brilliance when the men arrive. The stone-washed blue of the sky is hard to break, but by the time the men park behind shin oak and start for the Convent, the sun has cracked through. Glorious blue. The water of the night rises as mist from puddles and flooded crevices in the road's shoulder. When they reach the Convent, the avoid loud gravel crunch by weaving through tall grass and occasional rainbows to the front door (285).

The Convent is a place of light, literally and metaphorically. When Steward shoots open the door – that had never been locked in the first place, thus contrasting the open, welcoming nature of the Convent with the stark exclusionism of Ruby – “Sun follows him in, splashing the walls of the foyer, where sexualized infants play with one another through flaking paint” (285). The flaking paint is not able to cover up the layers of the past, brought to the surface once more by the light of the sun. In the eyes of the Ruby men, the place is filled with evidence of the women's moral corruption, “defilement and violence and pervasions beyond imagination” (287). Even though the cellar is windowless and dark, when the men are observing the drawings on the cellar floor, “Deek taps his shirt pocket where sunglasses are tucked. He had thought he might use them for other purposes, but he wonders if he needs them now to shield from his sight this sea of depravity beckoning below” (ibid). The drawings blind the men because they shine a light on individual truths of subaltern lives that the Ruby men have excluded from their historical narrative: the many different layers and stories of the past, the female experience, the darkness that is the trauma of African American histories.

Just like the female space of the Convent is impossible for the men to read, misinterpreting signs of healing for signs of perversity, the women themselves are equally impossible for the men to grip, even with rifle shots. In a gruesome scene of

⁴² The killings are also motivated by a simple, literal desire to control space. Sargeant Person's reasoning shows that this control of the land is seen as part of the solution to Ruby's problem and a way to increase his power: “Why would they want to leave and raise families (and customers) elsewhere? But he would be thinking of how much less his outlay would be if he owned the Convent land, and how, if the women are gone from there, he would be in a better position to own it” (277). Owning the land to Sargeant appears to be the solution to Ruby's unraveling, the drain of the youth to the faraway cities. By binding them and their capital to Ruby he envisions to mend its economic and social problems.

brutal and unfair fighting, the men shoot the women one by one. Yet, when the men try to find the women after they killed them, their bodies are nowhere to be found: “Three women were down in the grass, he’d been told. One in the kitchen. Another across the hall. He searched everywhere. [...] No bodies. Nothing. Even the Cadillac was gone” (292). Even though this development seems to elevate the novel even more into the realm of magical realism⁴³, this disappearance can be read as a logical development in the women’s continual evolution away from the constrictions of time and space. Having created mirror images for themselves, split entities for their bodies past and present, their continuation to spectral form is a further step towards spatial and temporal fluidity. For the community of Ruby, the women’s disappearance means that the narrative of the killing is open for interpretation, as the evidence for the deed is missing. And indeed, the story is told and retold in many versions, as “people were changing it to make themselves look good. [...] enhancing, recasting, inventing misinformation” (297). As Dålsgard suggests, “In relation to Ruby, the absence of the women implies that the story of the massacre – and hence the story of the community as a whole – is rendered impossible to close” (243). The new trauma of the cold-blooded murder replaces the old trauma of the Disallowing as the constitutive moment for Ruby’s communal sense of self. Since it cannot be adequately captured in a singular, authorized narrative, for lack of evidence and a plurality of vested interests in different versions of the story, the history of the event and its interpretations need to remain open and fluid, thus diversifying the heretofore monolithic historical discourse of Ruby. This openness provides a “second chance” (297) to Ruby, an opportunity to redeem itself and change into a community in which differing opinions are heard and accepted, or at least tolerated. Pat Best, the town’s historian, provides a version of the event that comes closest to the “truth” as overheard by Lone DuPres: “nine 8-rocks murdered five harmless women (a) because the women were impure (not 8-rock); (b) because the women were unholy (fornicators at the least, abortionists at most); and (c) because they could” (297). Pat never voices this version of the massacre, though, and thus the narrative is told in many different ways, shifting blame from one to the other, and since

⁴³ Among the magical realist elements in the novel are surely Lone and Consolata’s gift of “stepping in” people’s bodies and minds to take them back from death (247), the walking man with a satchel guiding the Old Fathers to Haven (98), and Dovey’s friend who talks without moving his lip (91). These elements are used by Morrison to support her deconstruction of traditional modes of discourse and narrative structure, as “Magical realism is a mode suited to exploring... and transgressing... boundaries, whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical or generic” (Zamora and Faris 1995, 5).

the lack of dead bodies makes a police investigation impossible, some of the perpetrators even begin to forget that the event took place at all.

The massacre at the Convent and its aftermath effects a tectonic shift within Ruby's discursive foundation that made visible by the breaking up of the town's main entity: the Morgan twins. In *Paradise*, Morrison exemplifies Ruby's avoidance of newness and change, via an unusually large number of twin pairs: Coffee and Tea, Brood and Apollo, Deacon and Stewart, Merle and Pearl. Misner comments on Ruby's obsession with the past and its inability to move into the future and detects in Ruby a desire to procreate without newness: "As though past heroism was enough of a future to live by. As though, rather than children, they wanted duplicates" (161) – and a twin is as close to a duplicate it can get without cloning. Indeed, Stewart and Deacon form a univocal, uniperspectival entity of thought, thus supporting Ruby's monolithic historiography: "The twins have powerful memories. Between them they remember the details of everything that ever happened – things they witnessed and things they have not" (13).

When Stewart and Deacon split after the massacre, as Deacon is repentant whereas Stewart is not, it symbolizes a differentiation that had not been possible before. By splitting up the dual identity of Deacon and Stewart, Morrison opens up possibilities for reframing and repositioning previously fixed identities in a way that they become autonomous and form individual narratives. Instead of leaving the twins neatly opposed to each other, thus merely reproducing Ruby's Manichean philosophy, she leaves their relationship open-ended and unresolved, hanging between a deep ideological rift and the tight brotherly bond of twins: "Morrison [...] does not necessarily resolve these dualisms, she does succeed in expanding the limits of human consciousness beyond the either or mentality that sets people against each other in mutually destructive ways" (Heinze 150).

The story of Stewart and Deacon mirrors the story of Coffee and Tea, twin brothers that were part of the original 8-rock families that founded Haven. During their journey, they were forced at gunpoint to dance for some drunken white men. Whereas Tea complied and danced, Coffee refused and as a consequence was shot in the foot. Coffee could not forgive Tea for this act of accommodation as he viewed it, and "went off and never spoke to his brother again" (*Paradise* 303). Thus, Coffee performed an act of Disallowing on Tea, turning him into the unwanted Other and excluding him from the proud community of 8-rocks that went on to found Haven. Indeed, while Coffee

moved on to reinvent himself as Zechariah and became the prophetic leader figure guiding the way to Haven, Tea is nowhere to be found in Ruby's history books.

Unlike in the case of those two brothers, there is hope for reconciliation between Steward and Deacon, as Reverend Misner says to Deacon: "To lose a brother is a hard thing. To choose to lose one, well, that's worse than the original shame" (303), thus gently pointing him on a way towards forgiveness and acceptance and thus out of Ruby's vicious circle of exclusion and judgment. Whereas before, the twins have been an entity so conjoined that they knew each other's thoughts without voicing them, now they will have to work on accepting each other's different views. Thus, where differentiation and a multiplicity of views had not been possible at the time of Coffee and Tea, the massacre at the Convent breaks up the monolithic hegemonic historiography of Ruby and thus makes for the possibility of a layered discourse, in which communal history is replaced by individual stories. The permission of diversity and change into the heretofore hermetically closed-off space of historicized trauma opens up a future for Ruby that is better adapted to heed the challenges of the present and the individual needs of its community members: "The allowance of differentiation indicates a self that augurs well for the future in that it can reproduce rather than clone itself. Double-consciousness replaces duplication" (Matus 162).

Whereas the men of Ruby face this new openness as a challenge and an opportunity for a future, the women of the Convent find opportunities for closure after crossing the border to the space beyond, and visit the people that caused their traumatic injuries in the past, their parents, sisters, daughters that rejected and betrayed them and thus set them adrift in the world. Those encounters happen in a liminal place between the material and the spiritual world, a place "neither life or death [...] just yonder" (307), as Misner describes it when he and Anna visit the deserted Convent and, looking around, they both see a window or a door to "the other side" (305). On that other side, Mavis meets up and makes peace with her daughter Sal, Gigi talks to her imprisoned father, Pallas and Seneca appear before their mothers but do not acknowledge them. In this space beyond the here and now, the women manage to free themselves once and for all from the shackles of their traumatic past and transcend the spatial and temporal constrictions that prevented them from finding a lasting home in the world.

5.5 What would be on the other Side? – Re-visioning Paradise

For Toni Morrison, the discourse on home and place is integrally connected to the discourse on race that

concerns legitimacy, authenticity, community, belonging. In no small way, these discourses [on race] are about home: an intellectual home; a spiritual home; family and community as home; forced and displaced labor in the destruction of home; dislocation of and alienation within the ancestral home; creative responses to exile, the devastations, pleasures, and imperatives of homelessness as it is manifested in discussions on feminism, globalism, the diaspora, migrations, hybridity, contingency, interventions, assimilations, exclusions (Morrison, *Home*, 5).

Paradise connects these themes around the discourse on race and the issue of home place in an allegory about finding and losing paradise.

An interrogation of the very idea of paradise, the novel juxtaposes two versions, Ruby and the Convent, whose ideals of communal place could not be more different. Whereas Ruby is exclusionary and isolated, fiercely protective of its historiography and social and economic status quo, the Convent is open and connected, acknowledging and accepting the different individual histories of its inhabitants. Morrison's stance on the competition for the most viable model of Paradise is obvious: to her, the Utopia of Ruby is doomed to failure for its insistence on a debilitating unchangeable creation myth and its refusal to include those "less than perfect" in their utopian project. The Utopia of the Convent, on the other hand, is presented as a flawed but functioning community, giving its inhabitant what they need: shelter, food and human compassion. The garden with its lush abundance of fruits, vegetables and spices is a further hint towards the paradisiacal nature of the Convent.

Thus, whereas Ruby, the place that is designed as a paradisiacal homeplace, does not achieve the status of either paradise or home, the Convent, a community by coincidence, comes closest to the ideal of home as a place of safety and nurture. Ruby's classical Utopia does not stand a chance in the fight against change and in the fierce protection of its homogeneous space loses sight of the most basic needs of its people. The Convent, on the other hand, is not concerned with such ideals of purity and ideology and thus, is better able to accommodate the individual women's needs for healing their traumata.

On a broader metaphorical level, *Paradise* can be read as an allegory on nation building, particularly of the building of the American nation and westward expansion, thus being a further mosaic piece in Toni Morrison's revisionist map of American history and geography. Presenting the Old Father's move westward in a context of exclusionism and violent subjugation of the Other, Morrison points "to the obvious fact that American myths of exceptionalism have helped whitewash the conquest of the West [and] that westward expansion should be placed in a global framework that understands the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as a period of new colonial endeavors worldwide" (Flint 591). Like America's understanding of its own exceptionalism, Ruby's myth of origin is centered around heroism and defiance and forms the basis for the community's understanding of its exceptional status, which in turn legitimizes its exclusionary practices and violent actions towards the perceived enemies in the Convent. Ruby's isolationist historiography and violent rejection and subjugation of the Other accommodate the larger imperial agenda of American settler colonialism, although the Ruby men are under the impression that they have escaped it. Thus, the narrative of the Rubyites can be read as an African American Jeremiad: as they reject their place in the America Dream because they feel that it has failed to live up to its promise of equality for all, they at the same time reinvest in that narrative by appropriating its very ideology of exceptionalism, as Dålsgard points out: "Ruby's attempts at self-narration are enacted from a position of accommodation within an imperial political paradigm" (Dålsgard 605). Thus, instead of creating a real inclusive society as an answer to the rejection they faced, the Rubyites invite the same kind of problems that plague the rest of American society: racism, classism, sexism. Ruby can only fulfill the promises of its own exceptionalist history by brutally rejecting any particular narratives that undermine the authority of its monolithic historiography. The massacre of the Convent women is their last desperate attempt to regain their earthly Paradise, to expel the destructive elements endangering their hard-won Eden.

Thus, while Ruby operates under the belief that it forms an antithesis to mainstream America, in fact it mimics its discursive practices: "Ruby's patriarchy modeled its practices of narration after those of the United States so as to erase any evidence that Ruby was under the control of a more powerful imperial narrative – a discursive move more evocative of a colonizer-colonized context than a regional-national one" (ibid 605). The Rubyites thus employ what Homi Bhabha calls colonial mimicry, a strategy that brings to light the ambivalence of colonial discourse:

“[C]olonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (Bhabha 86). By appropriating white hegemonic ideals of purity and exceptionalism and reversing them to fit their situation, the Rubyites effectively mimic the white oppressor. Yet, the assimilation harbors in itself a difference, as it includes adopting American mainstream paradigms as far as being God’s chosen people are concerned, while at the same time rejecting those paradigms as far as their own exclusion from them is concerned.

Where Ruby achieves sameness (but not quite) with mainstream America, it achieves difference (but not quite) from the Convent community. Establishing the Convent women as the ultimate Other – impure, immoral, immodest – the Ruby men do not take into account the fact that “[t]he Other is never outside or beyond us” (Bhabha Nation 4). For Ruby, the impossibility of a neat binary “self – Other” means that the scapegoating of the Convent women destabilizes the Ruby men’s own self image and their claim to a hegemonic racial, patriarchal and moral paradigm.

The Convent, on the other hand, avoids the Manichean dualities that govern Ruby and emerges as a liminal space of cultural hybridity, a fictional example of Homi Bhabha’s Third Space, “which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew” (Bhabha 37). Fittingly, throughout the novel, the Convent and its inhabitants are connected to images of water and fluidity. From the “water of the night” that “rises as a mist from puddles and flooded crevices in the road’s shoulder” (285) as the men walk towards the Convent on the morning of the attack, to the “sea of depravity” (287) the men face in the basement to the last scene on the ocean shore, where Piedade bathes Consolata “in emerald water” (284/285).⁴⁴ This last scene is one of perfect peace and

⁴⁴ The water symbolism also connects this scene to the baptism scene on page 101, “when baptisms were held in sweet water. Beautiful baptisms. Baptisms to break the heart, full of major chords and weeping and the thrill of being safe at last” as well as the last scene of the novel, where Consolata and Piedade are joined on a sea shore and experience their final vision of paradise. Water thus symbolizes a feeling of safety and being at home within the fluid sphere and the absence of rigid boundaries of space. The water imagery connects the three novels by its being symbolic of the mysterious, maternal space of women. The river that Beloved steps out of, the river called Treason that can only be read by Wild but not by the white men often falling prey to its seeming serenity, and finally the ocean front of Piedade and Consolata that exists in a liminal space and time and in its indefinability provides a home for those adrift in an otherwise hostile world with rigid spatial and temporal boundaries.

tranquility, of a final home to Consolata and the “lost and saved, atremble”⁴⁵ that have been afloat, root- and homeless, “disconsolate for some time” (318). This rather obviously alludes to the words on the Statue of Liberty, “Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to be free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my burning lamp beside the golden door!” Putting an allusion to this famous inscription at the end of *Paradise*, in itself an allegory on the shortcomings of nation-building, again hints at America’s failure to fulfill its promise of being a home for those adrift, diasporic people seeking a safe haven on their escape from unjust societies. Situating the ideal place, the home of safety and nurture on a surreal ocean shore in a liminal space between spatio-temporal planes, Morrison suggests that the idea of home has to be completely reimagined – beyond the boundaries of the nation state and, for that matter, outside the boundaries of conventional narrative.

On the seashore, Piedade speaks to the ocean in a “language it had not heard since the sea opened” (284/285). This unknown, archaic language points to Piedade’s speaking inside a “semiotic chora,” a pre-verbal, maternal space, in which Piedade indeed takes care of Consolata like a mother: “At night she took the stars out of her hair and wrapped me in its wool” (285). This is a space of women’s discourse and discourse between this world the “other side”, a home place in which the uprooted and traumatized Consolata is safe and nurtured: „a pulsing, kinetic, heterogeneous space whose meanings are much more fluid and imprecise, yet no less powerful” (Daly 308)⁴⁶. Only the discursive space of the semiotic, with its fluid, flexible meanings, can contain the individual histories of trauma survived by Consolata and those “lost and saved” souls arriving on the shore. Piedade’s words, spoken in her ancient language, transcend the categories of time and space and “evoke memories neither one has ever had: of reaching age in the company of the other; of speech shared and divided bread smoking from the fire; the unambivalent bliss of going home to be at home – the ease of coming back to love begun” (318).

With this picture of a reimagined Paradise, Morrison leaves the reader with a vision of memory and history that is dynamic and all-encompassing. Thus, the loss of

⁴⁵ Allusion to inscription of Statue of Liberty: “Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to be free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my burning lamp beside the golden door!” More than America, this paradise on the beach fulfills America’s promise to be a home to those homeless diasporic people sent adrift by unjust and exclusive societies.

⁴⁶ For the use of semiotic chora in *Beloved*, see p. xxx of this dissertation

Paradise, both the Paradise of Ruby and the Paradise of the Convent, offers the opportunity of finding home. In Ruby, traumatic history has been made more open and democratic: the inscription of the Oven now reads “We are the Furrow of His Brow” (*Paradise* 298), thus hinting at a possibility of individual and communal agency in the present by opening up a space for the reinterpretation and renegotiation of Ruby’s history. Thus, this history can be filled with new meaning for communal and individual life in the present, thus paving the road to a future of possibilities for Ruby.

The women of the Convent have transcended their historic traumata and, after being ousted from their home on Earth, have transcended the boundaries of space and time as well. As an ending of Morrison’s historiographic trilogy, *Paradise* offers an ending equally open as the previous two novels, but less bleak, more hopeful. The paradise Morrison envisions is transient, not eternal – a resting place for the weary drifters “before shouldering the endless work they were created to do down here in Paradise” (318). But in its transience it offers company, nourishment and love, an overcoming of past trauma and tragedies in a third space, “both snug and wide open, with a doorway never needing to be closed” (*Jazz* 221), a postmodern vision of home.

VI. CONCLUSION

“What’s the world for if you can’t make it up the way you want it?” (*Jazz* 208).

In *Beloved*, *Jazz* and *Paradise*, Toni Morrison negotiates ways of individual and collective identity formation through figurations of space and trauma. In geographies that are public and private, open and closed, inclusive and exclusive, geographies of the past and of the present, Morrison writes discursive spaces in which to create individual and communal African American history and identity, based on the traumatic hi-stories at the core of the Black American experience, such as the Middle Passage, slavery, Jim Crow and the Civil Rights Movement.

In the three novels, Toni Morrison subscribes to a postmodern notion of space and place, presenting it as relative to the individual’s frame of mind. Places are used as metonymies for the protagonists’ traumatized minds and their different ways of dealing with trauma. Trauma that is not worked through and transcended is presented by Morrison as impacting the protagonists’ ability to fashion a home out of a vast and often hostile space. The physical and mental space of Morrison’s protagonists is occupied by

historical traumata that disables the protagonists to find a place in the present without revisiting the places of their troubled past. While this burdens their lives, it also opens up a historical and metahistorical discourse that allows the revision of mainstream historiography to include minority histories of oppression and trauma. Morrison thus “rewrites the nation” (Grewal, 8) from an African American minority perspective. She reconfigures the American historical landscape by emphasizing the subjectivity of any history and through her historiographic metafiction offers alternatives to historical grand narratives.

All three novels explore the possibility of reconciliation between past trauma and present life. Doing so requires Morrison to send her protagonists on strenuous journeys through time and space in order to visit the past trauma that keeps them from making a home in the here and now. The protagonists venture back to the primal scenes that bear major significance for their lives but have been suppressed for being too painful to remember. Their pain thus awakens anew, but out of it grow the possibility of a life in the present and the hope for a future.

The pasts Morrison thus digs up are primal scenes, events that serve as anchors to situate African American place in the American historical landscape: „Primal scenes, though perhaps pathogens, at least allow the belief on a presence, a self, a subject“ (Rushdy 302). In their quest for home Morrison’s protagonists, notably Sethe, Paul D, Joe, Violet and the women of the convent, have to take spiritual and psychological journeys back to their pasts to find primal places, historical and geographical anchors infused with a specific sense of community and culture that serve as foundations of identity. The knowledge of those anchors is necessary for the protagonists’ navigation of their complex and traumatic histories, since “[t]o lack a primal place is [...] being without any effective means of orientation in a complex and confusing world” (Casey, qdt. in Su 593). Morrison’s trilogy reconstructs some of these primal places, these roots for African Americans, in the form of fictional stories, creating memories that had been oppressed by a hegemonic historiography that had no interest in capturing them. Although the Middle Passage and slavery, Jim Crow and the oppression of the Blacks in the 20th century are painful and traumatic memories to harbor, they are necessary to place African American history squarely within the American historical landscape, in order to “have a secure point from which to look out on the world, a firm grasp of one’s own position in the order of things, and a significant spiritual and psychological attachment to somewhere in particular” (Relph 38).

Those primal places have a geographical as well as a historical and psychological quality, as places in Morrison's novels are often used as metonymies for the protagonists' traumatized minds, containing the memory of the traumatic past, subscribing to Gaston Bachelard's view that "[...] space contains compressed time" (8). It is only by "decompressing time" and bringing memory to the outside by narrating the story, that the protagonists in Morrison's fiction are able to find a true home. Moreover, by spatializing time, Morrison makes history accessible to a communal working through, thus countering the modernist impulse to treat memory as a private faculty embedded in the individual's psyche. This individualization of memory makes it difficult, for African Americans with individual recollections of slavery and racist oppression for example, to use traumatic memory as the basis for a common sense of identity. Morrison uses spatialized time as a forum to discover this basis, to allow for the establishment of a common historical bond. At the same time, she warns against instrumentalizing a common history to exclude those who do not share it. Any history, for Morrison, should be open and flexible enough to accommodate different perspectives.

In *Beloved*, the house on 124 Bluestone is presented as a metonymy of Sethe's traumatized mind. A container for her repressed and painful memory, the "house stands at stage center as a unifying symbolic structure that represents and defines the relationships of the central characters to one another, to themselves, and to the world" (Chandler, 1). A vastly unhomey place from the beginning, when the girl Beloved and the traumatic memory it embodies take over the house, it turns into a virtual grave, filled with the spite and the pain of the past. Only when Sethe's daughter Denver finds her way beyond the confines of the stasis of the house and back into the arms of the community, when the women of the community use song to break the ghostly spell of the past, can Beloved and the trauma of Sethe's infanticide be transcended. Reconnected to the world outside and the life of the present, Sethe can begin her painful journey of healing and rebuild her home into a place of intimacy and nurture. Exploring the cultural roots of Black Americans in slavery, Morrison extends African American cultural memory in the space of *Beloved* and situates African American traumatic history in the history of American nation-building. The concept of rememory allows Morrison to spatialize time in a way that it allows individual memory to become communal history, as it makes memory publicly accessible for commemoration and interpretation.

In *Jazz*, this public commemoration is not wanted, as Harlem's attraction to the legions of Blacks migrating there from the South is exactly the promise of newness, freedom and hope for a cultural and socioeconomic rebirth of the Black community. With this comes a forgetting of pain and trauma, but also a forgetting of history and roots, preventing the creation of a true home place for Joe and Violet Trace. As it turns out, New York, even Harlem, lives by the rules of Western modernity, an unwavering belief in progression and individuality that does not account for the long history of oppression and diaspora shaping the Black community. In order to be able to move forward, Joe and Violet have to go back to find their roots, their anchor, without which the journey ahead would be void of meaning and a sense of direction. Both of them have to visit their home places in the South of the past, experience the time and place of their greatest humiliation and pain, in order to begin the journey of healing their wounds. Like Sethe in *Beloved*, Violet in *Jazz* finds an important source of solace and strength in the community of women, specifically Alice Manfred. It is in the female space of blues and laughter that Violet is able to reconnect with her original self and thus transcend the unhomeliness of her life by refusing to let it get her down. By integrating past trauma into her memory, Violet is able to reconcile her fragmented identity. Likewise, Joe has to come to terms with the shadows in his past. Traumatized by his motherlessness, Joe shoots Dorcas in a compulsive act of exorcising the ghosts of the past. Her death opens up a space for reliving his maternal rejection. Mourning the loss of Dorcas and the loss of his mother gives him the opportunity to start looking ahead. Both Violet and Joe have to not only remember their history, but create it in the first place. Only through the knowledge of how and where they became the people they are, are they able to be whole and find a place for themselves in the present. *Jazz* ends on a hopeful note, with Joe and Violet rediscovering each other in a city that has changed, just as their state of mind has changed. Starting out as merely a beautiful surface hiding an inside of unhomeliness, the city now bears the possibility of being a true home for Joe and Violet. Acting as a mirror of their state of mind, Morrison's New York is as ambivalent and open to interpretation and improvisation as Jazz, the music that pervades it. Joe and Violet are granted the power to create their own histories, which also enables them to create and reclaim their identities that had been defined externally for so long.

Creation and definition of communal and individual identity via control of place and time are at the contested center of *Paradise*, the last novel of the trilogy analyzed in this dissertation. *Paradise* warns of the excesses of commemoration that can hold a

community in its grip, thus keeping it bound to the time and place of the past and unable to adapt to the present. The novel examines the idea of paradise as a space that depends in its existence on the exclusion of the Other. Ruby, the town that desires to be a Utopia and models itself to be a Paradise with a capital P, bases its sense of identity and community upon a creation myth that installed in the Rubyites a deep sense of pride in the black color of their skin and the belief that they need to preserve a strict racial and social homogeneity in order for their community to survive. Therefore, the town's one authorized version of history is above critical scrutiny, any attempt to provide a different historical perspective is crushed by the elders who view this sort of liberal approach to history as dangerous to the town's ideological integrity. Ruby is intent on maintaining its status quo by excluding and eventually destroying the Other that threatens its carefully maintained equilibrium. This Other are the women of the Convent, a place that is juxtaposed to Ruby, as it is open and flexible, includes and accepts otherness and different histories of its inhabitants. The Convent provides ideological alternatives to the Manichean dualities that govern Ruby. Discourse, especially the discourse of historical trauma is not fixed and authoritative as it is in Ruby, but flexible and open for renegotiation. Because the Convent is a place that lets the women externalize and work through their individual, heterogeneous histories of pain, it provides a safe space for healing, and thus for the formation of a nurturing home place. The Convent thus represents Morrison's ideal of social space, in that it allows for heterogeneity of histories and narratives. Ruby, as a homogeneous space filled with only a single layer of historical and social meaning, lacks the flexibility to meet its inhabitants needs for understanding and acceptance and is portrayed as a barren town with a crumbling social base. The Convent, on the other hand, is fit to accommodate the heterogeneous histories of its inhabitants and thus to their needs for healing. Flawed and filled with tension and even fighting, the Convent is still a functioning social space.

Apart from the need for flexible borders and multiple layers of historical meaning, Morrison's home places have another feature in common: they are spaces on the margin. Most ostensibly, 124 Bluestone in *Beloved*, and the Convent in *Paradise*, these home places are located on the geographical and social outskirts of Cincinnati and Ruby respectively. Away from the mainstream pressures at the center of society and culture, these liminal spaces allow "for the production of counter-hegemonic discourse" (hooks, "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," 149), as bell hooks phrases it,

as the place at the margin may function “as a site of resistance – as location of radical openness and possibility” (204).

As Morrison aims to break the hold of heterogeneous historiography and reclaim the history of African Americans, it is important that she establishes a view of memory and history that allows for layers of heterogeneous, equally valid (hi)stories. Memory, collective and individual, and the connected realms of story and history are central themes in the three novels, as they deal with the influence of past trauma on life in the present.

In *Beloved*, the focus is on the recovery of memory that had been suppressed and lost as it was too painful and unimaginable to put into words and narrativize. Sethe’s killing her daughter, Paul D’s humiliation and torture at the hands of his white masters, the general unspeakable cruelty of slavery traced all the way back to its origin in the Middle Passage – all of these memories are exhumed and exposed by Morrison, in order to be put into the narrative context of the present, thus diminishing their power to paralyze. History in *Beloved* is decidedly personal, presenting seminal African American periods like the Middle Passage from the perspective of the girl Beloved, so as to underline the creative quality of history writing as opposed to it being an accumulation of objective facts, as Morrison herself says: “Memory (the deliberate act of remembering) is a form of willed creation. It is not an effort to find out the way it really was – that is research. The point is to dwell on how it appeared and why it appeared that particular way. [...] If my work is to be functional to the group then it must bear witness and identify that which is useful from the past and that which ought to be discarded” (Morrison 1996, 213)

In *Jazz*, the storyteller claims an omniscient role, providing the reader with a seemingly authoritative account of history. As the novel proceeds, though, she has to revise her stories as they are told and retold, and the many layers and perspectives of the narrative conspire against her monolithic view to reveal multifaceted, fragmented accounts of history that are impossible to pin down under one meaning. The failure of the omniscient narrator opens up a space for counternarratives to hegemonic accounts of history. *Jazz* is thus the most overtly metanarrativistic novel, addressing, through the character of the storyteller, issues of history and memory as being deeply unstable and personal, unfit for generalization as authoritative accounts of events and histories. Like the solos of Jazz musicians blend together in ever different musical pieces, the voices of Morrison’s protagonist blend together to weaving a colorful quilt of narrative pieces of

Black American history: “[...] make me, remake me. You are free to do it and I am free to let you because look, look. Look where your hands are. Now” (229). In the end, the narrator remains just one voice among many in Morrison’s historical choir of subaltern counternarratives.

In *Paradise* finally, Morrison deals with history itself, the way that memory and story are instrumentalized to fabricate a history that is seen as essential to the community’s survival. In reality, the community’s fixation on a monolithic account of history entails the impossibility of an open future. The community of Ruby has established social sanctions for the disregard of its historiographic policy, fiercely protecting their status quo that is based on an essentialist ideology of racial purity and superiority. The Convent women are open and welcoming to the multifaceted, multiperspectival layers of individual histories forming an ever-changing whole under one roof. The resulting discourse is multipolar and anti-essential and the Convent’s discursive space remains moveable and adaptable where Ruby’s is static and inflexible.

The endings of all three novels are characterized by hope for the future. With *Beloved* banished, Sethe reunites with Paul D and her community. Joe and Violet individually face their pasts, and are reunited in the end. Deacon divorces himself from his twin, tries to understand his place in history and finds his own self, the town of Ruby has to come to grips with its changing parameters, while the women of the Convent free themselves from their traumatic past in transcending space and time. Thus, Morrison ends each novel of the trilogy and in the end, the trilogy itself on a reconciliatory note. In the place of the Manichean fights “man vs. woman,” “individual vs. community,” “self vs. Other” and “past vs. present,” Morrison ends the novels with scenes of transcending dualisms in a “pattern of fusion and fragmentation” that

begins with the presentation of paired entities (such as two characters, contrasting families, and opposed settings). [...] Always already, the entities and the gaps between them, their differences and their similarities, their distinctness and their inseparability, exist simultaneously in a complex and never-ending flux (Page 1885, 27).

The last scene in *Paradise* captures this view beautifully, as it has Consolata and Piedade forming a union that transcends essentialist categories, painting an image of unconditional love and a home place that is outside of the boundaries of space and time. Thus, the final “vignette” with Piedade is to be read as a conclusion not only for

Paradise itself, but also for the whole trilogy: where *Beloved* dealt with a maternal love so strong that it destroyed the child, and *Jazz* with the pain of motherlessness and childlessness, *Paradise* ends with a reconciliation of mother and daughter. Piedade functions as a spiritual Black mother figure, mothering a daughter that unites features both black and white: “In ocean hush a woman black as firewood is singing. Next to her is a younger woman whose head rests on the singing woman’s lap. Ruined fingers troll the tea brown hair. All the colors of seashells – wheat, roses, pearl – fuse in the younger woman’s face” (318). By lovingly cradling a daughter figure that embodies the anti-essentialist mixture of colors and races, Piedade, while symbolizing a pure Blackness, nevertheless “figures here as mother to all races” (Tally 92), thus overcoming the poles of past and present, here and there, and on this undefined spatio-temporal place, then women enjoy the greatest feeling of security and intimacy one can find: home. Piedade’s words “evoke memories neither one has ever had: of reaching age in the company of the other; of speech shared and divided bread smoking from the fire; the unambivalent bliss of going home to be at home – the ease of coming back to love begun” (318). Thusly pointing to the collective nature of memory, Morrison emphasizes the common historical bond connecting all African-Americans. It is only by recognizing the inclusive nature of their traumatic history that Morrison’s protagonists find a home in the present and a gateway into the future

Essentially, Morrison suggests that western historiography is a discursive construct that is a “literary inscription of the dominant values of a hierarchical system. [It] is based upon a series of discriminatory logics that empower a dominant voice to promote, demote, include, exclude, and finally, at the end, to emerge victorious over the other voices or characters of the narrative” (Mayberry, 298). By allowing, in all three novels, a polyphonic weaving of different equal histories to destabilize a single, authoritative, hegemonic historiography, Morrison gives African Americans the power to construct their own past, their own present, and thereby claim back their identity: “Freeing yourself was one thing, claiming ownership of that freed self was another” (qtd. in Grewal, 1).

Moreover, Morrison destabilizes the duality of private space and public space that has long served to distinguish subjective individual memory from objective communal history and thus to legitimize certain accounts of history at the expense of others. The gendered as well as the racial other, by virtue of being excluded from the public sphere, have been excluded from their own historicization: “The public sphere, the sphere of

justice, moves into historicity, whereas the private sphere, the sphere of care and intimacy is unchanging and timeless” (Benhabib, 1994, 157). By opening up the private sphere of personal trauma and loss, Morrison spatializes personal memory in a way that it forms a parallel public sphere in which African Americans may negotiate their historicity, move out of the timelessness of the private into the historicized public. By opening up the traditionally private sphere of the home to the public and turning it into a deeply political place, Morrison redefines home in a way that it does not necessarily conform to the classic view of a closed-off shelter but rather a transient place with flexible boundaries that allows for the formation of liberated individual and communal identities out of (hi)stories of pain and trauma.

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VIX. APPENDIX

9.1 Zusammenfassung der Arbeit in deutscher Sprache

Im Zentrum meiner Arbeit steht die Untersuchung der Konzepte Trauma und Zuhause in den Romanen der afroamerikanischen Schriftstellerin und Nobelpreisträgerin Toni Morrison. Die Verbindung des psychologischen Traumasymptoms mit dem geographischen und phänomenologischen Begriff des Zuhauses wird besonders deutlich in Morrisons Trilogie bestehend aus den Romanen *Beloved*, *Jazz* und *Paradise*.

Morrisons geht davon aus, dass die Schaffung eines Zuhauses, sei es auf persönlicher oder nationaler Ebene, unmittelbar an die Kenntnis seiner Geschichte geknüpft ist. Die Kenntnis der räumlichen Koordinaten des Menschen ist sozusagen von der Kenntnis seiner historischen Koordinaten abhängig. Ausgehend von der Tatsache, dass die Geschichte der Afroamerikaner innerhalb der amerikanischen Geschichtsschreibung die längste Zeit vernachlässigt wurde, hat es sich Morrison zum Ziel gesetzt, eben diese Geschichte wiederzuentdecken, wiederzuerinnern und aus der afroamerikanischen Perspektive heraus, wiederzuschreiben. Die hier untersuchte historiographische Trilogie untersucht die nationale Identität der USA im Hinblick auf ihre afroamerikanische Minderheit und versucht eine Wiederherstellung des sozialen Gedächtnisses der ehemaligen Sklaven. Dabei umfasst sie die Geschichte der Afroamerikaner beginnend bei der ursprünglichen Entwurzelung der afrikanischen Gefangenen von ihrer Heimat in der Middle Passage, über Sklaverei, Reconstruction, Jim Crow und der jüngeren Geschichte der Harlem Renaissance bis hin zur Bürgerrechtsbewegung in den 70er Jahren des 20. Jahrhunderts. Somit stellen diese drei Romane eine eindringliche Neuverortung des afroamerikanischen Raumes innerhalb der amerikanischen historischen Landkarte dar. Die Romane sind dabei poetisch und politisch zugleich, denn Morrison nutzt ihr literarisches Talent, um den amerikanischen Raum als Ort afroamerikanischen Traumas abzubilden.

Während die Forschungsliteratur über Morrison sowohl zum Thema Trauma als auch zum Thema Heimat und Zuhause zahlreiche gute Analyseansätze liefert, wurde der Zusammenhang zwischen individuellem und kommunalem Trauma und dem Erlebnis von Raum, Ort und Zuhause bisher nur dürftig beleuchtet. Diese Lücke soll die vorliegende Arbeit zu schließen helfen.

Um die beiden Ebenen Psychologie/Trauma und Geographie/Raum konzeptionell zusammenzuführen, beginnt die Arbeit mit einer Vorstellung des theoretischen Rahmens. Eine Einordnung in den philosophischen Kontext der Begrifflichkeiten von Raum/Ort und Zeit verortet beide als primäre Kategorien des menschlichen Lebens. Unter Rückgriff auf postmoderne Theorien der Relativität von Raum und Zeit wird gezeigt, dass sowohl das Erlebnis von Raum als auch die Erfahrung von Zeit von den anderen Parametern des menschlichen Lebens abhängig sind, den wirtschaftlichen, politischen und sozialen Bedingungen der Existenz. Morrison geht auf diesen Umstand ein und zeigt in ihren Romanen, wie Orte und ihr Erleben Spiegelbilder der Psyche der traumatisierten Protagonisten darstellen. Die Suche der Protagonisten nach einem Zuhause ist begründet in einer buchstäblichen und metaphysischen Orientierungslosigkeit aufgrund der psychischen und geographischen Entwurzelung und der damit einhergehenden Löschung des kommunalen historischen und kulturellen Gedächtnisses im Zuge von Sklaverei und Unterdrückung. Das Fehlen von Heimat und Gemeinschaft resultiert aus einer metaphysischen Verlorenheit, einem Trauma, das sie von einer persönlichen und kommunalen Geschichte trennt. Nur durch eine Externalisierung der traumatischen Erinnerung finden sie ihre Wurzeln, gemeinsame Werte, eine Gemeinschaft und somit auch ein Zuhause.

Dieser narrativen Externalisierung kommt bei Morrison eine besondere Bedeutung zu, denn ihr geht es unter anderem darum, die Vergangenheit im Sinne einer postkolonialen Betrachtungsweise umzugestalten. Morrison betont die Subjektivität einer jeden Geschichte und bietet Alternativen zu den Großen Erzählungen (grand narratives) der westlichen Geschichtsschreibung. Bei dem postkolonialen Theoretiker Homi Bhabha ist der Raum des "darüber Hinausgehenden" ("beyond") besetzt von den hybriden Identitäten der Umhertreibenden, Ortlosen. Dieser Raum ist eine Art Zwischen-Ort, in dem neue Identitäten entdeckt und erarbeitet werden können. Somit bietet das Beyond die Möglichkeit, in die Gegenwart einzugreifen, indem die Vergangenheit neu konstruiert wird. In Morrisons Trilogie finden die Protagonisten neue Bedeutungsebenen und Möglichkeiten zur Identitätsfindung im Beyond, denn ihre Protagonisten begeben sich in ihre Vergangenheit und fungieren somit als Zeugen traumatischer Perioden in der Geschichte der Afroamerikaner. Diese wird aus ihrer eigenen Perspektiven neu erzählt und kann so korrigierend auf die Gegenwart wirken. Indem sie das Trauma ihrer kulturellen, geographischen und psychischen Ortlosigkeit erzählen, schaffen sie einen diskursiven Raum des Heilens. Indem der beständige Lauf

der Geschichte und der modernistische konstante Fortschritt angehalten wird, können historische Themen neu verhandelt werden.

Der erste Roman der Trilogie, *Beloved*, behandelt sehr explizit die Symptomatik eines historischen Traumas und seiner Auswirkung auf das Erleben des Hier und Jetzt. In ihrer Fiktionalisierung des tatsächlichen historischen Falles der Margaret Garner, die ihre Kinder lieber tötete, als sie der Sklaverei zu überlassen, müssen die Protagonisten Sethe und Paul D eine Reise in ihre gemeinsame Vergangenheit unternehmen. Sie müssen sich den Gräueln des Erlebten stellen, um die Geister der Vergangenheit auszutreiben, die ihr Hier und Jetzt auf sehr korporeale Weise bewohnen. Erst dann ist ein Zuhause in der Gegenwart möglich.

Das Trauma der Sklaverei wird in *Beloved* sehr konkret verkörpert von dem Mädchen *Beloved*, das eines Tages aus dem Fluss steigt, von Sethe aufgenommen wird und fortan als Familienmitglied bei Sethe, Paul D und ihrer Tochter Denver wohnt. *Beloved* funktioniert als Katalysator und fördert bei Sethe und Paul D auf unterschiedliche Art und Weise ihre verdrängten traumatischen Erinnerungen zu Tage. Indem sie Sethe unaufhörlich Fragen stellt, zwingt sie die Mutter zu einer narrativen Auseinandersetzung mit der Vergangenheit. In zwanghaften sexuellen Begegnungen mit Paul D bringt sie diesen dazu, sich seinen Gefühlen zu stellen, die er aus Selbstschutz aus seiner Existenz verbannt hatte. Auf der einen Seite fungiert *Beloved* also als eine Art Therapeut. Auf der anderen Seite jedoch nimmt ihre Präsenz Überhand im Leben der Familie, sie wird zu einer Art Sukkubus, die wächst und gedeiht, während Sethe mehr und mehr an körperlicher und seelischer Substanz verliert. Sinnbildlich steht dies für eine Übermacht der traumatischen Vergangenheit, die ein Leben im Hier und Jetzt vereitelt. Erst nachdem Denver den Kontakt zur Gemeinschaft wieder herstellt, der nach Sethes Mord an ihrer Tochter vollständig abgebrochen war, öffnet sich der Teufelskreis aus Schuldzuweisung und Selbstzerstörung, *Beloved* verschwindet auf mysteriöse Art und Weise aus ihrem Leben und Sethe und Paul D wagen am Ende einen vorsichtigen Blick in eine ungewisse Zukunft.

Morrisons Versinnbildlichung von Orten als „Lagerhäusern der Erinnerung“ wird in *Beloved* konkret dargestellt am Beispiel von Sethe Zuhause in der Bluestone Road 124. Abgelegen und isoliert vom Rest der Gemeinde ist das Haus besessen vom Geist von Sethes getöteter Tochter, dem Geist der Vergangenheit. So isoliert das Haus vom Leben der Gemeinde ist, so isoliert ist Sethes Seele von der Gegenwart. Ebenso ist Sethe abgeschnitten von der Welt der Lebenden, identifiziert sich lediglich mit den

Toten und steckt fest in einer Vergangenheit, die statisch ist und die sie nicht verändern kann. Diese zeitliche und räumliche Stasis kann am Ende nur durch die Kraft der Gemeinschaft durchbrochen werden. Als die Frauen der Gemeinde sich vor Sethes Haus versammeln und gemeinsam singen brechen sie den Fluch, den Sethe an ihre Vergangenheit bindet und öffnen den abgeschlossenen Raum von 124 Bluestone. Als Sethe am Ende aus dem Haus und auf die Straße tritt, tritt sie auch aus der Vergangenheit in die Gegenwart. In *Beloved* erweckt Morrison die Toten zum Leben, um sie am Ende wieder zu begraben. Sie muss *Beloved* auferstehen lassen, um ihren Tod und den Verlust von Freiheit und Leben aller Sklaven anzuerkennen, zu erzählen und zu betrauern. Danach jedoch müssen die Geister der Vergangenheit ruhen, damit die Sethe und die Gemeinde die Möglichkeit einer Zukunft ergreifen kann.

Während *Beloved* die Zeit der Sklaverei und der Reconstruction beleuchtet, ist die Handlung in *Jazz* zur Zeit der Jim Crow Gesetze und der Harlem Renaissance angesiedelt. Die Protagonisten Joe und Violet Trace, die versuchen, dem Ort des Traumas und der rassistischen Demütigung, dem amerikanischen Süden zur Zeit des Jim Crow, zu entfliehen und im New York der Harlem Renaissance ein neues Leben zu beginnen. Dem Motto des „New Negro“ und des modernistischen Fortschrittsglaubens der 20er Jahre des 20. Jahrhunderts folgend wollen sie alles hinter sich lassen, was sie an ihre traumatische Vergangenheit erinnert. Die glitzernde Stadt mit ihrer Kultur und den vielen Möglichkeiten der Zerstreuung bietet dazu eine perfekte Arena. Die beiden müssen jedoch feststellen, dass sie ihrer Vergangenheit nicht entfliehen können.

Joe und Violets Reise, ihre Great Migration vom ländlichen Süden ins urbane Harlem ist eine Flucht vor den rassistischen Gewalt, die im amerikanischen Süden nach Ende der Sklaverei immer noch herrscht. Die Entscheidung, ihre Heimat im Süden zu verlassen, zeugt von einem Wunsche nach wirtschaftlicher, gesellschaftlicher und spiritueller Freiheit. Am Ende soll sich jedoch herausstellen, dass das modernistische Fortschrittscredo, dem sich Joe und Violet in Harlem unterwerfen, im Kern eine Abwandlung des weißen Amerikanischen Traums und somit ein Teil des Diskurses des Unterdrückers ist und eine heilsame Auseinandersetzung mit der eigenen traumatischen Vergangenheit verhindert. Morrison zeigt Joe und Violets geistige und spirituelle Verlorenheit, indem sie die Risse in ihren Masken aufzeigt, mit denen sie versuchen, in das Bild der fortschrittsgläubigen Stadt hineinzupassen und ihre Vergangenheit hinter sich zu lassen. Diese psychischen Risse gipfeln in Violets fortschreitender geistiger Verwirrung und Joes Mord an seiner jüngeren Geliebten Dorcas, den er als

Nachstellung seiner traumatischen Suche nach seiner eigenen Mutter empfindet. Im Nachgang dieser Episoden lässt Morrison ihre Protagonisten die Orte ihrer traumatischen Vergangenheit wieder aufsuchen und lässt sie ihre Geschichten erzählen.

Ein wichtiger Unterschied zwischen dem ländlichen Leben im Süden und dem urbanen Leben in New York ist die Bedeutung der Gemeinschaft. Der städtische Raum des Nordens steht bei Morrison oft sinnbildlich für die Auflösung der schwarzen Solidarität. Bei allen Gräueln, die Joe und Violet im Süden des Jim Crow wiederfahren sind, so waren sie doch eingebunden in eine Art Schicksalsgemeinschaft. In der Metropole New York gehen diese persönlichen Beziehungen verloren und Joe und Violet verlieren den Bezug zu sich selbst und zueinander. Erst als Violet bei Alice Manfred diese Solidarität wiederfindet und in dem entstehenden diskursiven Raum das unaussprechliche ausspricht, kann sie ihre Fragmentierung überwinden. Die beiden Frauen bieten einander einen Raum des Erzählens und indem sie sich gegenseitig die Geschichte ihrer Schmerzen erzählen, können sie sie überwinden.

Somit emanzipiert Violet sich vom weißen historiographischen Diskurs, findet ihre eigene Identität und kann dann anfangen, sich mit Joe ein Zuhause im Hier und Jetzt aufzubauen.

Jazz ist ein postmoderner Roman, nicht nur auf der thematischen Ebene, sondern auch auf der Meta-Ebene der Narration. Ein wichtiges Stilmittel in Jazz ist der Einsatz des Erzählers, den Morrison nutzt, um die Subjektivität der Geschichtsschreibung eindringlich zu verdeutlichen. Zu Beginn von Jazz ist Morrisons Erzählerin eine allwissende Stimme, eine Beobachterin, die die Geschehnisse von außen betrachtet und kommentiert. Im Laufe der Erzählung wandelt sie sich in eine unsichere, fragende Stimme, die genauso von der Suche nach Sicherheit und Identität getrieben ist, wie die anderen Charaktere im Roman. Somit dekonstruiert Morrison die Autorität der westlichen Geschichtsschreibung und öffnet den historischen Diskurs, um eine neue Schreibung der afroamerikanischen Geschichte zu ermöglichen.

Auch der dritte Roman in der Trilogie, Paradise, behandelt den Einfluss eines vergangenen Traumas auf die Möglichkeit eines Zuhauses in der Gegenwart. Während es bei Beloved und Jazz jedoch darum ging, ein verschüttetes, verschwiegenes Trauma zu erzählen und somit zu überwinden, geht es bei Paradise darum, einem geradezu lautstark präsenten Trauma die Macht über das Leben zu entreißen. Ebenso wie Beloved und Jazz zeichnet Morrison in Paradise ein Kapitel amerikanischer Geschichte aus afroamerikanischer Perspektive neu, nämlich das der Western Frontier. Bei dieser neuen

Betrachtungsweise der afroamerikanischen Geschichte geht es Morrison nicht wie bei *Beloved* um die Rolle der Erinnerung, oder wie bei *Jazz* um die Rolle des Erzählens bei der individuellen Identitätsfindung. *Paradise* untersucht die Themen Geschichte und Erinnerung auf einer breiteren kulturellen Ebene und beleuchtet ihre Rolle in Bezug auf die Bildung von Gemeinschaft und Nation. Morrison untersucht die Gemeinschaften in *Paradise* im Hinblick auf ihre dichotomen Auffassungen von Erinnerung und Identitätsbildung und kommt so zu Einblicken in die Zusammenhänge zwischen der Einstellung einer Gemeinschaft zu ihrer Vergangenheit und ihrer Fähigkeit ein stabiles Zuhause zu schaffen. Wie in *Beloved* und *Jazz*, so spielen die Orte im Roman eine wichtige Rolle, denn sie dienen als räumliche Darstellungen unterschiedlicher Auffassungen von Zeit und Geschichte. Ruby's Geschichtsideologie sieht die Vergangenheit als statisch und unveränderlich an, was in der Unfähigkeit zur Öffnung nach außen ausgedrückt wird und sich in einer gelähmten, fremdenfeindlichen Gemeinschaft manifestiert. Die Frauen des Convent akzeptieren Geschichte als vielstimmig und immer in Veränderung begriffen und erreichen somit eine räumliche und gemeinschaftliche Offenheit, die ihnen bei ihren individuellen Wegen zur Heilung und zu einem Zuhause zugute kommt.

Der Roman untersucht den Begriff des Paradieses und stellt zwei Entwürfe von Paradies gegenüber, Ruby und den Convent, deren Ideale eines Ortes der Gemeinschaft unterschiedlicher nicht sein könnten. Rubys Identität fußt auf einem traumatischen Ereignis in der Vergangenheit, aus dem sie ihren ganzen Stolz als Rasse und Gemeinschaft ziehen und das als unumstößlicher, nicht verhandelbarer Schöpfungsmythos im Zentrum ihres kommunalen Seins steht. Jedes Infragestellen dieser Geschichte wird als Angriff auf die Gemeinschaft gewertet und streng sanktioniert. Rubys Gemeinschaft basiert auf einer totalen Isolation, um die rassische Homogenität ihrer Mitglieder und die einzig autorisierte Version ihrer Geschichte um jeden Preis zu bewahren.

Der Convent, auf der anderen Seite, ist offen und sucht den Kontakt zur Außenwelt, basierend auf einem Credo der Akzeptanz individueller Geschichten und Geisteshaltungen. Morrison bezieht klar Stellung im Bezug auf das lebensfähigste Modell des Paradieses: Ruby ist zum Scheitern verurteilt aufgrund seines Beharrens auf einen unveränderbaren Schöpfungsmythos und seiner Weigerung, auch die weniger perfekten in ihre utopische Gemeinschaft aufzunehmen. Das Convent wird hingegen als

fehlerhafte aber funktionsfähige Gemeinschaft dargestellt, die ihren Mitgliedern das bietet, was sie brauchen: Obdach, Nahrung und menschliches Mitgefühl.

Die Frauen des Convent mit ihrer offenen, liberalen Lebenseinstellung, die sie offen zur Schau tragen, werden von den Männern von Ruby als Sündenböcke für den Verfall ihrer Gemeinschaft und ihrer Ideale auserkoren und in einem geplanten Akt der Vergeltung getötet. Die Frauen existieren fortan in einem Raum zwischen Diesseits und Jenseits, indem sie mit jenen kommunizieren, die für ihre Traumata verantwortlich sind und ihnen vergeben. Somit transzendieren sie ihre Traumata ohne sie zu vergessen und ohne an ihnen festzuhalten und finden ein Gleichgewicht zwischen der Erinnerung an die Vergangenheit und einer offenen Zuwendung zu der Zukunft. Für Ruby stellt der Vorfalls zugleich ein Ende und einen Anfang dar. Das Ende des mutmaßlichen Paradieses bedeutet gleichzeitig den Anfang einen realen Ortes und damit die Möglichkeit einer Schaffung eines Zuhauses im Hier und Jetzt.

Wie Toni Morrison im Verlauf von *Paradise* darstellt, so bedarf die Schaffung und die Erhaltung eines perfekten Ortes, des Paradieses, einer Aufrechterhaltung von Stasis und Homogenität auf Kosten von persönlicher und gemeinschaftlicher Freiheit. Vertreter des Wandels oder der Unordnung müssen um jeden Preis aus dem perfekten Ort verbannt werden, da sie das zerbrechliche Gleichgewicht des utopischen Zeit-Raum-Gefüges bedrohen. Die manichäischen Gegensätze, die den Ort Ruby zu einem statischen, lebensfeindlichen Ort machen, werden im Convent aufgebrochen zugunsten eines Grenzraumes der kulturellen Hybridität, ein fiktives Beispiel für Homi Bhabhas *Beyond*. Die letzte Szene in *Paradise* spielt an einem paradiesischen Ort, einem surrealen Strand, an dem Consolata und Piedade, eine Art spirituelle, schwarze Mutterfigur, harmonisch beieinander sitzen. Piedade hält Consolata in ihren Armen und bietet der entwurzelten, traumatisierten Frau somit einen idealen, sicheren Ort. Indem sie das perfekte Zuhause an einen surrealen Ort zwischen den Welten verlegt, deutet Morrison an, dass die Vorstellung von Heimat und Zuhause in unserer heutigen Zeit neu gezeichnet werden muss, als ein offener Raum mit flexiblen Grenzen, in dem der kulturellen Hybridität der postmodernen Realität Rechnung getragen wird. Die individuellen Bedeutungsebenen von Erinnerung, Gedächtnis und Geschichte werden betrachtet, akzeptiert und bilden eine dynamische und allumfassende Vision von Geschichtlichkeit.

Das Ende von *Paradise*, gleichzeitig das Ende der Trilogie, ist genauso offen wie das der beiden anderen Romane, jedoch bietet es einen hoffnungsvolleren,

versöhnlicheren Blick in die Zukunft. Die von Morrison gezeichnete Vorstellung eines Paradieses zeigt es als einen vorübergehenden Zustand der Gemeinschaft, Fürsorge und Liebe, in dem die Traumata der Vergangenheit betrachtet und überwunden werden können – eine postmoderne Vision von Zuhause.

In der hier untersuchten Trilogie verwirft Morrison die Vorstellung eines reinen, homogenen Raumes in geographischer, kultureller und narrativer Hinsicht. Morrison befürwortet Räume, in denen verschiedene Bedeutungsebenen sich ergänzen und bereichern, anstatt einander auszuschließen. Die Räume, die bei Morrison zu Orten der Heimat und des Zuhauses werden, erlauben die Koexistenz einer Vielfalt gegenwärtiger und vergangener Diskurse, die Gleichzeitigkeit von Innerem und Äußerem und die Überlagerung individueller und gemeinschaftlicher Geschichte, so dass Ihre verschiedenen Bedeutungsebenen betrachtet und interpretiert werden können.

9.2 **Erklärung über die verwendeten Hilfsmittel**

Hiermit versichere ich, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit eigenständig und ohne Zuhilfenahme anderer als der von mir angeführten Hilfsmittel verfasst habe.

Mannheim, im Juni 2009

Dagmar Lonien

-Ort, -Datum

-Unterschrift-