

Research Article

Wounds That Speak: Historicizing Trauma and Female Corporeality in *Beloved* and *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment*

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Abstract

This paper examines the scarred female body as a material and narrative site of historical testimony in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Assia Djebar's *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment*. While memory may be seen as an abstract vessel of historical truth, the feminine body emerges as a tangible, corporeal archive inscribed with the traumas of racial and colonial violence. Drawing on the theoretical insights of Dennis Patrick Slattery, Elaine Scarry, and Hortense Spillers, the study explores how wounds and scars on the female body serve as physical evidence of enduring trauma and oppression. Both Morrison and Djebar utilize the fragmented female body to articulate a history that traditional archives often ignore or suppress. Their narratives foreground bodily pain as a form of truth-telling that transcends abstraction, offering a visceral lens through which historical injustices, such as slavery and colonialism, can be understood. Anchored in Black feminist theory and postcolonial critique, this paper argues that the wounded female body is a potent discursive site where personal suffering intersects with collective memory. In both African American and Algerian contexts, the scarred female body becomes a living text that bears witness to ongoing traumatic experiences. The paper further explores how, through acts of feminine bonding and solidarity, female characters not only begin to heal their wounds but also transform into national symbols, embodying a collective scar that continually retells stories and fosters resilience.

Keywords: The Feminine Body, Scars, Trauma, Memory, History, Healing, Djebar, Morrison.

Introduction

While the faculty of memory could be posited as abstract immaterial evidence of historical truth, the body, particularly the feminine body, is postulated as a material physical and concrete text where historical realities are inscribed. The scarred female body is emblematic of history's intense struggles and injustices. The scar plays a central role in reliving history since it is an undeniable remnant of the past. In *The Wounded Body*, Dennis Patrick Slattery contends that "the wound is where something buried or hidden splits open, breaches, and reveals a memory, a site of pain, suffering, and death" (16). The indelible corporeal scars, revelatory of a history of gendered and colonial oppression, are visible on almost all female characters, including major and minor ones in *Beloved* and *Women of Algiers*. Morrison's *Beloved* and Djebar's *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* provide a comprehensive point of departure for the discussion of the tortured and the scarred female body bearing witness to historical injustices. Both novels craft a narrative of traumatic history from the wounds and scars of the body by opening avenues of significant meaning. This paper draws on two intertwined historical genealogies: the history of slavery in antebellum America and colonialism in Algeria. It explores how the scar, as a physical and symbolic mark, serves to revive histories of subjugation and violence inflicted upon women's bodies. The analysis also draws a compelling analogy between Algerian and African American women, examining how their corporeal traumatic histories unfold within the bonds of a feminine community. Through this lens, the paper highlights the resilience of these women, whose collective experiences of suffering and survival shape their identities and narratives of resistance.

Djebar and Morrison foreground the body as a discursive text where fragmentation, wounds, and scars caused by historical oppression form overriding physical evidence of historical truth. The materially oppressed body in history is represented in the narrative in a way that shows how Djebar and Morrison try to find an alternative way of expressing the truth claims of history. Thus, the exploration of female corporeality and material bodies is an enduring preoccupation of Djebar and Morrison, who fundamentally

share an awareness of the cultural and political territory of the female body. Their narrative strikes a balance between bodily pain and historical testimony. In this regard, Elaine Scarry stresses the truth and reality of physical pain in her seminal book *The Body in Pain*. She contends that "the physical pain is so incontestably real that it seems to confer its quality of "incontestable reality" on that power that has brought it into being" (27). Scarry emphasizes that physical pain is undeniably real-so real, in fact, that it gives a sense of absolute reality or legitimacy to the force or power that causes it. Read perceptibly as a trope for larger historical injustices, the violence enacted on the material body serves as a sign of the historical and material truth. It represents and mirrors the political injustices perpetrated on countless bodies throughout history. Virtually material, the body, as depicted in the narratives of Djébar and Morrison, becomes the locus of historicized trauma. Both *Beloved* and *Women of Algiers* examine the Black and Algerian fragmented female body and its connections to historical oppressions and racialized forms of violence, notably slavery and colonialism. This paper argues that the scarred feminine body is perceived as physical evidence of historical truth claims. It examines how the corporeal body becomes a narrative site through which histories of injustice are revealed. Furthermore, it explores how feminine corporeality carries trauma perpetually inscribed in collective memory.

Through the painful revivification of memories evoked by the scars on the feminine body, Toni Morrison and Assia Djébar poignantly delineate the horrors and brutalities endured by Black and Algerian women under colonization and slavery. In *Beloved* and *Women of Algiers*, the women-ranging from Sethe's mother to figures like Aicha, Fatma, and Yemma Hadda-suffered not only sexual exploitation and abuse but also the destruction of their capacity for motherhood, a profound agony uniquely tied to their racialized and gendered suffering. Sethe's trauma, particularly, exposes the harrowing dehumanization Black women faced under slavery, where their bodies were violated and their maternal instincts were shattered. For instance, Sethe's experience with the nephews of schoolteacher, who held her down and raped her while stealing her breast milk, symbolizes the extreme violation of Black women's bodies, reducing them to mere objects of exploitation. This act of violence underscores the ultimate indignity of Black motherhood under slavery-the stripping away of a woman's agency and her ability to nurture. Both Morrison and Djébar highlight that it is the bodies of women, marked with scars, both physical and psychological, that bear the most visible traces of these historical injustices. These scars not only testify to the violence but also serve as a potent reminder of the resilience and survival of these women, who, despite the brutal legacies, continue to reclaim their narratives in the bonds of sisterhood and shared trauma.

1. "Sethe" and "Sarah's" Scarred Bodies: Bearing Witness to Historical Truth

In the narratives of Djébar and Morrison, the scar emerges not merely as a physical wound but as a *text*-a narrative inscribed onto the surface of the body that testifies to the countless brutalities inflicted upon Algerian and African American women. These scars are not passive remnants of past violence; rather, they serve as active sites of memory and meaning. According to Slaterry, "Wounds, misshapen bodies, scarred or marked flesh always tell a story through their opening onto the world" (14). They function as corporeal signifiers that continually revive the trauma endured by the feminine body, making the past persistently present. In *Beloved*, Morrison imbues the scar with a layered significance-it is both a marker of unspeakable suffering and a form of identification that binds women together across time and space. The scar is not just a symbol of racial and gendered violence but also a sign through which other characters recognize their pain, story and resilience. It becomes a visual language of solidarity, readable only to those who have endured similar traumas. Thus, the scar becomes a powerful site of recognition and identity, linking individual experience to a broader collective history of oppression and resistance. In both *Beloved* and *Women of Algiers*, scarred bodies disrupt the silence imposed by dominant historical narratives. They speak, they remember, and demand to be acknowledged-not just as sites of suffering, but as living texts embodying survival, resistance and the possibility of healing.

The body functions as a vessel of memory, connection, and meaning, with the scar as a haunting and enduring marker of a woman's identity. This motif of scar-as-identity is echoed in the story of Sethe's own mother, who also bears a significant bodily mark: a circle and a cross branded into her ribs, remnants of the unspeakable atrocities endured during the Middle Passage. This scar functions as an indelible signature of ownership and commodification, reflecting how enslaved Black women's bodies were reduced to symbols of possession. However, in a subversive reversal, Sethe's mother reclaims this mark as a personal signifier-an emblem of identity and survival. She deliberately shows it to Sethe so that her daughter would be able to recognize her should they ever be separated. This act, while simple, is profoundly influential: it affirms that even within the systems designed to erase individual identity and autonomy, the body can retain and transmit memory, connection and meaning. The scar serves as a haunting marker of her identity-the

murdered daughter of Sethe, whose life was taken by her mother in a desperate act meant to spare her from the brutalities of enslavement. This scar becomes more than a physical trace; it symbolizes the unbearable moral and emotional weight carried by both Sethe and Beloved, encapsulating the impossible choices enslaved women were forced to make under the threat of violence. In *Beloved*, Morrison describes Sethe's mother:

She opened up her dress front and lifted her breast and pointed under it. Right on her rib was a circle and a cross burnt right into the skin. She said, "This is your ma'am. This," and she pointed. "I am the only one got this mark now. The rest dead. If something happens to me and you can't tell me by my face, you can know me by this mark." Scared me so (*Beloved* 61).

Likewise, Sethe bears horrific scars on her body, telling stories of her torture at "Sweet Home." Beloved, Sethe and her mother carry enormously symbolic scars as they connect characters whose lives have been fragmented by historical oppressions. In all the scarred and beaten feminine bodies in the narrative, the scar inevitably evokes and reenacts the memories that are inarticulate and unspeakable in the unconscious of each character. Through these intergenerational scars, Morrison creates a lineage of embodied memory, where the feminine body becomes both archive and testimony. Each mark, whether on Beloved's neck or the ribs of Sethe's mother, resists the erasure of Black female subjectivity by inscribing a personal and collective history into the flesh. The body, scarred and branded, becomes the site where pain and resilience converge, where trauma is recorded but also where identity is forged and reclaimed.

Two of the most potent examples of the indelible scars are left on the bodies of the African American Sethe and the Algerian Sarah. They expose the wound and unveil the hidden truths of their origin. The tragedy of Sarah and Sethe's stories is written on their bodies, horrifically fragmented and fractured by the institution of slavery and colonialism. The imperishable scars on Sethe's and Sarah's bodies speak the truth of both women's relapsed status in history. In *Beloved*, the most striking image of the scar inflicted upon a female body is illustrated on Sethe's back. It is described as a chokecherry tree with many branches by Amy Denver, a white woman who healed the whipping scars and helped Sethe give birth in a boat on the Ohio River on the night of her escape. Denver sympathizes with Sethe by sharing a level of common oppression. Amy says: "I had me some whipping, but I don't remember nothing like this" (*Beloved* 93). While helping Sethe deliver, Denver nursed Sethe and took care of her; she described her scars as resembling a chokecherry tree. She says: "It's at tree, Lu. A chokecherry tree. See, here's the trunk. It's red and split wide open, full of sap, and this here's the parting for the branches. You got a mighty lot of branches. Leaves, too, look like, and dern if these ain't blossoms [...] Your back got a whole tree on it" (93). Denver's comparison of Sethe's scar to a tree with many branches metaphorically captures the depth and complexity of Sethe's suffering. The image of the tree signifies that her scar is not just a physical mark but the result of a long, violent history—an accumulation of torture, abuse, and dehumanization. Just as a tree grows over time, Sethe's scar embodies the enduring legacy of pain inflicted upon her body. At the same time, the tree becomes a haunting symbol of perpetual trauma—one that cannot be erased. It will forever accompany Sethe, a living reminder etched into her skin, constantly recalling the brutality she endured on the plantation.

Rather than fading into the background, Sethe's scars remain starkly visible—unhealed wounds that persist both physically and emotionally. In her conversation with Paul D, Sethe recognized the eternal tragedy her back will constantly evoke. She contends: "I've got a tree on my back and a haint in my house" [...] "it's there all the same." [...] "I've never seen it and never will. But that's what she said it looked like. A chokecherry tree" (*Beloved* 19). The significant scars that remain on Sethe's back are not merely remnants of personal suffering; they function as enduring physical testimonies of systemic brutality. These marks, inflicted through violent whipping and branding, serve as visual evidence of the inhumane acts perpetrated by white slaveholders, etching into Sethe's flesh the grotesque legacy of racial violence. Far from fading into the background of her body, these scars remain starkly visible, unhealed both physically and emotionally. In describing them as a "chokecherry tree," Morrison transforms Sethe's scarred back into a living, symbolic landscape where pain and survival are intertwined. What makes these scars especially significant is their role in preserving the memory of slavery. They are not just reminders to others of what was done; they are reminders to Sethe herself, who acknowledges that her back constantly carries the weight of the past. Her scars embody the psychological truth that the trauma of slavery is not something one can simply leave behind. It is imprinted on the body, haunting the present even in moments of calm or intimacy. Through these scars, the past becomes inescapably present. Moreover, Sethe's back becomes a kind of historical document—an alternative archive through which the silenced narratives of enslaved Black women are made visible. In a society where the official record often omits or distorts the experiences of the oppressed, the

scarred body becomes a form of resistance, defying erasure and demanding recognition. Morrison reclaims the wounded body as a site of memory and meaning, turning what was intended as a mark of subjugation into a powerful symbol of survival and testimony. Hence, Sethe's scars do more than chronicle her pain—they speak on behalf of generations of enslaved women whose bodies bore the brunt of a violent history. They confront readers with the realities of slavery not as abstract historical facts but as lived, embodied experiences that continue to reverberate. Through this, Morrison insists that the legacy of slavery is not something that can be neatly contained in the past; it persists, visible on the bodies and psyches of its descendants, compelling both recognition and reckoning.

Sethe's scarred body in *Beloved* resonates with Sarah's story in *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment*. Sarah, a former fighter in the Algerian War of Independence and the wife of Ali bears a prominent scar—a lasting trace of the physical torture she endured during the war. This scar is first revealed in the Hammam (public bath) scene, where it becomes the earliest visible and speakable sign of her suffering, marking both her trauma and resilience. Djebbar writes in *Women of Algiers*:

Sarah joined Anne, who, when Sarah knelt and let her panga slide off, noticed her friend's wide, blueish scar. "A burn?" she asked, touching it lightly all along her abdomen. Sarah didn't respond. She ought to say, probably in a melodramatic tone of voice at that, "a war injury."...Anne knew nothing about the city during the period of fire and murder just past: women outside under attack by submachine guns, white veils with bloodshot holes... How had Sarah squandered her youth? (34).

In this scene, Anne becomes the first to notice the stark physical evidence of Sarah's past—the wide, bluish scar etched across her abdomen. Her casual question, "A burn?" accompanied by a light touch, contrasts sharply with the weight of the trauma the scar signifies. Sarah's silence in response speaks volumes. Her reluctance to answer reveals her desire to avoid appearing melodramatic and, more deeply, her instinctive resistance to reopening wounds that have never truly healed. The suggestion that she *ought* to say "a war injury" underscores the gravity of her experience while also hinting at the inadequacy of language to capture the full horror of what she lived through. Anne's ignorance of the recent period of "fire and murder"—the chaos and terror that engulfed the city—is a crucial element in this interaction. Her naivety creates a chasm between them, emphasizing how trauma isolates its survivors. The imagery of women outside under attack by submachine guns, white veils with bloodshot holes, evokes a brutal history of violence specifically targeting women, their bodies politicized and violated in the public sphere. Sarah's scar is thus more than a personal wound; it is a physical archive of a collective trauma—an embodied reminder of war, gendered violence, and survival. Her scar is not simply a remnant of a painful past, but a persistent presence that keeps the memory of violence alive. It marks not only the destruction of her youth but also the burden of memory she continues to carry. Even in the presence of someone as close as Anne, that memory resists being spoken, instead lingering silently, powerfully, on the surface of her skin.

It is equally significant to observe that the scar, both as a physical mark and a symbolic trace of trauma, is confined to the intimate sphere of women's community. In both Djebbar's and Morrison's narratives, the scars are neither exposed nor spoken about in public or male-dominated spaces; rather, they are revealed, acknowledged, and gently explored within the safety of female companionship. In *Women of Algiers*, Sarah's scar becomes visible and subject to inquiry only in the presence of Anne and later Leila—two women who, while perhaps not fully understanding her experience, offer a space in which that pain can exist without judgment. Similarly, in *Beloved*, Sethe's scarred back is examined and spoken of by Baby Suggs, Denver, and Amy Denver—women who either share in or witness her pain with empathy and care. This gendered boundary around the scar's visibility is not incidental; it reflects the deep necessity of a feminine space for the articulation of suffering. Within these communities, the scar becomes more than just a record of violence—it becomes a shared language of survival. These women, each scarred in their own way, form emotional and psychological support systems that allow the beginnings of healing to take place.

The act of discussing or simply acknowledging the scar is a decisive step toward reclaiming agency over their own narratives. It is within these moments of communal recognition that healing begins—not by erasing the wound, but by validating its presence and offering solidarity. Moreover, these intimate exchanges underscore the limitations of broader society, which often silences or misinterprets women's trauma. By situating the scar within a circle of women, Morrison and Djebbar emphasize that healing is not a solitary endeavor but a collective process rooted in empathy, shared history, and mutual recognition. In this way, the scar becomes a bridge—connecting generations of women through pain, but also through resilience, strength, and the potential for transformation.

The wounded body, particularly when experienced as a dead or detached part of the self, becomes a powerful symbol of fractured identity, silenced expression, and embodied memory. The wounded body also emerges in the narrative as a dead or alienated body-one that no longer feels like it belongs to the individual. Sethe, for instance, bears the horrific scars on her back, a living testimony to the brutal violence inflicted by the schoolteacher. Yet, she confesses that her back "was dead years ago," as if disassociating from the pain it once carried. This disconnection reflects a deeper psychological survival mechanism-wherein the body, in order to endure, must sometimes forget or numb itself to pain. Slattery's reflections on woundedness echo this idea: "The body wounded is a very mortal flesh remembered in a particular unique way... What is the wounded in its relation to language, to identity, and to expression?" (Slattery 11). For Slattery, the scarred body is not merely a marker of injury, but a poetic, phenomenal body-one that shapes how we remember, speak, and identify ourselves. In this light, Sethe's "dead back" becomes more than physical damage; it represents the severing of her sense of self from a past too painful to confront directly. Similarly, Sethe's mother distinguishes herself from the other enslaved women by pointing out her unique scar-a physical mark that defines her identity in a context where Black bodies were often rendered indistinguishable and disposable. And yet, as Slattery suggests, the scar also deprives the individual of the full capacity to narrate its origin; its silence becomes part of its haunting power. The wound thus stands at the intersection of memory and erasure, presence and absence-an indelible imprint that both reveals and conceals.

Though Sethe tries hard not to remember the past, she is trapped and held by the memory of the past that continuously haunts her. While talking with Paul D about her past, she said, "No thank you. I don't want to know or have to remember that. I have other things to do worry, for example, about tomorrow about Denver, and about Beloved, about age and sickness not to speak of love" (*Beloved* 83). But the subsequent paragraph clearly illustrates her difficulty in "keeping the past at bay" (42). In the novel, Morrison writes: "But her brain was not interested in the future. Loaded with the past and hungry for more, it left her no room to imagine, let alone for, the next day...other people went crazy, why couldn't she?" (83). The passage illustrates the impossibility of escaping the past and embarking in the future. There is no other outlet to leave the past behind except through madness. Reminiscent of Sethe, Sarah avoids remembering the horrible and painful memories that her scars start to unfold. She neither voiced the source of her torture in the first scene when Anne saw the scar in the *Hamma*, nor her scene with Leila while Sarah had been listening and consoling her. However, like Sethe, Sarah is besieged by her "memory" and the things that she "unforgets." Despite her efforts to detach from the past, Sarah's thoughts fuel the haunting memory.

Scarred bodies seldom have the courage to talk and voice the origin of their scars. Many women in the history of colonialism and slavery also bear historical landmarks of past traumatic realities that they never dared to voice. In *Women of Algiers*, Sarah seems to be speechless about her enormous scar. In an outrageous voice, while Leila was crying and lamenting the conditions of the Algerian women, she addresses Sarah: "...You ...Even then, they already called you the silent one...They never knew the carefully listed details of your tortures. Afterwards, they took care of you as they now do of me, they thought you were left with just a few scars, they never knew" (*Women* 45). The only words Sarah uttered are "I've always had a hard time with words," then with floods of tears in her eyes she undid her blouse and "uncovered the blue scar that started above one of her breasts and stretched down to her abdomen" (45) to let the scar speak for itself. After a moment of deep sorrow, "Sarah felt a purely sensual rush...she looked for words, like a deaf-mute, words of love, informal words, but words in what language, like grottos or whirlwinds of tenderness, but she didn't move and became exasperated with herself when she slowly buttoned her blouse again" (45). We can say that both Sarah's and Sethe's scars speak for themselves rather than having words describe them. Scarry succinctly discusses the inability of language to render the experience of the body in pain. She contends, "Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned"(Scarry 4). The scar symbol stands for what has not been documented and works against expression. When language fails to transmit the intensity of the action, the scar speaks. It expresses the pain of these experiences and verifies and gives them undeniable visibility. *Beloved* engages in the process of making narratives from the pain and scar of traumatic history. The materiality of the body in Djébar's and Morrison's fiction represents real bodies and thus a historical reality that has been long "masked," as Michel Foucault has already suggested.

While attempting to transform the visual scar into narrative and language, Djébar and Morrison acknowledge the history of Black and Algerian female pain and traumatic history by creating the possibility for the story of the scars to be written and narrated as the French feminist Hélène Cixous claims in *The Laugh of Medusa*: "Write yourself. Your body must be heard" (880). Both *Women of Algiers* and *Beloved*

examine the fragmented, scarred female body in its connections to the historical oppression, and ultimately, both portray how maternal recognition and feminist bonds are prone to begin the healing process. Following Black feminism, Hortense Spillers re-articulates the theories expressed by black feminists, notably Bell Hooks and Barbara Smith, who claim that Black women are more oppressed than any other minority women. In her seminal essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," Spiller discusses the uniqueness of the situation of black women concerning the brutalities of slavery and its aftermath. She criticizes history for its unacknowledgement of the particularities of the African female subject in slavery. Spiller explains:

The African female subject, under these historical conditions, is not only the target of rape_in one sense, an interiorized violation of body and mind_but also the topic of specifically externalized acts of torture and prostration that we imagine as the peculiar province of male brutality and torture inflicted by other males. (Spillers 68)

She further discusses the condition of African-American women as "A female body strung from a tree limb, or bleeding from the breast on any given day of fieldwork because the "overseer," standing the length of a whip, has popped her flesh open" (68). Spiller holds the stance of many postcolonial and Black feminists in distinguishing the experience of the Black women. Following the lead of Gayatri Spivak and Barbara Christian, the experiences of women in different times in history is far from being one and the same.

Both *Beloved* and *Women of Algiers* powerfully demonstrate how the female body becomes an archive of historical trauma. The scars born by Sarah and Sethe are not just physical remnants but are visual testimonies to violence and silencing, representing what Scarry calls the destruction of language under the weight of pain. In both texts, the scar becomes a form of communication when words prove insufficient, offering a palpable, undeniable presence that resists erasure. Through these embodied narratives, Djébar and Morrison reclaim histories often neglected or distorted—those of Black and Algerian women—placing their pain at the center of postcolonial and feminist discourse. By turning the wounded, maternal body into a site of memory and resistance, both authors challenge historical silencing and begin the work of healing through feminist solidarity. As Hélène Cixous asserts, the act of writing the body is itself revolutionary: it inscribes what history has omitted. Ultimately, *Beloved* and *Women of Algiers* converge in their insistence that women's personal, bodily pain is deeply political, and that these scars—when acknowledged—can be transformed into stories that resist forgetting.

2. Towards Politics of Healing and Reclaiming the Coherence of the Self

The image of the scar symbolizes the ongoing traumatic history that most female characters in *Beloved* and *Women of Algiers* undermined. Evoking the innermost thoughts of each character, the traces of the scars are permanently there and corporeally visible. However, though the image of the scar is indicative of gendered and racialized oppression, it is also a precursor of resistance and, therefore, healing. In this respect, Slattery maintains: "To retrieve one's own embodiment, bit by bit and piece by piece, and to stitch the parts back together is at the same time to reclaim the history of that embodiment" (Slattery 112). Said differently, as long as Sethe and Sarah begin the process of healing by yoking together their fragmented bodies, they also reclaim their own lost history and identity. In this sense a sense of liberation emerges when the body commences to recollect its bits and pieces, as Scarry has it: "... [The wounded body] ... can also include a joyful sense of new freedom as well" (27). Thus, the body is ostensibly regarded as a political and historical signification text that can be negotiated and problematized. In *Beloved*, not only women sympathize with Sethe's scars, but also men, probably because they share the same traumatic experiences. Morrison describes the first encounter of Paul D with Sethe's Chokecherry tree as follows:

[S]he felt Paul D behind her and his hands under her breasts. She straightened up and knew, but could not feel, that his cheek was pressing into the branches of her chokecherry tree" [...] behind her, bending down, his body an arc of kindness, he held her breasts in the palms of his hands. He rubbed his cheek on her back and learned that way her sorrow, the roots of it; its wide trunk and intricate branches [...] [H]e saw the sculpture her back had become, like the decorative work of an ironsmith too passionate for display" (*Beloved* 20).

While Paul D caresses and sympathizes with Sethe's scars, he not only amends his own pain but also begins to heal hers. Sethe remains static—speechless and motionless—but her stillness is not emptiness; it is a heavy, embodied silence that speaks of trauma too deep for words. The language of her body becomes a text Paul D reads with his hands, his cheek and his breath. As he presses into the "branches of her chokecherry

tree," he does not recoil but leans into the physical evidence of her suffering. His gesture is not sexual; rather, it is tender, reverent and redemptive. In that arc of kindness, Paul D acknowledges the root system of sorrow that binds them both. The tree on her back, shaped by the cruelty of slavery, becomes a living sculpture, not of disfigurement, but of survival. It is a visual record of memory inscribed in flesh.

In this moment of bodily encounter, the body becomes a site of collective memory and mutual recognition. Paul D does not speak; instead, he listens through touch, and in doing so, his body communicates solidarity. Paul D also carries scars, some of which are invisible, while others are unspeakable. When he kisses her wounds, he silently asserts that they are not hers to bear alone. Their re-encounter is a revelation of remembering, a somatic act of communion through which individual trauma becomes shared experience. The healing here is not immediate or complete, but it begins with the body—with empathy enacted through physical presence. This scene reflects how, in the aftermath of unspeakable histories, healing can begin not with language, but with the gentle acknowledgment of pain through the language of touch.

Similarly, *Women of Algiers* by Assia Djébar underscores the themes of collective consciousness and feminist bonding, both of which are vital to healing and the reconstitution of the self. This sense of feminist solidarity is movingly portrayed in the scene where Sarah comforts Leila following her painful confession about the role of women during the Algerian War of Independence. Overcome with emotion, Leila breaks down in tears, prompting Sarah to respond with quiet compassion. She gently caresses Leila's face, tracing its contours in a gesture of deep empathy. Djébar renders this moment with delicate intimacy, conveying a powerful act of sisterhood, tenderness, and unspoken understanding between women. Djébar writes:

She approached the bed and embraced Leila. She ran her fingers over her forehead, the arches of her eyebrows, she would have liked to start licking that face and so weep over her, crush her emaciated body with warm vehemence, that body with its hunched shoulders, those scrawny arms, those childlike wrists, that head all angular and corpse-like... Sarah felt a purely sensual rush... she looked for words, like a deaf-mute, words of love, informal words, but words in what language, like grottos or whirlwinds of tenderness. But she didn't move and became exasperated with herself when she slowly buttoned her blouse again. (*Women* 45)

This is one crucial scene in the novel that epitomizes the epiphany of the feminine body. It strikingly parallels the scene which depicts the encounter between Paul D and Sethe's body. Both scenes are emblematic of deep signification. While in Djébar's novel, the encounter occurred between two women who share the same traumatic experiences, the scene in *Beloved* captures a moment between a man and a woman. In both scenes, the encounters are deeply physical, intimate, and sensual. Sarah unbuttons her blouse, revealing the large scar that runs from her breast to her abdomen, her touch gentle and tender as she caresses Leila's body in an embrace. Meanwhile, Paul D's body presses against Sethe's back, his lips kissing the scars there, his hands caressing them with love and empathy. These encounters are silent, without words, allowing their scarred bodies to communicate—expressing pain, yearning, and the quiet need for comfort through the act of touch. Evidently, characters in both novels connect mentally and consciously with each other, while simultaneously retreating from the painful intensity of unjust memories repressed in the subconscious due to their unspeakability. These two moments in both novels are only the most significant examples among others of how the feminine body is honored. No matter how ephemeral the encounter inevitably might be, it powerfully bears significant long-lasting positive effect on the psychological state of the individuals in *Beloved* and *Women of Algiers*. In *Beloved*, Baby Suggs's sermon powerfully stresses the reclamation of the body as a form of resistance and healing. She urges women to embrace their bodies, particularly the parts that were despised and dehumanized by white oppressors. She encourages them to love themselves fiercely, to recognize the beauty and worth of their physical forms, which had been objectified, exploited, and stripped of dignity. In her sermon, she speaks directly to the women, urging them to reclaim ownership of their bodies, to resist the shame and hatred that had been imposed on them by a brutal, exploitative system. By doing so, Baby Suggs calls for a profound spiritual and emotional healing, suggesting that true freedom comes from physical liberation and a deep, personal connection to one's own body and self-worth. This moment of self-love and recognition becomes a radical act of defiance, a refusal to internalize the degradation inflicted upon them. Through this reclamation, the characters in *Beloved* begin to reclaim their humanity, rejecting the narrative that had been imposed on them by slavery and white supremacy. Baby Suggs says:

We flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it...love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss

them...you got to love it you...no, they don't love your mouth. You got to love it...flesh that needs to be loved. Feet that need to rest and to dance...love your neck...all your inside parts...and the beat and beating heart, love that too. (*Beloved* 103-104)

Baby Suggs glorifies the status of the body and specifically the Black feminine body. Her sermon provides a powerful call to the urgent need to love and reshape the scattered feminine body. When Baby Suggs was nursing Sethe after she delivered, she saw the "roses of blood blossomed in the blanket covering Sethe's shoulders, Baby Suggs hid her mouth with her hand [...] wordlessly the older woman greased the flowering back and pinned a double thickness of cloth to the inside of the newly stitched dress" (109-110). Baby Suggs did not comment on Sethe's scars as Amy Denver did, probably because Baby shares deep understanding. Being a Black woman, she is more likely to internalize what the scars on Sethe's back mean. It is widely held among many feminists, either Black or White ones, that it is through the feminist bonds and communal sisterhood that the wounds become recovered, and the scattered self becomes recollected. Cixous sides with Morrison who says that "she (and other black women) is writing to 'repossess, rename, renown'" (A Case Book 6). Similarly, Cixous emphasizes the act of writing the body and writing women to enter the records of history by having women write about themselves and their sisters. This act of writing and narrating provides the possibility of 'becoming coherent in the world'" (Powell105).

Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies-for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. A woman must put herself into the text, as into the world and into history, by her own movement. (Cixous 875)

By the same token, Djébar also stresses this feminist bonding in *Women of Algiers* as she states: "For Arabic women I see only one single way to unblock everything: talk, talk without stopping, about yesterday and today, talk among ourselves and look." (*Women* 50) Cixous further argues, "It is necessary and sufficient that the best of herself be given to woman by another woman for her to be able to love herself and return in love the body that was 'born' to her. Touch me, caress me, you the living no-name, give me myself as myself"(881). Put differently, the traumatic experience of the past which is stirred by the body can be healed and forgotten through the solidarity bonds of sisterhood. As Slattery contends, "Our wounds have the capacity to advance our consciousness to new levels of awareness" (Slattery 16). The recognition of those scars and wounds among women can stir freedom on many levels.

Following the politics of reclaiming the self, Betty Powell claims in, "will the parts hold?": *The Journey Towards a Coherent Self in Beloved*, that the ex-slaves must face their traumatic past and come to terms with it in order to construct a sense of wholeness instead of the scattered and dispersed pieces of selves. He maintains that Sethe and the other characters must confront their past, express what has been silenced, and banish the lingering shadows to claim ownership. By piecing together fragmented life experiences and weaving them into a unified narrative, the characters of *Beloved* liberate themselves, intertwining stories, bodies, spirits, and flesh, thus starting to shape a sense of identity that offers hope for the future (Powell 105). In both Morrison and Djébar's fiction, it is within community with others, particularly women who share the same memories and the same historical consciousness, that bodily fragmentations can be overcome and recollected. According to Powell, "The gathering together of individual voices into a coherent unit expels the past at least to a point that will allow healing and perhaps forgetting" (112). Explicitly stated, both Djébar and Morrison are concerned with identity formation. While Morrison is deeply immersed in the construction of re-writing Black feminine subjectivity from, Djébar does the same with the Algerian feminine one. While putting a strong emphasis on the coherence of the self, they both stress the importance of collective suffering and its promising effects on both the individual and the collective. As Giulia Scrapa says: "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. (Scrapa 96)

To Morrison's thought, in their constant trial to escape from the atrocities of the past, the wounds inflicted on the bodies and minds of characters will not be healed easily unless there is an intense confrontation with that past and a deep recognition that this historical pain in whatever form it is, is not individual. "The past, until you confront it, until you live through it, keeps coming back in other forms. The shapes redesign themselves in other constellations until you get a chance to play it over again" (Qtd. in Companion to Morrison 160). More importantly, the healing of women is intricately bound up with a women gathering wherein women feel free to unfold their histories and the horrible events that marked them. According to

Djebar who shares the same politics of healing the self: "At every one of these gatherings, they are trapped in the web of impossible revolt; each woman who tells her tale—loud exclamations of the one, rapid whispers of another—gets something off her chest...in speaking to the listening group, every woman finds relief from her deep inner hurt." (*Fantasia* 145). Djebar, like Morrison, is adamant on the constitutive nature of women's community. It is a setting that enables oppressed women to recollect the fragments of the self to elbow their way towards agency and fashion their own tongues of resistance and rebellion.

Conclusion

In *Beloved* and *Women of Algiers in Their Apartments*, Toni Morrison and Assia Djebar craft powerful narratives in which the scarred female body becomes a living archive of historical trauma and resistance. Through the embodied experiences of Sethe and Sarah, the authors foreground the feminine body as both a literal and symbolic site upon which the violent legacies of slavery and colonialism are inscribed. These corporeal scars—often unreadable to outsiders but profoundly meaningful to those who bear them—resist erasure and demand acknowledgement, challenging dominant narratives that seek to silence or forget.

Crucially, Morrison and Djebar do not depict the body solely as a passive vessel of suffering. Instead, they reclaim it as an active agent in memory, testimony, and healing processes. The fragmented, silenced body becomes a subversive text—an alternative archive through which untold histories speak. These marks of violence, while painful, also serve as openings for intimate recognition and communal solidarity. Through narrating the body and sharing the experiences in women's gatherings, women become subjected to mutual healing and embodied remembrance. Similarly, Djebar's portrayal of Sarah and Leila's bodily interaction underscores the possibility of empathy and connection through shared pain and touch. These moments suggest that healing is neither linear nor solitary—it is relational, collective, and deeply rooted in acts of witnessing and storytelling. Feminist thinkers such as Hélène Cixous and Hortense Spillers have long emphasized the importance of writing the body as a form of reclaiming silenced identities. Morrison and Djebar respond to this call by situating the female body at the center of the narrative, transforming it from a site of oppression into a source of agency and truth.

The implications of this are profound. By inscribing memory into the female body, the authors not only honor the specificity of women's historical suffering but also offer a path forward—one in which solidarity, maternal legacy, and the act of storytelling become tools for self-reclamation and resistance. The scars remain, but they are re-signified: no longer symbols of defeat, they become emblems of survival and resilience. In this way, both Morrison and Djebar argue that confronting the past—through embodied memory and collective narrative—is essential to forging a coherent, empowered self and, by extension, a more just and inclusive historical record.

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