

**“The Past Is Never Dead, It’s Not Even Past”:  
Cultural Trauma and Memory in Neo-Slave Narratives**

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## Abstract

The cultural trauma in question in this work is the trauma of slavery which causes a traumatic wound in black community. The four books that I have chosen for this thesis are read as neo-slave narratives, and they illustrate slavery as cultural trauma from a contemporary perspective. This thesis will show how neo-slave narratives such as *Kindred*, *Beloved*, *The Underground Railroad* and *The Book of Negroes* evoke cultural trauma. Also, this thesis will provide an analysis of the journeys of the characters, through time and space, and the journeys' impact on urging to remember cultural trauma and will consider how the authors reflect the cultural trauma of slavery.



## 1.Introduction

“The past is never dead. It's not even past,” which is a part of the title of this work, is one of William Faulkner's most famous lines. Faulkner's statement prompts me to consider the United States' historical relationship with slavery, and apparently, the 44th President of the United States, Barack Obama, shares this idea with me that he quoted and commented on these lines in his speech, “A More Perfect Union,” in 2008 in order to emphasize that the United States' racial legacy continues to shape the present. Obama says: “Understanding this fact requires reminding us how we got to this point. As William Faulkner once wrote, “The past is not dead and buried. In fact, it's not even past” (Stringer 44). Speaking in Philadelphia, Obama emphasized that history, and especially African American historical experiences of oppression, continue to be relevant to contemporary political debates (Stringer 44). In his speech, Obama's references to “old racial wounds” and African Americans' “memories of humiliation, and doubt and fear” identify slavery as the source of these traumatic events (Stringer 45). Understanding and accepting the history of the U.S. requires facing with America's national legacy which contains slavery, one of the darkest events in human history. After slavery was abolished in America, its influence changed, and the legacy of slavery emerged as racial discrimination against blacks.

Aspiring to represent the traumatic legacy of slavery, contemporary African American writers join to produce “neo-slave narratives.” This term, which was coined by Bernard Bell and developed by Ashraf Rushdy, refers to the works written about slavery after slavery was abolished. The emergence of such works shows the writers' need to reflect the damage that slavery causes in the society in which they live. Neo-slave narratives lead the readers to confront with slavery and its traumatic legacy, which George Fredrickson once compared to “the skeleton in the American closet” (61). Interpreting slavery from a contemporary perspective, neo-slave narratives both expose and shape the cultural memory at the same time.

As Silke Arnold-de Simine states “Memory indicates a relationship to past events that is shaped by and in turn profoundly impacts, how we think, feel, and live in the present” (140).

The cultural trauma in question in this work is the trauma of slavery which causes a traumatic wound black community. The four books that I have chosen for this thesis are read as neo-slave narratives, and they illustrate slavery as cultural trauma from a contemporary perspective. This thesis will show how neo-slave narratives such as *Kindred*, *Beloved*, *The Underground Railroad* and *The Book of Negroes* evoke cultural trauma. This thesis will provide an analysis of the journeys of the characters, through time and space, and the journeys’ impact on urging to remember cultural trauma and will consider how the authors reflect the cultural trauma of slavery. As Judie Newman suggests,

One major feature of neo-slave narratives, therefore, no matter how careful they are to reproduce the history of slavery and to maintain a connection to the genre of the slave narrative, is an emphasis on remapping the world, scrambling agreed definitions of place or time, and drawing attention to the limits of conventional conceptions. The reader is forced to experience the kind of disorientation in time and space felt by the slave. (33)

These texts together offer a distinctive combination that allows for a better understanding of the representations of cultural trauma in contemporary literature. Discussions surrounding the relationship between neo-slave narratives and memory and trauma are of great interest to the present study. I divide my thesis into four chapters. In the introduction, I provide theoretical information regarding my argument by presenting the terms I use throughout my work, namely cultural trauma, memory, and neo-slave narrative. In the second chapter, I examine the cultural trauma of slavery through time traveling from a contemporary perspective by in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*. Through these novels, I present the function of time travel as conflating past and present

hence allowing a confrontation with history. Both Morrison and Butler highlight the present-day effects of trauma of slavery in their novels by enabling the characters to travel in time, thereby presenting the return of the trauma. In *Kindred*, Dana is haunted by the past which makes her travel through time. Every time she feels dizzy, she finds herself in a slave plantation that is owned by her ancestors in the Antebellum South. I argue that through Dana's journeys, Butler emphasizes the indelibility of the marks of the traumatic past, which occurs as a result of slavery. I analyze time travel in *Kindred* by arguing that it is based on cultural trauma. Additionally, I introduce the loss of Dana's arm as a symbol of cultural trauma. The second novel I work on is Morrison's *Beloved*, which tells the story of Beloved and her mother Sethe, a former slave who kills her daughter Beloved in order not to surrender her to slavery. Years later, Beloved returns as a young woman, and I argue that her haunting the present is the embodiment of the cultural trauma. I claim that Beloved stands for all African Americans who are traumatized or destroyed by slavery, hence I trace her return as the critical factor to remembering cultural trauma. Beloved's "traveling" to the present means her return as a ghost; thereby, as a ghost, she urges both the characters and the readers to remember cultural trauma through her being the embodiment of the traumatic memory of slavery and storytelling.

In the third chapter, I present two other neo-slave narratives, Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* and Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes*. Suggesting that the novels function as an effective device to evoke the cultural memory of North Americans, I explore the American and Canadian heritage of slavery by reconsidering cultural trauma theory. In *Underground Railroad*, by transforming the metaphorical underground railroad into an actual transportation system, Whitehead suggests a journey beginning with the horrors of slavery in Georgia, including oppression, segregation, lynching, and sterilization of African Americans in South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Indiana. In my point of view, the novel

provokes the memory of North Americans and reminds them the legacy of slavery which haunts the present time.

Lastly, in *The Book of Negroes*, Hill urges the readers to remember cultural trauma through Aminata's experiences. He offers confrontations with history through a realistic description of the conditions of the compulsory voyage of enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to America. Aminata's second journey is from New York to Canada, which seems to promise freedom but confronts her with racial discrimination. Through her experience in Canada, Hill highlights that slavery and racial discrimination existed in Canada as well as in the U.S. Exposing, thus reminding the readers of the historical facts, I argue that this part of her journey challenges the haven-like representation of Canada for black people. Then Aminata goes back to Africa, where she came from. This journey highlights Aminata being a "djeli," an African storyteller who embodies the traumatic memory of slavery.

What connects the aforementioned narratives is the traveling, which functions as the reminder of the trauma of slavery. Hence, the characters' experiences connect the traumatic past and its legacy in the present. These narratives illustrate "the effects of a slave past on a personal present by showing how ancestors' lives act as a palimpsest on the lives of their contemporary progeny" (Rushdy "Remembering" 9).

## 2. Terminology

### 2.1 Cultural Trauma

The meaning of the word trauma has derived over the years. In the seventeenth century, trauma was used to refer to physical injuries caused by an accident or an attack in accordance with the word's origin, which is "traumatizo," a Greek word meaning wound. Then, in the nineteenth century, psychologists used the term "to create the concept of psychological trauma, which describes a wound within the psyche" (Woods 2). Nowadays, the term both refers to physical wounds and is also used to "describe emotional or psychological injury, as opposed to bodily harm" (Kurtz 1). According to Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, "trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being" (7). Sigmund Freud's theories about traumatic experience are essential in terms of the place of the trauma concept in psychology. He introduces the concept of trauma as "a temporal disruption, destroying or fracturing the narratives of our lives" (Simine 144) in his 1896 essay "The Actiology of Hysteria." He asserts that "an event is not understood as traumatic until its return" (Simine 144) which means it cannot be captured instantly whether the event will cause trauma in human psychology or not. Cathy Caruth, the pioneer of the traditional trauma model, agrees with Freud and argue further that trauma is "not locatable in the simple violent or original event in the individual's past" (Caruth 4) but only identified in "the way it is precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Caruth 4). When this "return" takes place the effects of trauma on the human psyche are various. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration explains initial responses of an individual to trauma as "exhaustion, confusion, sadness, anxiety, agitation, numbness, dissociation, confusion,

physical arousal, and blunted affect (. . .)” (61), and delayed responses to trauma as “persistent fatigue, sleep disorders, nightmares, fear of recurrence, anxiety focused on flashbacks, depression, and avoidance of emotions, sensations, or activities that are associated with the trauma, even remotely” (61).

With the emergence of the term cultural trauma, the meaning and scope of the trauma has expanded. According to Alexander, “cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (Alexander et al. 1). Ron Eyerman argues in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, major conceptual work on cultural trauma, “there is a difference between trauma as it affects individuals and as a cultural process” (Eyerman 60). Underlining the difference between trauma that “affects individuals” and trauma “as a cultural process” Ron Eyerman offers the following distinction:

“As opposed to psychological or physical trauma, which involves a wound and the experience of great emotional anguish by an individual, cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion. In this sense, the trauma need not necessarily be felt by everyone in a community or experienced directly by any or all. While some event may be necessary to establish as the significant cause, its meaning as traumatic must be established and accepted, and this requires time to occur, as well as mediation and representation.” (Eyerman 61)

Distinguishing the concept of trauma from the term cultural trauma, Eyerman in this statement also shows that the word "trauma" retains the meaning of "wound." Physical, psychological, and cultural wounds can be detected in bodies, minds, and societies. He also emphasizes that the trauma caused by traumatic events that hurt communities may not be

experienced or felt by all members of the society; nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that trauma has changed the structure of society.

Cathy Caruth, in *Unclaimed Experience*, builds on Freud's trauma model and posits that trauma "is never simply one's own" (24), thus, pointing out the shared aspect of a traumatic experience. Even if such collectively traumatic incidents happen to individuals, traumatic events become a cultural phenomenon that affects individuals by penetrating the cultural memory. Just as individuals under the influence of trauma are "being possessed by an image or event" (5), which is Caruth's definition of a condition of trauma, in the case of cultural trauma, communities are captured by the events they are affected by. Hence, traumatized people and, in this case, traumatized groups live the present with the burden of the past (Caruth 5).

Neil Smelser offers another definition of cultural trauma: "A memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation which is (a) laden with negative affect, (b) represented as indelible, and (c) regarded as threatening a society's [or group's] existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions" (44). Smelser's characterization of cultural trauma as a memory shows that the events that are the subject of cultural trauma are difficult to forget and leave behind.

## **2.2 Memory**

For a better understanding of my study, while examining the term "memory" in this subchapter, I will explain the terms individual memory and cultural memory. Firstly, "on the inner level, memory is a matter of our neuro-mental system (Assmann "communicative" 109)". It is "the storage of acquired knowledge for later recall" (Sherwood 157). Nothing can be learned and remembered without it, and thus personal, cultural, scientific, technological or artistic development would not be possible. In simpler terms, memory stores, saves, and

reveals information when necessary. Remembering happens when the brain releases information.

On the other hand, “on the social level, memory is a matter of communication and social interaction” (Assmann “communicative” 109). Halbwachs uses the term collective memory regarding memory in social conditions, which stands as the basis of cultural memory. The main argument in Halbwachs' works is that memory depends on social conditions (Assmann “cultural memory” 21). Considering memory as a social notion rather than biological, Halbwach argues that the social environment is a condition for forming and preserving memory (Assmann “cultural memory” 21). Assmann also argues that “memory always ‘belongs’ to an individual, but this memory is socially determined. Therefore, ‘collective memory’ should not be perceived as a metaphorical expression. Undoubtedly, societies do not have a memory, but societies determine the memory of their members (Assmann “cultural memory” 22).” Therefore, “no memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections” (Assmann “cultural memory” 43). This means that individual memory cannot be isolated from the individual's group; interaction and mutual sharing are essential.

German Egyptologist Jan Assmann and scholar Aleida Assmann coined the term “cultural memory,” which refers to “the external dimension” of human memory (“cultural memory” 5). In other words, a separate dimension of memory is shaped by the influence of the community to which the individual belongs. Cultural memory is how a community remembers the events. The memory in question here does not belong to the society itself, but to the individuals in the society. Assmann asserts that, “despite the fact that it is always individual who “has” memory, it is created collectively” (“cultural memory” 21). Events that concern societies and leave a trace are engraved in the memories of societies and transferred to future generations through cultural memory. Jan Assmann presents memory as “a metonym

based on material contract between a remembering mind and a reminding object”

(“communicative” 111), and he defines cultural memory by explaining it on the social level:

Things do not ‘have’ a memory of their own, but they may remind us, may trigger our memory, because they carry memories which we have invested into them, things such as dishes, feasts, rites, images, stories and other texts, landscapes, and other "lieux de memoire." On the social level, with respect to groups and societies, the role of external symbols becomes even more important, because groups which, of course, do not "have" a memory tend to "make" themselves one by means of things meant as reminders such as monuments, museums, libraries, archives, and other mnemonic institutions. This is what we call cultural memory” (“communicative” 111)

### **2.3. Neo-Slave Narratives**

In order to understand neo-slave narratives, comprehension of the term slave narratives is essential. Ron Eyerman highlights that “the complex and problematic issues of representation have been of central concern to black Americans from the earliest periods of the slave trade to the present” (73). Klotman and Cutler call the struggle for the right of black Americans to live, be seen, and heard on equal terms as “the struggle for representation” (Eyerman 73). The literary part of this representation started with the slave narratives. A slave narrative contains a fugitive or formerly enslaved person's entire life or part of their life, either verbally or in writing. As William L. Andrews writes in his article on Encyclopaedia Britannica website, typically, American slave narratives focus on the narrator's journey from slavery in the South to freedom in the North. These narratives are historically valuable works since the experiences of the enslaved people are conveyed firsthand. Andrews adds that “from 1760 to the end of the Civil War in the United States, approximately 100 autobiographies of fugitive or former slaves appeared. After slavery was abolished in the United States in 1865,

at least 50 former slaves wrote or dictated book-length accounts of their lives". The slave narrative first emerged during the 1770s and 1780s (Gould 11). Audrey A. Fisch introduces the slave narratives' purpose as "the end of slavery" (2). She claims that "the slave narrative is a key artifact in the global campaign to end first the slave trade (the practice of transporting slaves across international waters), then colonial slavery (in British Caribbean colonies like Jamaica), and finally U.S. slavery" (2).

Following the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, American slave narratives contributed to the growing national debate about slavery. Frederick Douglass wrote *My Bondage and My Freedom* in 1855 to describe his ongoing struggle for freedom and independence against racism in the North. In 1861, as the first African American woman to write her own narrative, Harriet Jacobs published *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, which depicts her resistance to her master's sexual exploitation and eventual liberation success for herself and her two children.

On the other hand, "since the 1970s, African American writers have insistently revisited earlier historical periods, in particular the era of slavery" (Dubey, "Neo-Slave" 332). When American society began to return to the past and reconsider slavery, neo-slave narratives emerged. Unlike the slave narratives which are written in the first person, neo-slave narratives are the works of writers who did not personally experience slavery but continued their lives in the shadow of slavery and its legacy. As a term, "neoslave narrative" (without the hyphen) is coined by Bernard W. Bell in his 1987 book *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition* in order to define the literary genre of contemporary slave narratives which are "residually oral, modern narratives of escape from bondage to freedom" (289).

In 1997, Ashraf H.A. Rushdy adds a hyphen, and reforms the term. He is particularly interested in how contemporary slave narratives depict "the experience or the effects of New World slavery" and explain "lasting cultural meaning and social consequences" of slavery

(Rushdy, "Neo-Slave" 533). Writers of the neo-slave narratives offer a contemporary perspective, which is, according to Valerie Smith:

informed and enriched by the study of slave narratives, the changing historiography of slavery, the complicated history of race and power relations in America and throughout the world during the 20th century, and the rise of psychoanalysis and other theoretical frameworks. They are therefore free to use the imagination to explore the unacknowledged and elusive effects of the institution of slavery upon slaves, slaveholders, and their descendants. (169)

While the authors share an insider perspective, these narratives reflect the perspective of a generation who did not experience slavery but grew up with its memories and legacy on the slavery institute and its impact on society. At the same time, the authors offer a more external perspective compared to slave narratives since they do not experience slavery in person. Therefore, writers often invoke their "imagination" to explore and reflect on the effects of slavery on enslaved people and slave owners" (Smith 169).

### 3. Trauma and Memory in Neo-Slave Narratives

Neo-slave narratives are trauma writings. They indicate African- Americans' reaction to the trauma of slavery, as nightmares are the reaction of individuals who have experienced psychological trauma. After the abolition of slavery in North America, slavery and its legacy have become the subject of neo-slave narratives with the historical knowledge and imagination of the authors. The fact that the twentieth and twenty-first century writers who did not directly experience slavery write on slavery and its legacy indicates the deep trauma that slavery created in African American culture. These narratives emerged as a new genre in the twentieth century because they offer an opportunity to be confronted with the effects of the institution of slavery for the people who did not have the chance to intervene in slavery. The writers of neo-slave narratives highlight the cultural trauma which affects individuals and then society by exposing the wounds in the African American psyche which is left by the middle passage and the institution of slavery. As trauma stories, neo-slave narratives describe "the psychological and social effects of suffering" (Byerman 3). Therefore, the rise of neo-slave narratives demonstrates that the effects of slavery and the divisive social order it brought about still resonate in the subconscious of African American society.

Neo-slave narratives have been revealed by the twentieth and twenty-first century writers in the light of cumulative knowledge, statistics, and history. In this sense, there is an important difference between narration and interpretation with the slave narratives written by those who experienced the middle passage. As members of a society traumatized by slavery, neo-slave narrative writers "illustrate the centrality of the history and the memory of slavery to our individual, racial, gender, cultural, and national identities" (Smith 168). Moreover, as Valerie Smith argues, neo-slave narratives "provide a perspective on a host of issues that resonate in contemporary cultural, historical, critical, and literary discourses," including "the challenges of representing trauma and traumatic memories," and "the legacy of slavery"

(168). In these narratives, “the present is always written against a background where the past is erased but still legible” (Rushdy, “Remembering” 8).

Neo-slave narratives trigger “remembering” on an individual and social level, leading to a confrontation with cultural trauma. In *Creating Memory and Cultural Identity in African American Trauma Fiction*, Patricia San José Rico argues that one of the functions of neo-slave narratives as trauma writings is “keeping the memory of the real traumas of the past alive and thus helping readers access that memory, giving voice to these traumas” (35). Remembering helps to cope with trauma's effects, thus opening the way for healing in individuals and society since when what has been experienced is accepted and seen by the community, people who have experienced the traumatic event can begin to heal.

### 3.1 Remembering Trauma Through Time

As Newman argues, one of the most important features of neo-slave narratives is their emphasis on “scrambling agreed definitions of place or time” (33). Two neo-slave narratives I focus on in this chapter, Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, challenge to linear understandings of time, thus establishing the connection between the past and the present. As Spaulding states, “in order to emphasize the links between past and present, contemporary African American writers create narratives that undermine conventions of linearity and distinctions between past and present” (Spaulding 25). Both Butler and Morrison’s protagonists are haunted by the past with the purpose of emphasizing the cultural trauma of slavery by breaking the linearity of time; therefore, the movement to the past and future is possible, and even forced.

I argue that both in *Beloved* and *Kindred* the movement through time functions as a reminder of cultural trauma of slavery. For instance, in *Beloved*, Beloved, as a ghost, haunts the present after Sethe murders her. She becomes the connection between the past and present. In *Kindred*, Dana is haunted by the past which compel her to travel back in time.

Suddenly she finds herself in the slave plantation that her ancestors live in nineteenth century. Both novels use the concept of time travel into the past and into the present in order to illustrate the horrors of slavery and remind the characters and the people who tend to forget of slavery.

### 3.1.1 Traveling to the Past: Octavia Butler's *Kindred*

Among the neo-slave narrative works that remind and emphasize cultural trauma through time, the first work I will examine is Octavia Butler's *Kindred*. Published in 1979, the novel is about the time travels of African American Edana Franklin who also known as Dana. Her mysterious journeys begin on 9<sup>th</sup> of June 1976, the day Dana and her husband Kevin move into their new home in California. When Dana feels dizzy and unconscious, she mysteriously finds herself in 1815 on the Weylin plantation near the city of Easton. On her first journey, she wakes up by a river, where a boy is about to drown. After rescuing him, Dana is transported to present again. She later learns that the boy is Rufus who is the father of her great-great-grandmother Hagar Weylin and the son of the plantation owner. Her second journey also starts with dizziness, and she is transported Rufus's bedroom where the curtains on fire. After putting the fire out, Dana realizes the reason for her time travel: whenever Rufus's life is in danger, she is forced to travel to the past to protect him, hence her family's existence.

The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the function of time travel in *Kindred*, which is reminding the readers of cultural trauma both to characters and readers. In this chapter, I present cultural trauma as the reason of Dana's journeys. Firstly, I analyze time travel in *Kindred* by arguing that it is based on cultural trauma. Secondly, I present the function of time travel in the novel which is conflating past and present hence allows confrontation with history. Thirdly, I introduce the loss of Dana's arm as a symbol of cultural trauma. Ultimately, I argue that *Kindred* reveals the cultural trauma of slavery through time travel which

confronts the readers with the history of slavery in the United States by connecting the traumatic past and the haunted present.

First of all, although Octavia Butler is known for her science fiction writings, time travel in *Kindred* is not scientific, it is rather based on the cultural trauma of slavery. As Butler explains in the interview with Randall Kenan “with *Kindred* there's absolutely no science involved. Not even the time travel. I don't use a time machine or anything like that” (496). With this statement, Butler implied that not making use of any technological device in time travel takes this journey out of scientific context. Dana’s travels from 1976 California to the early 1800s antebellum South does not happen through any technological device but it occurs when she feels sudden dizziness. Butler does not explain how Dana goes into the past and comes back to the present. This reveals the fact that the author wants the reader to focus on the reason behind Dana’s compulsive journeys to the past, not how it is possible for her to go (Spaulding 47). The obvious cause is to keep her family line continue by keeping Rufus alive. Whenever one of Dana's ancestors, the plantation owner Rufus Weylin, needs help, she is dragged into the past and she finds herself in the eighteenth century slave plantation where her ancestors lived.

One of the signs showing that Dana's time travel was traumatic is that Dana's being dragged into the antebellum period resembles the flashbacks, one of the responses of individuals who have experienced psychological trauma. Judith Herman explains the condition of reliving the trauma:

Long after the danger is past, traumatized people relive the event as though it were continually recurring in the present. They cannot resume the normal course of their lives, for the trauma repeatedly interrupts. It is as if time stops at the moment of trauma. The traumatic moment becomes encoded in an abnormal form of memory,

which breaks spontaneously into consciousness, both as flashbacks during waking states and as traumatic nightmares during sleep. (37)

In this case, time travel causes flashbacks in *Kindred*. Smelser argues that flashbacks are a way for trauma to insert itself into the mind (53). Hence, a person who has had a flashback feels as if he has relived the moment of trauma. Similarly, as a member of the society that has been under the influence of the cultural trauma of slavery, Dana goes back to the past through time travel and relives the history. The cultural trauma causes Dana's motion which leads reliving slavery decades after it was legally abolished and confronting both her personal and her nation's past. Therefore, Dana's going back in time is a traumatic journey.

Time travel in *Kindred* functions as a vehicle which conflates past and present by spoiling the linearity of time (Spaulding 46), therefore confronts the readers with the history of slavery in the United States. Butler explains in the interview that in *Kindred* time travel is "a device for getting the character back to confront where she came from" (Randall 496). Time travel leads to Dana's confrontation with history by allowing Dana to witness the memories of his ancestors, become a part of the past, and record what happened there in her own memory; therefore, her individual memory becomes a historical record. As Spaulding states, "Butler explicitly erases the boundaries between the past and the present, compelling readers to confront slavery, not as a distant and containable moment, but as a precursor of the present" (Spaulding 25). The history of enslaved people becomes Dana's present for a short time. This makes her and, through her, the reader's confrontation with history more striking.

Furthermore, time travel allows the readers to realize the roots of racial discrimination in the U.S. by emphasizing the traumatic heritage of slavery. After Dana becomes part of slavery, she concludes that the racist behavior to which she and other African Americans were subjected in the twentieth century is the heritage of slavery. Certain events in Dana's daily life in 1976 indicates that the traumatic legacy of slavery continues to affect the lives of African

Americans. The reactions of Dana and Kevin's family members to their marriage illustrates this point clearly. For example, when Kevin tells his sister that he is going to marry Dana, his sister expresses clearly that she does not approve this marriage and makes racist remarks that Dana "don't want to hear" (249), which shows that interracial marriages still are not welcomed by some sections of the society even in the twentieth century. While Kevin's sister absolutely disagrees with his decision to be married with Dana, Dana's aunt approves this marriage since the children they will have will be light skinned. (252). As a descendant of slaves, she considers that having light skin is more valid than having dark skin, as if having darker skin is a defect. Here, with Dana's aunt's statement, Butler provides a testimony of the phenomenon "colorism," which is "prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color" (Walker 506). As Evelyn Nakano Glenn argues in her article "Yearning for Lightness: Transnational Circuits in the Marketing and Consumption of Skin Lighteners":

Color consciousness in the African American community has generally been viewed as a legacy of slavery, under which mulattos, the offspring of white men and slave women, were accorded better treatment than "pure" Africans. While slave owners considered dark-skinned Africans suited to fieldwork, lighter-skinned mulattos were thought to be more intelligent and better suited for indoor work as servants and artisans. Mulattos were also more likely to receive at least rudimentary education and to be manumitted. (7)

As noted in the quote above, since being white was a sign of superiority in the antebellum period, there was also discrimination based on the color tone of black people's skin. Landor and Smith define colorism as "a stratification system that not only privileges Whites over Blacks but also privileges lighter skinned Blacks over their darker peers" and "one of the most

enduring legacies of slavery and colonialism in the United States” (798). Landor and Smith also argue “like racism, colorism has its roots in slavery and colonialism in the United States, in that skin tone has historically played a role in determining power stratification and racial hierarchies across racial/ethnic groups and within the African American community” (802). Therefore, the discrimination on the grounds of color changes the perception of African Americans about their own bodies. As Dana’s aunt considers that her light skinned child will be more advantageous than those with darker skin, for instance, they will be able to find a job more efficiently and face less discrimination. According to the research, “the burden of traumatic experiences associated with colorism is evidenced by noteworthy skin-tone differences in many areas of life, including employment, educational attainment, and income [...] marriage [...]; interactions in the criminal-justice [...]; and health [...]” (Landor and Smith 802). During the antebellum period, lighter skinned slaves have been considered more intelligent and could have been employed in lighter jobs. “There is also evidence that lighter skinned slaves were sold at a higher price and therefore were valued more than their darker skinned counterparts (Landor and Smith 802).

While the aunt’s traumatic opinion reflects the mindset of the period of enslavement, Dana’s uncle’s taking it as an insult that Dana wants to marry a white man reflects the 1970s which is black power movement period. During black power movement period, the skin tone perception has changed. While being black became a proud feature, whites and light-skinned blacks were discriminated against by society for not being black enough. Dana, who has been discriminated against because of her race and skin color during her journeys to past, realizes that the origin of this discrimination goes back to the antebellum period.

Another example of traumatic heritage of cultural trauma in the novel is Kevin’s attitude when Kevin is in the plantation with Dana. He acts as the owner of her for their own

safety; however, Butler's emphasis on Kevin's falling into that role "too easily" (640) shows that cultural memory of slavery is embedded in the social subconscious of all segments of society, including the generations of those who persecute as well as those who is being persecuted. Even though they were born decades after slavery was abolished, white American Kevin has no trouble taking on the role of slave owner, and this experience exposes the connection between slavery and present time oppressions.

Butler suggests comparisons on life in the nineteenth and twentieth century America which forces the readers to draw a connection between slavery and its legacy. An example of this comparison occurs when Dana expresses her involvement in a workers' agency. Dana and her colleagues call their institution the 'slave market' because the agency offers low wages and difficult working conditions. Dana describes this institution, which exploit people who live in dire conditions and try to earn a living, as follows:

I was working out of a casual labor agency—we regulars called it a slave market. Actually, it was the opposite of slavery. The people who ran it couldn't have cared less whether or not you showed up to do the work they offered. They had more job hunters than jobs anyway. . . . Getting sent out meant the minimum wage—minus Uncle Sam's share—for as many hours as you were needed. You swept floors, stuffed envelopes, took inventory, washed dishes, sorted potato chips (really!), cleaned toilets, marked prices on merchandise . . . you did whatever you were sent out to do. It was nearly always mindless work, and as far as employers were concerned, it was done by mindless people. Nonpeople rented for a few hours, a few days, a few weeks. It didn't matter. (Butler 52–53)

According to Spaulding, Dana's experiences emphasize that "poverty and class exploitation are modern corollaries to slavery (51)." She works as a slave on the Weylin plantation, where

she is forced to work under conditions that push the limits of the human body and psychology. Thus, the novel compares the enslavement of Africans and “the exploitation of the underclass in contemporary America (Spaulding 52)”.

These journeys cause Dana to be physically injured, and these wounds continue to hurt as she comes from the past to the present. For example, at the beginning of the novel, when Rufus' mother attacks Dana, she continues to feel pain in the back and shoulders that Rufus' mother punched (Butler 21) in 1976. The second and most obvious example is the arm that Dana lost on her last journey from the past to the present. According to Steinberg “Dana is unable to return unimpaired, for Butler's point is to make both her characters and her readers aware of how Americans, inevitably, live the slave past in the ostensibly free present (473).”

Dana's missing arm is a symbol of cultural trauma since it represents the physical and psychological wounds that all African American people have received due to the slavery institution. Dana loses her arm, while she travels from past to present at the end of the novel. When the enslaver Rufus attempts to rape her, Dana counters this attack with her knife and stabs Rufus in the back. However, Rufus grasps her left arm before she manages to escape. When she reaches the present time, she realizes that she leaves her left arm behind. Dana describes her emotions when she returns home on her last journey as follows: “But I was still caught somehow, joined to the wall as though my arm were growing out of it-or growing into it. From the elbow to the ends of the fingers, my left arm had become a part of the wall. I looked at the spot where flesh joined with plaster at it uncomprehending. It was the exact spot Rufus's fingers had grasped (605).” Dana's arm snaps right where Rufus is holding her, emphasizing Rufus' influence on Dana. Firstly, in order to analyze this effect, I must examine the representation of Rufus in the novel. His character represents the white slave owners in the antebellum south. He is a cruel man who rapes women, and tortures slaves. On the

plantation Dana witnesses and experiences her ancestors' suffering, inhuman treatment, freedom restrictions, and exploitation for their physical strength. Moreover, Rufus has a significant function, he is the trigger for Dana's traumatic journeys. Whenever Rufus's life is in danger, Dana is "called" by Rufus in order to be saved. Since Rufus is Dana's great-great grandfather, Dana must ensure Rufus's survival so that the family line can continue. The fact that Rufus is the cause of Dana's movement to the past makes Rufus the representative of the traumatic past.

Representing the traumatic past, Rufus disturbs Dana in 1976 by forcing her to a journey through time which emphasize that slavery affects not only the enslaved people who lived in that period, but also those born after the abolition of slavery. The past haunts African Americans today. As Butler explains in her interview with Randall Kenan: "I couldn't really let her come all the way back. I couldn't let her return to what she was, I couldn't let her come back whole and that, I think, really symbolizes her not coming back whole. Antebellum slavery didn't leave people quite whole" (30). Rufus's leaving traces on Dana's body proves that slavery, as an unpleasant experience, is not left behind. It has become a cultural trauma that also affects future generations, apart from the physical and psychological effects it leaves on enslaved people. For Ashraf Rushdy, the loss of Dana's arm represents "a symptom of how recovering the past involves losing a grip on the present" ("Families" 139). In other words, the rupture of Dana's arm is an indicator of the cultural trauma of slavery's effect in the present. Dana's loss of her arm physically brings the trauma back to the present and her severed arm becomes a tangible symbol of the havoc which slavery has wreaked on enslaved people and their descendants.

As Manis states, "witnessing life on the plantation brings Dana to a new understanding of history that she cannot get from historical texts alone. The emotional and physical scars she and Kevin return home with remind them of the traumas they have lived through by traveling

to the antebellum South (4).” At the end of the novel, Dana and Kevin acquired a broader perception of the connection between the past and the future. His journeys into the past contributed to them and, through them, to the reader, “a new view of history and a new view of the present” (Manis 4). Dana and Kevin's journey to Maryland in the final chapter of the novel illustrates this point clearly. When they decide to return to Maryland in order to know what happened to Dana 's ancestors, the only information they receive is that Rufus is killed on fire in his house, and the slaves in the plantation are sold. They were astonished when they could not find any information about the lifestyles of the slaves living on the Weylin plantation, as if they had never lived. When questioned why they had come there, Kevin concludes, “To try to understand. To touch solid evidence that those people existed. To reassure yourself that you're sane” (Butler 611). Through this journey, both their and readers' understanding of history is extended.

In conclusion, time travel is based on cultural trauma in *Kindred*. Butler interferes with the reader's perception of time through time travel by introducing time travel as a fantastic concept, rather than scientific, since she wants the reader to focus more on the reason of Dana's going into the past, not how it is possible for her to go. Cultural trauma is primarily the cause of Dana's forced time travel. Butler takes Dana on this journey because Dana, who was living a normal life in 1976, is dragged into this journey as a result of the past disturbing her. Through the journey, she witnesses and confronts history. In the novel, Butler implies that slavery is a cultural trauma that continues even today, firstly by taking Dana on this journey and secondly by the symbol that Dana left her arm in the past on her last trip to the past. Cultural trauma is also the reason why Dana could not come to the present without physical and mental injuries at the end of these journeys. Dana's broken arm and loss of a limb are symbolic of the lingering effects of past traumas. Butler's selection of an African American with slave ancestry as the protagonist and sending her to the past, allowing her to

experience and confront the past, allow Dana and the readers to create a link between the cultural trauma of slavery and the racial oppressions of today. As Butler emphasizes, when I question what Dana's connection with the past is, not how Dana travels in time, I argue that the legacy of slavery continues to affect African Americans' lives, and the cultural trauma that has taken place in the cultural memories of African Americans is passed down from generation to generation.

### **3.1.2 Traveling to the Present: Toni Morrison's *Beloved***

In a 1989 interview between Bonnie Angelo and Toni Morrison, Morrison revealed that "I thought, this has got to be the least read of all the books I'd written because 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, white people don't want to remember. I mean, it's national amnesia" (Angelo Interview 257). As a member of the African American community in the US, Toni Morrison is both beset and affected by the traumatic legacy of slavery which leads to the emergence of *Beloved* as a neo-slave narrative. While writing *Beloved*, Morrison is inspired by the story of Margaret Garner, a traumatic incident that took place during the time of slavery. In 1856, black enslaved woman Margaret Garner escaped from the Kentucky plantation with her husband and children while she was pregnant. Their master and the federal marshals were chasing them with authority given by the fugitive slave act in order to catch and re-enslave them. Realizing that they would be caught, Margaret attempted to kill herself and her children in order to prevent themselves from returning to slavery. She slit the throat of her two-year-old daughter then stabbed the other children and herself. Her daughter died instantly, and the rest of the family was captured. Similarly, Sethe, who escapes from a plantation with her children, gets caught by the masters and their agents, and she kills her daughter in order not to return to slavery. The novel is about the reappearance of this child, *Beloved*, in a grown-up form. In this chapter, I claim that *Beloved* stands for all African

Americans traumatized or destroyed by slavery hence I trace her return as the critical factor to remembering cultural trauma. Beloved's "traveling" to the present means her return as a ghost. Therefore, she urges both the characters and the readers to remember cultural trauma by embodying the traumatic memory of slavery and storytelling.

Beloved's return to the present in the form of a ghost leads the characters and the readers to confront the cultural trauma of slavery. As Morrison points out in an interview with Gail Caldwell that "the past, until you confront it, until you live through it, it keeps coming back in other forms" (Taylor-Guthrie 241). While Beloved's haunting is based on the ghost's desire to be understood and confronted, Morrison's use of the ghost emphasizes the story's connection with the past of which the ghost carries both the burden and traces. The dialogue between Amy Denver and Sethe while she massages Sethe's swollen legs to help her while she is exhausted from running away foreshadows the ghost's appearance: "It's gonna hurt, now" said Amy. "Anything dead coming back to life hurts" (Morrison 73). While Amy refers to the swollen legs of Sethe with this phrase, her statement is confirmed when Beloved returns as a ghost. Beloved torments Sethe by appearing as the embodiment of Sethe's suppressed memories. Another example of traumatic memories continuing to exist in the human mind is Sethe and Denver's dialogue:

"Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It's never going away. Even if the whole farm—every tree and grass blade of it dies. The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there—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 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. That's how come I had to get all my children out. No matter what."

Denver picked at her fingernails. “If it’s still there, waiting, that must mean that nothing ever dies.”

Sethe looked right in Denver’s face. “Nothing ever does,” she said.” (76)

In this dialogue, Sethe explains to Denver that the traumatic experiences keep their presence in memory and do not reveal themselves until they are triggered. As Bessel A. Kolk and Alexander C. McFarlane state in *The Black Hole of Trauma*, “traumatic experiences can damage the psyche and leave indelible marks on it” (Kolk et. al 487). They are always in mind, not lost or erased. The trauma of Sethe’s murder of her child is also not forgotten. It is revealed with the return of Beloved. She, as a ghost, represents these non-disappearing, undead memories of both the characters and readers.

Beloved’s reappearance in the present revives Sethe’s traumatic memory of killing her child. In order to fully understand Sethe’s state of mind, the circumstances that provoke her to think that killing her own children is a better alternative than letting them be slaves must be examined. Experiencing the horrors of slavery influences Sethe mentally and physically, and she eventually escapes from the Sweet Home. When she and her children are caught, she faces the dilemma of surrendering to the life of slavery or not. She chooses not to surrender, and in order to liberate herself and her children from the horror of slavery, she attempts to end the lives of her children and her own. Consequently, she commits to murder her children and cuts the oldest one’s throat. Her infanticide shows that she disapproves of being a part of the institution of slavery so strongly that she considers murdering her children is more suitable than bringing them up as slaves. Even though Sethe is the one who commits the crime, she is also a victim of slavery. Murdering her own child is indisputably a traumatic incident that will leave deep scars on her soul. Beloved’s return to 124 House as a victim of slavery illustrates its devastating effect.

Beloved triggers the return of the traumatic memory of slavery not only for Sethe but also for the African American community. As Cathy Caruth writes “trauma is never simply one’s own,” (24) therefore, although the pain that Sethe experienced due to infanticide is individual, it is also communal, as it reminds of the middle passage and slavery, which causes deep scars in the memory of African American society. As a victim, she exposes the traumatic experiences of the family but also stands as a symbol of the greater context of African American history and memory; therefore, as Ramos states, “she stands for all African Americans traumatized or destroyed by slavery” (61). She represents the traumatic memory of oppression. Beloved has experienced inhumane treatment that slaves are routinely subjected to, such as whipping, rape, exclusion, and exposure to racial discrimination. The infanticide symbolizes the pressure created by slavery which offers death as the only way to achieve independence. Therefore, the murder of Beloved by her mother emphasizes the wound slavery has inflicted on society. The conversation below between Denver and Beloved shows that Beloved symbolizes African American history and memory:

“What’s it like over there, where you were before? Can you tell me?”

“Dark” said Beloved. I am small in that place. I’m like this here.

She raised her head off the bed, lay down on her side and curled up.

“You see anybody?”

“Heaps. A lot of people is down there. Some is dead.”

“You see Jesus? Baby Suggs?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know the names.” (134)

When Denver asks Beloved where she was before, what kind of place she was in, Beloved replies she was still a baby when he was killed. With this dialogue, Morrison emphasizes that Beloved comes from the world of the dead. This makes her a representative of all people who were killed by slavery and whose names are not even known.

The novel's epilogue is another significant aspect that indicates Beloved's representation of the African American community. *Beloved* is dedicated to "sixty million and more" by Toni Morrison, which refers to the estimated number of people who suffered and lost their lives in the middle passage and slavery. In my opinion, 'more' in this statement implies the undetermined number of slavery's victims. Ultimately, even after slavery was abolished, it continued to affect people's lives. Beloved's character is the symbol of this influence in the novel. As Wyatt states, "she represents a whole lineage of people obliterated by slavery, beginning with the Africans who died on the Middle Passage, the "sixty million and more" of the novel's epigraph" (Wyatt 474).

Another example that shows Beloved's unity with enslaved African Americans is her monologue during her middle passage experience:

I am always crouching the man on my face is dead ... in the beginning the women are away from the men and the men are away from the women storms rock us and mix the men into the women and the women into the men that is when I begin to be on the back of the man for a long time I see only his neck and his wide shoulders above me [. . .] he locks his eyes and dies on my face [. . .] the others do not know that he is dead. (Morrison 339)

In this quotation, Beloved shares a memory of herself on a slave ship, even though it is known that she was killed when she was a baby, and therefore couldn't have experienced what she states above. Thus, as I claim, Morrison connects Beloved to "sixty million and more" by describing her as the embodiment of memories of the enslaved people who suffered both on the slave ships and in North America.

Furthermore, Beloved's name suggests a collective sense since she stands as the representation of "all the loved ones lost through slavery, beginning with the Africans who died on the slave ships" (Wyatt 479). Even though not everyone shares the same experience

with Sethe, her pain is familiar to the African American community. The root of this trauma is identical: the horror of the institution of slavery. As Baby Suggs states, “Not a house in the country ain’t packed to its rafters with some dead Negro’s grief” (26).” With this sentence, Baby Suggs emphasizes that there is no point in moving from 124 house which is haunted by baby ghosts because the haunting will continue in any other place they move to. According to her, every home in the country is trying to cope with the pain created by slavery, hence, it is haunted by the legacy of slavery. Therefore, abandoning the house is not the solution. Staying and facing the trauma is the only way to healing.

Morrison uses storytelling to depict a confrontation with traumatic memories therefore she also offers healing of cultural trauma. Morrison explains how sharing heals people:

And no one speaks, no one tells the story about himself or herself unless forced. They don’t want to talk, they don’t want to remember, they don’t want to say it, because they’re afraid of it which is human. But when they do say it, and hear it, and look at it, and share it, they are not only one, they’re two, and three, and four, you know? The collective sharing of that information heals the individual-and the collective. (Darling 248)

Since “sharing stories of their past experiences brings healing both to the listener and the speaker” (Shilaja 98), Beloved, as someone who is obsessed with hearing about the past, triggers the healing process. Before Beloved’s arrival, the residents of 124 are not comfortable to share their memories. The 124 residents’ silence about the traumatic events they experienced is one of the triggers of the ghost’s existence. They do not prefer to talk about the pain slavery created. For instance, Baby Suggs and Sethe agreed that the past is unspeakable (110), and so they buried it. For Sethe, remembering her past is so painful that she does not want to remember anything about Sweet Home. Paul D is another character who prefers not to

mention his past while struggling with it. The tobacco tin he carries on his chest becomes a metaphor for the burying of his memories: “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” (Morrison 195).

While the characters prefer to bury their past, *Beloved* breaks the silence through storytelling, and emphasizes the inevitability to face the past and trauma neither for the family nor black community, as part of the unspoken traumatic past.

While the characters prefer to bury their past, *Beloved* breaks the silence through storytelling, and emphasizes the inevitability of facing past traumas both for the family and the black community as a whole. Ever since she returned home, *Beloved* has been asking the inhabitants of 124 House questions about their pasts. *Beloved* encourages characters to recount their memories and forces them to recall traumatic events. For example, she insists on hearing about the past by starting her sentences with “tell me” (109). While listening to these stories, *Beloved* is incredibly amused; however, Sethe is in pain: “Sethe learned the profound satisfaction *Beloved* got from storytelling. It amazed Sethe because every mention of her past life hurt. Everything in it was painful or lost” (*Beloved* 69). As Peter Ramos argues “the larger memory that *Beloved* embodies, that of slavery itself, while necessary to confront, is all too consuming in its agonizing contradictions and horror (62).” Storytelling “became a way to feed her. Just as Denver discovered and relied on the delightful effect sweet things had on *Beloved*, Sethe learned the profound satisfaction *Beloved* got from storytelling. It amazed Sethe (as much as it pleased *Beloved*) because every mention of her past life hurt. Everything in it was painful or lost” (109). The evocation of *Beloved*’s presence began to weigh heavily on Sethe’s soul, therefore *Beloved* starts to consume her:

[...] Beloved could not take her eyes off Sethe. Stooping to shake the damper, or snapping sticks for kindlin, Sethe was licked, tasted, eaten by Beloved's eyes. Like a familiar, she hovered, never leaving the room Sethe was in unless required and told to. She rose early in the dark to be there, waiting, in the kitchen when Sethe came down to make fast bread before she left for work. In lamplight, and over the flames of the cooking stove, their two shadows clashed and crossed on the ceiling like black swords. (108)

Beloved, as the embodiment of trauma, she forces Sethe into a confrontation by her existence. Beloved's presence allows for the confrontation necessary for moving on, as well as for healing. As Heinze states, ". . . Beloved comes back in snatches until finally her history is retold, a discovery process shared by Morrison, her characters, and the readers as the primary step to collective spiritual recovery (175)." Since Beloved symbolizes the past, her exorcism refers to getting rid of the traumatic heritage of slavery, therefore the whole community must act together. As Beloved drains Sethe's life energy, Sethe loses her job and starts losing weight. Worried about her mother's health, Denver decides to seek help in order to save her mother and 124 house from Beloved. When Ella, a member of the black community, hears that the ghost of Beloved consumes Sethe's soul, she furiously calls the haunting as "invasion" (Morrison 410). Since what Beloved represents belongs to cultural memory, the community performs the exorcism of Beloved together in order to achieve communal healing. In order to exorcise Beloved from the house, thirty black women gather in the garden of the house and begin to sing and pray. The power of uniting against shared suffering creates healing power, thereby forcing Beloved to leave Sethe's life and 124 House.

To conclude, Beloved, who is killed as a baby, fills 124 House with "hatred" and "poison" (Morrison 1) and haunts those who live in it. Her journey from the past to the present functions as a reminder of cultural trauma. Beloved's ghost is the embodiment of the

traumatic memories of not only Sethe but also all the people who suffered through slavery. Beloved also enables the memories of those around them to be revived through storytelling and guides people to face cultural trauma. This confrontation through memory sharing heals the common traumas of society. The exorcism of Beloved who represents the traumatic heritage of slavery indicates the communal healing from cultural trauma.



### 3.2 Remembering Trauma Through Space

Under the chapter of “Remembering Trauma through Space” I focus on two neo-slave narratives that use the element of motion to establish the connection between past and present: Colson Whitehead’s *The Underground Railroad* and Lawrence Hill’s *The Book of Negroes*. Ron Eyerman states in *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* that “in American mythology, mobility is often associated with freedom [...]” (154), as it is observed in the neo-slave narratives I choose, the protagonists’ motivation for movement is securing their own freedom. However, both in *The Underground Railroad* and *The Book of Negroes*, the journeys towards freedom are presented as a compressed representation of the country’s traumatic history. Thus, this neo-slave narratives force the reader to confront the cultural trauma that is experienced by the black people throughout the history.

#### 3.2.1 On the Road Underground: Colson Whitehead’s *The Underground Railroad*

Whitehead summarizes the essence of this novel by Lander’s speech at Valentine farm: “Here’s one delusion: that we can escape slavery. We can’t. Its scars will never fade” (Whitehead 406). *The Underground Railroad* is an escape story, it also highlights that even if people manage to escape from the chains of slavery, neither those who have experienced slavery nor those who live with its legacy can escape the trauma of slavery. While *Beloved* and *Kindred* evoke cultural trauma through time travel, Colson Whitehead’s *The Underground Railroad* offers a journey through America’s history of racism via the underground railroad which the author reimagines. By turning the metaphor of the underground railroad into a literal railway, Whitehead creates a time and space-traveling vehicle that visits the traumatic incidents of slavery and its heritage. Therefore, via the underground railroad, the author makes both the hero and the reader travel in time and space by placing the racist and

discriminatory events that took place at different times in the history of the United States into the hero's journey.

As a neo-slave narrative, *The Underground Railroad* is written as a reminder of the wounds which are induced by slavery, violence, and oppression, therefore this journey concerns exploring what is often theorized as cultural trauma. Whitehead writes this novel as a warning against forgetting the traumatic history. He remarks on cultural trauma by reimagining the underground railroad and reminds the traumatic history of the United States. While Cora, the protagonist, travels through the slave states, she also travels through time since each station on the railroad represents another instance of racism against African Americans. Eyerman observes that “as opposed to psychological or physical trauma, which involves a wound and the experience of great emotional anguish by an individual, cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion” (61). Whitehead reveals the ruptures in “the social fabric” of American society with Cora's journey (Eyerman 61).

In this chapter, I aim to delve into how the novel evokes the cultural trauma of slavery, thereby expanding the relationship between traveling and cultural trauma as it emerges from the novel. During the journey, Cora is witness to the various tragic incidents which are based on historical reality namely, slavery, eugenic movement, forced sterilization of African American women, the Tuskegee syphilis experiments, the lynch mobs of the Jim Crow era, and the Fugitive Slave Act. These incidents happened in different time periods in the history of the United States, for example, the 13th Amendment abolished slavery in 1865, the first Fugitive Slave Act was passed in 1793, the second in 1850, eugenic movement and forced sterilization was in trend in the twentieth century, the Tuskegee syphilis experiments conducted between 1932 and 1972, and Jim Crow laws were enacted in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. *The Underground Railroad* takes place in 1850, and it collects

the incidents mentioned above in the same time period through the journey of Cora.

Whitehead repeats and emphasizes the traumatic incidents which take a significant place in African American cultural memory. The incorporation of the incidents that emerged in the early twentieth century into Cora's traumatic journey in 1850 turns this journey a demonstration of cultural trauma. By presenting traumatic incidents which targeted black people in the twentieth century and carrying them into 1850 when the institution of slavery still prevailed, Whitehead melts slavery and the legacy of slavery in the same pot. Thus, the hundreds of years of cultural trauma is conveyed and reminded through Cora's journey. By establishing this parallels, Whitehead shows the readers that Cora's experiences are based on reality rather than imagination, thus reminding the readers of the cultural trauma of slavery. To achieve the aforementioned, firstly Whitehead's representation of the underground railroad will be introduced. After that, I focus on the stations of the underground railroad that present examples of racism against African Americans.

The underground railroad is a network that helps people who have escaped slavery to reach free places. After the northern states abolished slavery, the states in the central and southern regions continued slavery. The fugitive slave act enacted by the American Congress in 1793 required that the slaves were the property of their owners, and therefore, even if the state they went to had abolished slavery, they were arrested and handed over to their owners. However, despite this law, the anti-slavery movement began to develop, especially in the north. People who are against slavery help runaway slaves and unite around a system called "the underground railroad," that is a network of the secret routes and safe houses used by enslaved people to escape slavery to the free states, Canada and Nova Scotia, with the help of abolitionists and sympathizers.

*The Underground Railroad* suggests more than an ordinary escape story since it is based on the reimagination of the underground railroad. Whitehead turns the underground

railroad from a network of people offering accommodation and aid to the escaped slaves from the South, into a literal railway that runs through the United States with actual “conductors” and “stations”. Whitehead depicts the railroad as follows:

The stairs led onto a small platform. The black mouths of the gigantic tunnel opened at either end. It must have been twenty feet tall, walls lined with dark and light colored stones in an alternating pattern. The sheer industry that had made such a project possible. Cora and Caesar noticed the rails. Two steel rails ran the visible length of the tunnel, pinned into the dirt by wooden crossties. The steel ran south and north presumably, springing from some inconceivable source and shooting toward a miraculous terminus. Someone had been thoughtful enough to arrange a small bench on the platform. (Whitehead 101)

The novel’s unique illustration of the underground railroad enables Cora to travel through states via train: from Georgia to South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee and Indiana.

While Whitehead’s literal depiction of the underground railroad enables Cora to travel through states, it also allows Whitehead to repeat and emphasize the traumatic incidents which take place in African American cultural memory. Throughout the journey, Cora witnesses the dark history of the country. Conductor Lumbly’s statement highlights Cora’s confrontation with the traumatic history of the country: “If you want to see what this nation is all about, I always say, you have to ride the rails. Look outside as you speed through, and you’ll find the true face of America” (Whitehead 105). When “Cora looked through the slats”, she could only see “darkness, mile after mile” (Whitehead 105).

Since it is unknown where and when the train will stop when it begins its journey on the Underground Railroad, the escapees can learn where they have arrived only when they leave the stations and reach the ground (Whitehead 103). In the following quote, conductor Lumbly emphasizes the considerable diversity in the lifestyle of the states, but also

foreshadows Cora's discovery of the shocking events African Americans are subjected to throughout history: "Each one a state of possibility, with its own customs and way of doing things. Moving through them, you'll see the breadth of the country before you reach your final stop" (Whitehead 104).

In South Carolina, the first stop of her journey, Cora witnesses a combination of incidents that happened in the U.S. history, namely, eugenic movement, forced sterilization, and the Tuskegee syphilis experiment. Firstly, the public health program which is offered to Cora by Dr. Stevens conveys a parallel to the eugenic movement and forced sterilization towards African Americans in the U.S. According to the program, the U.S government encourages the sterilization of African American women. In fact, Dr. Stevens states that the sterilization is compelled to some African American women, including those who have more than two children or who have mental illnesses: "Colored women who have already birthed more than two children, in the name of population control. Imbeciles and the otherwise mentally unfit, for obvious reasons. Habitual criminals" (165).

Similarly, in the US history, the eugenics movement is based on racism, and it targets marginalized populations, including racial minorities. As Ann Gibson Winfield indicates eugenics "cloaked in a mantle of respectable science;" however, it "relied heavily on a pre-existing stream of historical consciousness comprised of base racism, ethnic hatred, and academic elitism" (xviii). Stern explains why racial minorities were the target of this movement as follows: elite whites who advocate eugenics suppose that Anglo Saxons and Nordics have high IQ; hence, their increased breeding is the key for the development of American society. In their opinion, the proliferation of these races would increase the intelligence and welfare of the society and ensure that whites remain the majority in the community. Therefore, as Stern states, people who are not Anglo Saxons or Nordics, such as immigrants and Blacks are targeted by eugenics programs. Alonso supports Stern's statement

by saying that “. . . African American women were victims of forced and coerced sterilization in the United States, especially in the South. Much of this coercion was motivated by racism against African American women because white society perceived them to be threats” (4). These practices were implemented with the aim of reducing the African American population in the society and building a community in which whites were superior in number, as it is stated in the novel: “America has imported and bred so many Africans that in many states the whites are outnumbered. For that reason alone, emancipation is impossible. With strategic sterilization—first the women but both sexes in time—we could free them from bondage without fear that they’d butcher us in our sleep” (Whitehead 178). The desire to keep the black population as a minority is an attempt of genocide against blacks who started to take place as individuals in the society after the abolition of slavery. This stands as a traumatic event in African American cultural memory.

Additionally, Ceasar learns that syphilis-infected African American men are subjected to an experiment by the state doctors, which offers a parallel to the Tuskegee syphilis experiments of the 1970s in South Carolina in American history. The experiments began in 1932 as a clinical study which was conducted by the United States Public Health Service (Reverby 553). Although the study is planned to proceed for 6 months, it continued 40 years until 1972 (Reverby 553). The human subjects, who are elected from African American men, are deliberately misinformed about the experiment by being told that they were being treated for “bad blood” which is a common term to refer range of ills (Reverby 553). However, they were not treated accordingly. Moreover, the doctors decide to continue the experiment even after penicillin is recognized as the treatment of syphilis in 1947. The subjects are prevented from receiving treatment in order to monitor the disease’s full progression, and they are deliberately exposed to pain, blindness, insanity, and death (Nix). Similarly, in the novel, the experiment uses African Americans to “discover how a disease spreads, the trajectory of

infection” and “approach a cure” (Whitehead 177). The doctors of the study endanger people's lives by not treating them and misinforming them about the subject matter, thereby committing an inhumane crime: “His patients believed they were being treated for blood ailments. The tonics the hospital administered, however, were merely sugar water. In fact, the niggers were participants in a study of the latent and tertiary stages of syphilis” (Whitehead 176).

In Cora's second stop, North Carolina, the violence inflicted by the Jim Crow laws, which started during the Post Civil War period and remained in effect until 1968, is revealed. By moving Jim Crow laws to 1850, Whitehead makes them a part of Cora's compressed traumatic journey. In North Carolina, Cora witnesses the execution and lynching of run-away slaves and abolitionists, also experiences being a run-away slave in Jim Crow Era. According to Luminita M. Dragulescu, the widespread lynching movements in the Jim Crow era is one of the traumatic events that constitute the American racial trauma (271). The lynchings in the novel remind the readers of the lynchings in the Jim Crow era. When Cora first arrives in North Carolina, she notices the corpses arw hanging from all the trees on the road called the "Freedom Trail" on her way to Martin Wells's house (282):

The corpses hung from trees as rotting ornaments. Some of them were naked, others partially clothed, the trousers black where their bowels emptied when their necks snapped. Gross wounds and injuries marked the flesh of those closest to her, the two caught by the station agent's lantern. One had been castrated, an ugly mouth gaping where his manhood had been. The other was a woman. Her belly curved. Cora had never been good at knowing if a body was with a child. Their bulging eyes seemed to rebuke her stares, but what were the attentions of one girl, disturbing their rest, compared to how the world had scourged them since the day they were brought into it? ‘They call this the Freedom Trail now. (Whitehead 153)

Cora also witnesses the "friday festival", which is an event held every week on Friday, where enslaved men and women were lynched (293), the "coon show" which is a racist show that intends to humiliate the black people and was popular in the early nineteenth century, and the execution of a girl named Louisa, who was caught "unable to escape from the logic of the system" (295). These events of Cora's life in North Carolina are a reminder of the abuse and racism of black people in the times of Jim Crow: "In North Carolina the negro race did not exist except at the ends of ropes" (Whitehead 289).

In Indiana, Cora arrives Valentine farm, 1850s black settlement where black people who have escaped or been freed from slavery come together and rule themselves and are supported by people who are against slavery. Although it may seem like a utopia considering what Cora has experienced at other stops, the Indiana chapter leads the readers to reconsider the historical effort of the black community in order to achieve equal rights.

After slavery was legally abolished in 1865 in the United States, African Americans who face discrimination and racism endeavor to erase the legacy of slavery and have equal rights with the rest of the nation. While they were trying to impose themselves on a society dominated by white people, they demanded equality through nonviolent, lawful protests. However, the impact of Malcolm X's ideas on society and libertarian movements in Africa, Asia, and Latin America changed the way African Americans thought consequently, The Black Power movement appeared. Black Americans aimed to gain power in the economic, political and political fields by focusing on their own power instead of demanding justice and equality from the whites. This movement emphasizes Black racial identity, pride, and self-determination. In the novel, the Valentine farm is not only a shelter but also a center where various artists come and talk, with literacy classes and libraries that allow people to improve themselves. In this context, the Valentine farm is a symbol of the equality attempts of the individuals who have suffered from captivity and discrimination. As Lander highlights in his

speech at Valentine's farm: "Here's one delusion: that we can escape slavery. We can't. Its scars will never fade. When you saw your mother sold off, your father beaten, your sister abused by some boss or master, did you ever think you would sit here today, without chains, without the yoke, among a new family? Everything you ever knew told you that freedom was a trick—yet here you are" (406).

In conclusion, at every station Cora arrives, she is confronted with traumatic and racist events from African American history. Through this journey, Whitehead presents the railway stations as the centers of the traumatic incidents that occupy African American cultural memory. Thus, the hundreds of years of cultural trauma is conveyed and reminded through Cora's journey which is a compressed narrative of the traumatic incidents that African Americans have experienced in history. Whitehead reveals what have been engraved in the cultural memory: the legacy of slavery which hunts African Americans. The author incorporates these practices aimed at depleting the ancestry of African Americans in Cora's journey and emphasizes that the Tuskegee experiment, forced sterilization, lynching are part of the traumatic legacy of slavery.

### **3.2.2 Traveling the Triangular: Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes***

Black people are "travelling peoples" (357), as Aminata Diallo, the main character of *The Book of Negroes*, states. The novel traces voluntary and obligatory journeys of Aminata from Africa to South Carolina, New York, Nova Scotia, Sierra Leone, and finally England. Aminata's journeys, similar to the journeys of Cora, the main character of *The Underground Railroad*, symbolize the experiences of the enslaved people in North America, thereby functioning as a reminder of the cultural trauma of slavery. Aminata's first journey, from Africa to America, which detaches Aminata from her family and sends her to a slave plantation, begins when slave traders come to her village and kidnap her. This long and challenging journey from the village to the seashore and then to the "new world" by ship

offers readers a confrontation with history by making a realistic description of the conditions under which enslaved people were brought to America. Her second journey is from New York to Canada, which seems to promise freedom but confronts her with further racial discrimination. Through her experience in Canada, Hill highlights that slavery and racial discrimination existed in Canada as well as in the United States. Exposing and remembering the historical facts, I argue this part of her journey challenges the haven-like representation of Canada for black people. Aminata then goes back to Africa, where she originally came from. This chapter will examine Hill's efforts to remind the readers of cultural trauma through Aminata's experiences in her journeys.

*The Book of Negroes* opens with "and now I am old" chapter, in which Aminata illustrates her life in London in 1802 (Hill 7). Throughout the chapter, she emphasizes that she defines the purpose of her life as conveying her slavery experiences: "I have my life to tell, my own private ghost story, and what purpose would there be to this life I have lived, if I could not take this opportunity to relate it?" (Hill 14). This quotation shows that Aminata's motivation for surviving is apprising others of the captives' experiences. Observing the enslaved people who are taken from their homeland and their families for the sake of slavery, she points to engrain in her memory what the enslaved people go through during and after the perilous journey on the slave ship. As Krampe states: "Aminata's way out of being overwhelmed by the trauma is to remember, to structure and to derive purpose from the most dreary experience" (Krampe 316). While she experiences the traumatic events that deeply affect an entire society, such as slavery, Aminata feels that she must record it in her memory in order not to forget what happened: "I decided, was what it meant to be a slave: your past didn't matter; in the present you were invisible and you had no claim on the future [. . .] I looked up from the street and again at the wretched captives. I vowed not to let the noises of

the city drown out their voices or rob me of my past. It was less painful to forget, but I would look, and I would remember” (Hill 228).

Aminata's journey transforms her into a djeli, which is a general name given to storytellers in West Africa, and who serve as crucial figures in African culture: “I sought comfort by imagining that I had been made a djeli, and was required to see and remember everything. My purpose would be to witness, and to prepare to testify” (Hill 72). Aminata becomes a form of memory storage and, as a djeli, reminds both herself and other enslaved peoples’ of their traumas. She says:

On that slave vessel, I saw things that the people of London would never believe. But I think of the people who crossed the sea with me. The ones who survived. We saw the same things. Some of us still scream out in the middle of the night. But there are men, women and children walking about the streets without the faintest idea of our nightmares. They cannot know what we endured if we never find anyone to listen. In telling my story, I remember all those who never made it through the musket balls and the sharks and the nightmares, all those who never found a group of listeners, and all those who never touched a quill and an inkpot. (Hill 73)

As she states in the quote above, Aminata focuses on remembering the terrifying experiences in the middle passage in order to be able to tell others in the future and create awareness.

Christian J. Krampe suggests “the notion of being a djeli” is one of the two factors that “secure Aminata’s psychological survival” (315). He says, “forty-five years after her abduction, Aminata writes her memoir, thus rendering her story into a durable medium, Aminata—as a djeli-cum-writer—externalizes and spreads those memories” (315).

While “Aminata’s reaction to the trauma of the Middle Passage is to survive in order to testify, thus reconstructing subjects through narration, Fanta can see no other way of escape

than to disrupt the chain of objectified selves by murder” (Krampe 314). Living a respectable life as one of the wives of the village chief in Bayo, Fanta realizes that her life will never be the same again when she is put on the slave ship that will sail to the new world. Fanta, who had lived a journey full of horrible events that lasted for months from her village to the port, began to question the quality of the life she could offer to her child after the responsibility of being pregnant. While the following dialogue with Aminata reveals that Fanta refuses to raise her baby as an enslaved person, it also foreshadows infanticide:

“I put my hand on [Fanta’s] shoulder and told her to think about the baby.”

She grunted. ‘I stopped caring about that a long time ago. No toubab will do to this baby what they have done to us.’ A shiver ran through my body” (Hill 105). Deeply traumatized by her experience of deportation and humiliation in the ship, Fanta could not stand the idea of raising her baby as an enslaved person; thus, she tries to “save” the baby by killing it: “Fanta brought out the knife from the medicine man’s room, placed a hand over the baby’s face and jerked up his chin. She dug the tip of the knife into the baby’s neck and ripped his throat open. Then she pulled the blue cloth over him, stood and heaved him overboard” (114). Like Sethe's motivation to protect her child from re-enslavement, Fanta is traumatized because of all the atrocities, thus killing her baby to prevent it from happening to them.

Aminata's second journey, which is from New York to Nova Scotia, challenges the haven-like representation of Canada for black people in history, thereby reminding the reader of the cultural trauma. Based on historical facts, this journey refers to the British government’s promise of a new and free life in the British colony of Nova Scotia to black people in New York in exchange for fighting alongside the British army during the American Revolutionary War. A British officer tells Aminata that Nova Scotia will be “the promised land” for black people (338), and they were guaranteed to be “as free as any [White] Loyalist” (338). Passengers are also promised land to reap and equal rights in Nova Scotia; however,

only the promise of safe passage to Nova Scotia is fulfilled. When they come to Canada, they are exposed to further discrimination and racism. While Canada is seen as a refuge and a free destination for individuals escaping slavery, Hill emphasizes the disappointment due to the disillusionment the British government created. Being exposed to racial discrimination, people realize that it is not the promised land.

Hill uses one of the names from the original Book of Negroes, Hana Palmer, a 15-year-old enslaved girl who has been forcibly taken to Canada (Hodges and Brown 18). By quoting from the original Book of Negroes, Hill emphasized that the destination of Aminata's journey is not a promised land, that slavery continues in Canada as in the United States, and that these events should be in the memory of the Canadians as well as of Americans. Although it is not emphasized enough, slavery is a part of the history of Canada. Lawrence Hill explains this at the interview with Siemerling as follows:

I felt that this is my way of bringing a twenty-first-century perspective to a story that has been long neglected. As much as we feel that we understand these things, most Canadians have had very little exposure to those stories, stories example of Black Loyalists moving from Manhattan to Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone. It is a vital and dynamic and revealing chapter in Canadian history, and most of us have no idea about it. (24)

While Aminata records the people who will embark on this journey, she is asked to record the "properties" of white loyalists, including their slaves. Hill criticizes the fact that slaves of white loyalists were on the ship to Nova Scotia next to the black people who hoped to achieve humane living conditions by supporting the British.

A group of ten Negroes was called up to the deck [where Aminata logs the names of those Blacks wishing to sail for Nova Scotia]. I had never seen them before.

"Who are they?" I asked [Captain] Waters.

“Slaves and indentured servants,” he said.

“But I thought...”

“We will get around to evacuating the refugees in Canvas Town,” Waters said. “But first, we register the property of white Loyalists.”[...]

A girl appeared before me. [...] I could see that nothing about this trip suggested freedom.

*Hana Palmer, I wrote, again taking down the colonel’s words. 15, stout wench. Ben Palmer of Frog’s Neck, Claimant.*

“Claimant?” I asked the colonel when the white man had taken away the girl.

“It means that he owns her,” the colonel said. (Hill 346)

Aminata states that “I could see that nothing about this trip suggested freedom.” (346), and she realizes that “the promised Land will not materialize for the future Africadians” (Krampe 327). Therefore, the history of Black Canadians is full of unfulfilled promises, as Aminata discovered while recording the names of those going to Canada. (Krampe 327). In the quotation below, it is emphasized that Aminata felt betrayed, referring to the failure to keep the promises made in the agreement between black loyalists and the British government:

I despised the Americans for taking the Negroes [they claimed as their property], but my greatest contempt was for the British. They had used us in every way in their war. Cooks. Whores. Midwives. Soldiers. We had given them our food, our beds, our blood and our lives. And when slave owners showed up with their stories and their paperwork, the British turned their backs and allowed us to be seized like chattel. Our humiliation meant nothing to them, nor did our lives. (Hill 364)

According to Christine Duff, “This observation emphasizes that the reality of bondage was not very different from one side of the border to the other, undermining the discourse of Canadian exceptionalism where slavery is concerned” (241).

Moreover, arriving to Canada did not mean freedom, for people who escaped from slavery in the United States since the British did not prevent American enslavers from coming to Canada and claiming ownership over human beings. Aminata clarifies this situation by saying: “I came to understand that if you had come to Nova Scotia free, you stayed free—although that didn’t prevent American slave owners from sailing into town and attempting to snatch back their property. However, if you came to Nova Scotia as an enslaved person, you were bound as fast as our brothers and sister in the United States” (Hill 381).

Aminata's purpose of returning to Africa highlights the trauma of losing her home and family. In the book *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* by Ron Eyerman, he asserts that “...Africa is more than a spiritual home, and much more than a cultural resource, it is a site of redemption” (167). Aminata “clings to an idealized notion of home in Africa, struggling to cope with her feelings of grief and pain caused by the slave trade and slavery” throughout her time in South Carolina, New York City and Nova Scotia (Nehl 151).

After being forcibly taken away from Bayo, which is a traumatic point in Aminata’s life, adopting a sense of belonging becomes impossible for her. She constantly questions where she is and where her homeland is, in order to be able to return later, after being brought to America and is sold into slavery (Hill 282). Her “home” questioning reaches the most impactful stage when her child is born. She questions as follows: “Where would home be for this child of mine? Africa? The indigo plantation? One seemed impossible, the other unacceptable. For this child of mine, home would be me. I would be home. I would be everything for this child until we went home together” (Hill 217). As can be understood from this quote, she does not feel American and desires to return to Africa one day. Therefore, when Mrs. Lindo asks Aminata what she wants as a gift for her services, Aminata says she wants to see a “world map” (251). Although she could not examine the map and locate her

village as she had hoped, her request signifies her devotion to her home. By emphasizing Aminata's attachment to her home and family, the author shows one of the devastating sides of the trauma of the middle passage on enslaved people.



#### 4. Conclusion

This chapter will conclude the study by summarizing the key research findings in relation to my argument. Interpreting slavery from a contemporary perspective, neo-slave narratives shape the cultural memory by exposing the legacy of slavery. This study has intended to portray slavery as cultural trauma from a contemporary perspective, as demonstrated in the protagonists' experiences in *Kindred*, *Beloved*, *The Underground Railroad*, and *The Book of Negroes*. In these texts, the continuing impact of slavery is represented through time and space travelling. By “scrambling agreed definitions of place or time” (33), which is Newman’s idea of a feature of neo-slave narratives, the authors re-imagine the experiences of the enslaved people, and thus introduce a striking confrontation with the trauma that slavery causes in the individual and in society.

The common point of *Kindred* and *Beloved* is the time travel notion that combines the past and the present. In this way, it is emphasized that the destruction caused by the past is felt today. Through my readings of *Kindred* and *Beloved*, I have shown how cultural trauma is reminded through time travel. In *Kindred*, the protagonist Dana is haunted by the past and forced to travel through time. Dana's journeys are reflections of the trauma caused by slavery. While in *Beloved*, Beloved, who was killed by her mother in order not to become a slave, returns to the present day. Beloved’s journey from the past to the present haunts the present time. In this respect, Beloved represents all enslaved people, thus her return is an important factor in reminding the reader of the cultural trauma.

On the other hand, *The Underground Railroad* and *The Book of Negroes* remind the reader of the trauma through the experiences of the protagonists’ physical journeys, which are presented as a summary of African American history. In *The Underground Railroad*, Cora’s time condensing journey includes oppression, segregation, lynching, and sterilization of African Americans. Every station that Cora arrives offers an example of a traumatic incident

from African American history; therefore, Whitehead conveys the cultural trauma through Cora's journey. He also reveals that the legacy of slavery which haunts African Americans is engraved in cultural memory; hence the novel provokes the memory of North Americans.

While in *The Book of Negroes*, Hill reminds readers of the cultural trauma through Aminata's journeys which are based on reality. Beginning with the representation of the harsh conditions of the Middle Passage, this journey offers confrontations with history through a realistic account of this forced journey of enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas. Aminata makes her second trip to Canada, which seems to promise freedom but racially segregates her. Thanks to his experience in Canada, Hill emphasizes that slavery and racial discrimination existed in Canada as well as in the United States. Then Aminata returns to Africa, where she came from. This journey highlights that Aminata is a "djeli", an African storyteller who embodies the traumatic memory of slavery.

While the traumatic memories of slavery haunt the protagonists in different ways, the mutual consequence is neo-slave narratives' significant reminding the reader of the cultural trauma. The narratives discussed in this study illustrate that, as Ron Eyerman contends, "slavery is not something relegated to the past, it is forever present" (188).

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Plagiarism Versicherung

Hiermit erkläre ich, dass ich meine Masterarbeit zur Erlangung des Grades Master of Arts (M.A.) mit dem Thema:

**“The Past Is Never Dead, It’s Not Even Past”:**

**Cultural Trauma and Memory in Neo-Slave Narratives**

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