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**Voicing the Trauma of Slavery in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes were Watching God* (1937), Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982).**

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## **Dedication**

To the memory of my grand mother;

To my beloved parents to whom I owe my success;

To my sisters Samira, Fatiha, Naima, Ghenima;

To my brother Youcef and his wife Wahiba and, to my brother Djamel;

To my uncle Boussad and his wife Zahia;

To my cousin Kevin and my nephew Said;

To my friends Katia, Yahia, Sabrina, Wardia, Katia, Nadia, Hassan, Tarik, Soumaya,  
Meliza and Yacine;

To my room mates Sirine, Lamia, Amina, Hayat and Sara.

**Soraya**

To my beloved parents,

To my brothers and sisters,

To my husband and his family,

And to all of my friends,

Whom I owe my success.

**Sabrina**

## **Abstract**

This dissertation studies the trauma of slavery and its legacies in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes were Watching God*, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. To achieve our goal, we have relied on Jeffrey C. Alexander's *Social Trauma Theory*. We have first examined slavery as a cultural trauma that threatens the collective identity of Afro-Americans with the hypothesis that the recurrent motif of rape finds its explanation in this cultural trauma. Second, we have analyzed the healing process Hurston, Morrison and Walker engage on as carrier groups in order to heal the Black society; they contribute through their novels in voicing the trauma of slavery and making it known in the public sphere. After analyzing the three selected novels in the light of Alexander's *Social Trauma theory*, we have come to the conclusion that these Afro-American writers see the predominance of rape as a legacy of slavery. Therefore, they engage, through their novels, in raising claims addressing their audience to contribute in healing their society from the trauma caused by slavery.

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## **I. General Introduction**

Slavery had existed for centuries in the New World. It was started by the Triangular Trade that was dominated, from the Discovery to the mid seventeenth century, by the Spanish, then the British. The Spanish and British empires transported manufactured goods to Africa. In return, they took with them African slaves to the New World under harsh conditions. They were sold in West Indies and North America to the White settlers who exploited them in their lands. The Spanish and the British traders took back with them products such as sugar and tobacco to be sold in Europe<sup>1</sup>. With the arrival of slaves to America, racial differences rapidly emerged. The relationship between them and white Americans was that of binary opposition: civilized/uncivilized, educated/uneducated, master/slave, etc .White Americans adopted European ideas and discourse; they believed in the superiority of their race and the inferiority of the other races<sup>2</sup>.

Although the importation of Africans ended in the first decade of the nineteenth century, slavery continued to develop with the Westward expansion. As the nation enlarged its territories, slavery was reinforced for economic reasons; Blacks were crucial elements in the development of agriculture and plantation<sup>3</sup>.

In 1865, however, slavery was legally abolished in the United States; the fourteenth amendment gave blacks the right of citizenship and the fifteenth amendment granted to black men the right to vote. However, in the south, US Supreme Court embraced Jim Crow Law and “separate but equal” doctrine that destroyed the fourteenth amendment and increased segregation<sup>4</sup>.

African Americans were faced with a distinct culture, one which seemed very hard to live with. They were deprived of their human rights and were forced to live in a hostile world, a world that gave them nothing but pain and suffering. Black men and black women continued to live as a periphery within the American society. They were victims of Whites’

oppression and racial inequality, especially in Southern United States. Their lives were devoted to serve and obey Whites' orders. They had no right to resist their masters, and if they dared to do so, they were hardly punished.

The stereotypes associated with Afro-Americans had a hegemonic influence over their minds and thus over their behaviors; they grew up with them and educated their children to believe in them. They "have the sense of looking at one's self through the eyes of others"<sup>5</sup>. These stereotypes were set in black men's minds, caused damage to their psyches and personalities and thus they were traumatized and terrorized at the extent that they turned their anger towards the black female. While Whites believed in the inferiority of blacks, the latter believed in the inferiority of black women. In other words, white Americans considered themselves as the superior race that would dominate all the 'rest'. The Black men, in their turn, showed their strength and power through oppression and violence against black women.

Since the 1950's and through different movements, such as civil rights movement, blacks started to get some of their rights<sup>6</sup>. While black men tried to abolish racial inequality, they fell in the gender issues. Black women were doubly subjected; they did not only suffer from racism because of their skin color but also they suffered from sexism by whites and by black men alike.

The black woman was humiliated by white men, white women and more surprisingly by black men. She was the victim of negative images that were the legacy of racism and sexism in America. The stereotypes are used by whites to describe the black race in general and black men use the same words and apply them to their wives, mothers, sisters and daughters. All feelings of inferiority and subjection were shown through their violent attitudes towards black females. Rape was one of the common methods of their repression and subjection. Black women were suffering because they were humiliated and raped by blacks and whites alike. Slave masters used rape for lust or reproduction. They raped their female



slaves without any feeling of regret, seeing in them nothing but property. They either rape them personally or had it done by one of their male slaves.

The issues of rape and incest are very common in the black family. It becomes a normal male behavior in the black community. "Rape represents an extreme behavior but one that is on a continuum with normal male behavior within the culture..."<sup>7</sup>. Summers uses Mary Koss's words to emphasize that rape is a daily phenomenon in the American society. Rape and incest make black women feel separated from their communities and their souls as well. If slavery is a sign of racism in the American society, rape and incest are signs of sexism within the black communities. In other words, African Americans were considered as slaves and the 'other' that needed a superior race to civilize them. Afro-American women were, then, considered both by whites and black males as sex objects.

During the twentieth century, rape and incest were among the predominant concerns in many Afro-American female writers' works, namely Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982). Being colored, women and artists, they were regarded as inferior and so were their works. However, they have finally taken their place as famous American writers. Their three 'trauma narratives' are the mirror of the black woman painful experience which is, mainly the source of rape by their fathers and humiliation by their husbands. Through their works, these writers try to show how black women are silenced and how they still suffer from discrimination because of being black and women at the same time. These writers make it clear that black man, who once struggled for equality, becomes the source of misery and pain in the black female's life.

## **The Literature Review**

The three selected novels have attracted many critics to study, analyse and contribute to them from different perspectives. Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

has also received a wide range of criticism. Mary Helen Washington, in her forward, appreciates the work because of its high poetry, female hero and its inclusion of the black folk traditions. The critic argues that this novel represents blackness, communal life and black traditions to the extent that readers see themselves in the characters and share their traumatic experience<sup>8</sup>.

Accordingly, Dr. R Sheela Banu studies, in her review entitled *Folk Pride as Reflected in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the way Hurston celebrates the Black culture. Banu argues that Hurston reveals the wisdom buried in the black folklore. She includes the African rituals, such as proverbial expressions, humour, music and dance to instil pride in the African American culture. She argues that despite Janie's alienation as a mayor's wife in Eatonville, she finds peace thanks to the folk rituals in which Tea Cake integrates her, such as singing, dancing, etc. Banu analyzes also *Their Eyes*, in terms of Black humour which is considered as a characteristic of black folk, and which is apparent in Hurston's novel by including many scenes of humour, such as the scenes when Tea Cake make Janie "lot of laughter out of nothing". In addition to humour, Banu adds that sermons and stories are parts of the Black culture that are celebrated in Hurston's novel. By doing so, Hurston shows the spiritual faith of black women through Nanny's voice speaking with a sermonic language. She argues that Hurston's *Their Eyes* informs more about the wisdom of the black folk culture despite the severe oppression and the poverty in which Blacks lived.<sup>9</sup>

*Their Eyes* was also read from psychoanalytic approach. Using Freud's "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", Minh Hanh Trinh' *Inheriting Psychological Trauma in Their Eyes Were Watching God* investigates the indirect traumatization of sexual abuse. In *Their Eyes*, he argues, Janie represses her feelings of anger towards her rapist father and grandfather and thus unconsciously prefers to live the same traumatic experience of rape and abuse by her husbands<sup>10</sup>.

Harold Bloom, in his *Bloom's Guides: the Bluest Eye* (2010), argues that Toni Morrison's work is clear and successful. He studies *The Bluest Eye* from a socio-political perspective. He states that the novel is the product of the black activism of the 1960s including "Black is Beautiful" movement, Civil Rights movement and Black Power movement. This novel –he adds– was set during the rise of Women's Right movement that made the issue of rape widely and publically discussed. In his criticism, Bloom shows that the aim of Toni Morrison works at two levels: to make the reader question the main character's state of being and to make him question history in order to change the black's self-denigration. He views Toni Morrison's novel as a challenge because, for "the first time in the human history", incest and rape are told from a female point of view in such depth<sup>11</sup>.

Then, Khalilah Tyri Watson. In his thesis, *Literature as Prophecy: Toni Morrison as Prophetic Writer* analyzes Morrison works from a textual perspective. The Critic argues that Toni Morrison has a prophetic role because her literature is meant "to guide her readers and her society to a greater understanding of the consequences of slavery and racism in America and to prompt both races to escape the pernicious effects of this heritage"<sup>12</sup> Watson places Morrison as a literary prophet whose mission is to warn the Afro- Americans and Americans in general from the dangers of racism and slavery in the United States. Morrison role as a prophet, he claims, lies in the fact that she bears witness to the black individual who suffers from the legacies of slavery in the American society. In his third Chapter: "The House that Race Built": The Awakening of Toni Morrison's Prophetic Mission", Watson analyzes many of Morrison's works, including "Home", *Solomon* and *the Bluest Eye*. He explains that Toni Morrison attempts to provide her readers with cultural guidance through exposing them to African American past, present and also their future. She serves, he adds, as a "caretaker of knowledge and a guardian of black history [...]".<sup>13</sup>

Another study on Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* has been undertaken by Esli Sugihali's essay "Racialised Beauty: Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*". The critic studies the novel from a feminist postcolonial point of view. Esli argues that Toni Morrison wrote her novel to subvert the notion of 'Beauty' and to restore the value of 'blackness' in the western world by showing the black female's experience in a racialised society. The black woman believes that beauty is associated with all that is white with blue eyes. Thus she despises herself and suffers while striving to have such features. Toni Morrison aims at showing that adopting such ideas is a danger and African Americans should be proud of their 'blackness'.<sup>14</sup>

Like Hurston and Morrison, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* has been analyzed from different perspectives. Baga Amira's thesis *Celie's Emancipation Process* in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (2010) examines the novel from a womanist psychoanalytical point of view focusing on Celie as "new black woman" who faced the oppression of the black patriarchal society in which she lives to become an independent woman. Both perspectives are interrelated in the fact that Celie's psychological development makes her seek for her 'selfhood', independence and resist the males' oppression.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, In Kheven LaGron's *Alice Walker's The Color Purple* (2009), Robin E. Field studies the novel from a womanist point of view. In his "Alice Walker's Revisionary Politics of Rape", Field argues that Walker is among the few writers who challenge and revise the limitations of representations of rape through the rapist point of view and thus ignoring entirely the woman's perspective. In this sense, Walker's intention is to place the reader within the victim's consciousness by making the traumatic experience heard from her point of view in order not to betray and ignore her. Alice Walker - he states- breaks the taboo of speaking about sexual abuse within the black communities in order to help them recover from this phenomenon. This novel demonstrates the process of writing as a trauma therapy

that allows the victim-Celie- to voice events of rape and then ‘shape her future’. He confirms that by doing so, Walker considers Celie as a ‘survivor’ and not a victim. The critic places this work as an epistolary novel and a bildungsroman; it emphasizes on the individual woman and intends to reveal to the reader her psychological and moral development in details<sup>16</sup>.

Marta Tysik’ essay “You Have Seen How a [Wo] man Was Made a Slave; You Shall See How a slave was made a [wo] man: Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* as a Neo-Slave Narrative” (2009) argues that this work is ‘a formal rebirth of the slave narrative tradition including reference to slavery, celebration of the oral tradition and folklore, remembering of the traumatic experience as a therapy for recovering, etc. The critic compares between Walker’s novel and Harriet Jacob’s *In the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) and shows the resemblance between the two works in terms of plots and conventions<sup>17</sup>.

Sabine Sielke’s book *Reading Rape* (2002) covers all of the works above and many other works. Sielke deals with the representation of rape in the American culture and provides the reasons of these representations. In her forth chapter, “Voicing Sexual Violence, Repoliticizing Rape: Post-modernist Narratives of Sexuality and Power”, Sabine Sielke argues that African American female writers - including Toni Morrison and Alice Walker- attempt to readdress rape in another way from previous authors who had already dealt with the issue of rape. These Afro-American females address the cases of rape and incest within the black communities, by black men and through the point of view of the victim. Sielke suggests: “The African American female writers appropriate the incest trope to redefine sexual assault as a family matter. Thereby suggesting that racism, once internalized [...] results in auto-aggressive acts within the black community”<sup>18</sup>. From this, we understand that the selected writers introduce rape and incest as violent acts that are caused by the feeling of inferiority. She adds that narrating stories of rape works as a “motor of change and transformation”<sup>19</sup>

## **Issue and Working Hypothesis**

The review of the literature shows that the novels have been studied from many perspectives. The critics' interpretations focus on the effect of the traumatic experience on the single victim. Sabine Sielke's study on the representation of rape in America deals with rape and incest within the black family and considers these violent acts as the outcome of racism in the United States. In doing so, she opens a completely new path in the interpretation of these works. However, in our contribution this exploration can be carried further. This could be achieved by appealing to the Trauma Theory. Indeed, through this theory, Hurston, Morrison and Walker can be viewed as healers. As far as we know, the critics have not considered the way Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Zora Neale Hurston voice the effects of trauma of slavery on the whole black community and the way these authors and their works contribute in the healing process. Our study, thus, intends to focus on rape and incest as common issues that concern not only the victim but the entire black communities. In addition to this, our intention is to show how these authors, through their selected novels, seek to cure not only victims themselves but the whole African American groups from the horrible effects of slavery that would destroy the whole social order.

To achieve our task, we will use Jeffrey C. Alexander's Trauma Theory emphasizing on his concept of Trauma. In fact this theory will help us to classify slavery as a cultural issue that threatens the blacks' sense of identity. Jeffrey C. Alexander's Trauma Theory offers, according to us, a very interesting framework for interpreting African American women writings. Yet, the question that remains unanswered is why the theme of rape is so recurrent in the three selected novels.

For a tentative answer to this question, we will structure our dissertation following the IMRAD. It will be divided into four parts. The first part is the current introduction in which we have provided some historical background about slavery, racism, and sexism in the United

States and then focused on the situation of the Afro-American women and the issues of rape and incest in the black community. In the second part, we will deal with the method and materials. In this part we will present Jeffrey C. Alexander's *Trauma: a Social Theory* and provide a brief overview of the selected novels - Zora Neal Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) - with the biographies of the three authors. The third part will be devoted to the results in which we will mention the main findings we have reached in the discussion part. The latter will be divided into two chapters. In the first chapter, we will analyze the way the selected authors voice the trauma of slavery by making it a group's concern. In the second chapter, we will study the three authors and their works as a therapy that would heal 'collectivities' from their common traumatic experience.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, viewed September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015 <[http://jmcenterfer.tripod.com/ch20\\_3.pdf](http://jmcenterfer.tripod.com/ch20_3.pdf)>.

<sup>2</sup> Oliver Pamila, *African Americans: History & Politics*, Viewed 14 may 2015, <<http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~oliver/soc220/Lectures220/AfricanAmericans/African%20Americans.pdf>>, 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Us History/ Westward Expansion and Manifest Destiny*, viewed 30 September 2015, ≤ [www.saylor.org/site/wp-content/upload/2011/08/HIST312-7.1-westward-expansion-and-manifest-destiny.pdf](http://www.saylor.org/site/wp-content/upload/2011/08/HIST312-7.1-westward-expansion-and-manifest-destiny.pdf)>, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Oliver Pamila, *African American*: 3

<sup>5</sup> Lyubansky Mikhail, *Revisiting Du Bois: The Relationship Between African American Double Consciousness and Beliefs About Racial and National Group Experiences* (University of Pennsylvania, 2004), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Oliver Pamila, *African Americans: History & Politics*.

<sup>7</sup> Christina Hoff Sommers, 'Researching the "Rape culture" of America: An investigation of feminist claims about rape' *The real issue* reprint, September, November 1995. 14

- <sup>8</sup> Helen Mary, *Forward Zora Neale Hurston Their Eyes were Watching God* ( New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 6- 8.
- <sup>9</sup> Banu R Sheela, *Folk Pride as Reflected in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes were Watching God* (India: Art College, 2015), 1-6.
- <sup>10</sup> Minh Hanh, Trinh, *Inheriting Psychological Trauma In Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Master diss. Lehigh University, 2007), 4- 5.
- <sup>11</sup> Bloom Harold, *Bloom's Guide Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2010), 7- 16.
- <sup>12</sup> Watson Khalilah Tyri, *Literature as Prophecy: Toni Morrison as Prophetic Writer*, (Goergia: Georgia State Univeristy, 2009), 2.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid, 38.
- <sup>14</sup> Sugiharti Esti, *Racialised Beauty: Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye* (PhD diss. Department of Women's Studies), 1- 4.
- <sup>15</sup> Baga Amira, Celie's *Emancipation Process* ( master diss, Constantine: Mentouri University, 2010).
- <sup>16</sup> Robin E.Field, *Alice Walker's Revisionary Politics of Rape*. In Alice Walker' *The Color Purple*, edited by Kehven LaGrone (New York: Rodopi B.V, 2009), 149- 164.
- <sup>17</sup> Lysik Marta, *"You have seen how a [wo]man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a [wo]man": Alice Walker's The Color Purple as a Neo-Slave Narrative*, Viewed 10 Juin 2015, <[http://www.asc.uw.edu.pl/theamericanist/vol/21/21\\_17-34.pdf](http://www.asc.uw.edu.pl/theamericanist/vol/21/21_17-34.pdf).2015>.
- <sup>18</sup> Sielke Sabine. *Reading Rape: The Rhetoric of Sexual Violence in American Literature and Culture* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002) 153.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid, 135.



## II. Method and Materials

### 1. Methodology

*Trauma: A social Theory* is a book written by Jeffrey C. Alexander including five illustrative cases. Alexander's opening chapter aims to structure trauma as a social theory that deals with "Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity". This theory's main concern is group conflict and how members of given group "injure each other"<sup>20</sup>. In such situation, the victims are denied. Their right to resist is understood as a rebellion. Through this theory, Alexander attempts to analyze the concepts of "injury, interest, capacity, and response" emphasizing on the collective trauma rather than self-interest and individual that ignore collective identity<sup>21</sup>.

The concept of "Cultural trauma and collective identity" is an approach that explains how a given group fails or succeeds in redefining its lost identity. It addresses "exploitation and violence" and "investigates the social sufferings' causes and effects which threaten the whole social organization and collective identity"<sup>22</sup>. Alexander maintains that intellectuals, artists and politicians may work as agents of change and symbolically repair the social order<sup>23</sup>. The theorist emphasizes Collective traumas rather than individual ones because, for him, "individual victims react to traumatic injury with repression and denial"<sup>24</sup> and these psychological traumas can be defeated only when facing them and bringing them into consciousness<sup>25</sup>. For 'collectivities', however, repression does not work. In order to help them recover, the traumatic experiences should be voiced through symbolic representations-trauma stories, narratives, rituals and speeches -, make them known and heard in order to enlarge the "we" or the audience that would show interest and then support for the victims. From this point, we know that trauma narratives are symbolic reconstructions and imagination of the traumatic events; they are not descriptions of what is done, and by whom, but rather, about what have been done and what should be. This social approach can be a means to prevent the traumatic and horrific results of a given experience.

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.<sup>26</sup>

In this quotation, Alexander coins the term cultural trauma to reflect the feeling of horrible sentiments that affect the whole members of a given community in their personality and identity. Cultural trauma thus, is an “empirical, scientific concept” which investigates the relationship between the traumatic events, perceptions, and reactions.<sup>27</sup> Alexander shows that one traumatic event can be represented and perceived differently. On the one hand, voicing the trauma helps “collectivities” to be familiar with the source of the suffering and then take the responsibility for action and change. In doing so, “societies expand the circle of the we”. On the other hand, “social groups, often, refuse to feel and totally ignore others’ trauma; they leave others suffer alone.”<sup>28</sup>

Thanks to trauma theory, people all around the world start to speak “about being traumatized by an experience, an event, by an act of violence or harassment...”<sup>29</sup>. People no longer repress their pain but rather express them in depth.

### **Cultural Trauma Theory**

Jeffrey C. Alexander argues that the world needs a reflexive approach to trauma which replaces theories, like Arthur Neal’s “lay theory” which emphasizes more the naturalistic approaches and “the commonsense understanding of trauma”<sup>30</sup>. Lay trauma explains that trauma emerges, immediately, from the event itself. This theory has two versions: Enlightenment and psychoanalytical approaches. The first version maintains that the reactions of victims are reasonable and lead towards problem solving and recovering. The second version explains that when traumatic events happen to people, “they become so frightened that they can actually repress the experience of trauma itself”<sup>31</sup> in their memory. This approach relies on literature as means to discuss the traumas caused by repression and its aim is to “restore collective psychological health by lifting societal repression and restoring

memory”.<sup>32</sup> Alexander shows the limitations of the naturalistic understanding of trauma and at the same time he finds lay theory’s emphasis on the collectivity rather than individual interesting.

“Lay trauma theory”, has greatly helped the concept of “trauma” to shift from “commonsense” in the ordinary language to an intellectual concept in the “academic language”. Alexander, however, rejects these two approaches because of their “naturalistic fallacy of the lay understanding from which they derive”<sup>33</sup>. In this sense, enlightenment and psychoanalytic approaches mistake “lay trauma theory” and its principles. For him, events themselves do not necessarily create collective trauma. The latter is rather created by society’s perception and understanding of the event. He adds these events may not be real; they are just imagined and constructed through “narratives of nationalist history.”<sup>34</sup> Alexander explains:

Events do not, in and of themselves, create collective trauma. Events are not inherently traumatic. Trauma is a socially mediated attribution. The attribution may be made in real time, as an event unfolds; it may also be made before the event occurs, as an adumbration, or after the event has concluded, as a post-hoc reconstruction. Sometimes, in fact, events that are deeply traumatizing may not actually have occurred at all; such imagined events, however, can be as traumatizing as events that have actually occurred.<sup>35</sup>

Alexander uses the term “the Social Process of Cultural Trauma” to focus on the event and the way it is represented. This process seeks to show that trauma is collectivities’ concern in the sense that it affects and threatens the sense of their own identity. He suggests three complementary elements that construct and voice traumas: the first is **Claim making**; a symbolic representation of the injury, terrifying and horrible with notable demands for “emotional, institutional, and symbolic reparation and reconstitution”<sup>36</sup>. Second, **Carrier Groups or Speakers** (they may be elites, common people or religious leaders.) who make the claim and make it known in the public sphere. The last element is **Audience and Situation: Social Performance**; it includes the historical and cultural and institutional environments within which the claim is presented to the public. The audience can be enlarged only when

they are convinced that they are also concerned with the same traumatic event and thus union is crucial to reconstruct the collective identity.<sup>37</sup>

Trauma is, then, classified as a New Cultural Master Narrative that carries a storytelling process; it tells the story of a traumatic event and seeks to answer four main questions: “The nature of the pain (what happened), the nature of the victim (people who were affected by the traumatizing pain), the relation of the victim of the trauma to the wider audience (to what extent does the audience sympathize with the victim and shares his/her trauma) and attribution of responsibility( identifying the perpetrator)”<sup>38</sup>. By succeeding to answer all these questions, trauma plays an important role in, symbolically, constructing society.

To structure a transparent trauma narrative, Alexander adds, it should be linked to “Institutional arenas” including religion or theodicy which allows searching the causes and effects of pain inside the religious arena, “Aesthetic” that appeal to imagination and emotion. Trauma, also, needs “Legal” to make all the national organizations and institutions recognize the danger of injuries and thus force perpetrators to take responsibility of their acts.<sup>39</sup> This new narrative use “Science” to revise and reveal “the nature of the pain, the victims and responsibility”. “Mass media and state bureaucracy” or government are crucial elements in the trauma narrative. They allow traumas to gain large audience’s support and thus power. Alexander states that the trauma theory was developed to investigate the western world’s “collectivities” like Jews -who experienced horrific trauma because of anti-Semitism by the Nazis during the Second World War- but it also studies and analyze the traumas of non-western societies which witnessed “some terrifying traumatic injuries”.<sup>40</sup>

Cultural trauma’s main concern is to transform “a specific and situated historical event, an event marked by ethnic and racial hatred, violence, and war [...] into a generalized symbol of human suffering and moral evil”<sup>41</sup>. In other words, through Cultural trauma, the

social event becomes universal, not particular, and goes beyond the limitations of space and time so that the traumatic experience “lives in the memories of contemporaries whose parents and grandparents never felt themselves even remotely related to it”.<sup>42</sup>

## **2. Materials**

### **2.1. Presentation of the novels**

#### **a. Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937)**

*Their Eyes were Watching God* is Hurston's second novel. It was published in 1937. Its events took place in Eatonville Florida and Jacksonville. The novel tackles the issues of racism and segregation that lead to violence and rape in the black community. Hurston shapes her characters to reflect her pessimistic attitude towards the state of her fellow men and their aggressive behaviours towards the black woman because of their traumatic experience of slavery. *Their eyes* is a mirror of the black woman's journey in a world that makes her silent and forgotten. Through her female characters, Nanny, leafy and Janie, Hurston shows that the destiny of every African American woman is humiliation and subjection in a racist country and patriarchal community. The protagonist Janie Crowford is a colored woman who seeks to live a peaceful life full of love and harmony. However, she cannot realize her dreams with her fellow men that look only for a weak woman to possess. Her three successive marriages have not succeeded because of her husbands' mistreatment and violence. Her first husband, Logan Kellicks is indifferent and treats Janie like a “pack mule”<sup>43</sup>. Janie finds an attractive and ambitious man called, Joe stark. She leaves Logan and gets married to him wishing to realize her dreams of an independent life. She finds love with “Jody” as she calls him but not independence. Jody tries to make her dependent to him. He refers to her as a mayor's wife not as Janie herself. In addition to this he doesn't allow her to interact with others. He only considers her a black woman who has to obey and satisfy her husband. Janie's third husband is not different from the previous ones. Although he loves her and considers her more as a

partner than an object, his nature as a patriarchal and a black man dictate to him to make her under his mercy. He sees himself as a boss. At the end of the novel, Tea Cake becomes ill and has his mind confused because he was bitten by a mad dog. Thus, he unconsciously mistreats Janie and tries to kill her. Janie however, succeeds to protect herself from the monstrous Tea Cake by killing him<sup>44</sup>.

**b. Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970)**

The *Bluest Eye* is Morrison's first novel. It is set in Lorain, Ohio following the Great Depression where racism reached its highest point. The novel represents the suffering of Black females from rape, violence and submission by greedy black males. Through this narrative, Morrison depicts the Black females' lifestyle which is characterized by Whites' humiliation, black males' aggression and by black females' self- denigration. Through flashbacks, the narrator of *The Bluest Eye* reveals the tragedy of a young Black girl, Pecola, who represents every African American girl that dreams for a peaceful and unified family. This dream, however is far to be realized because of racism in the United States. Pecola believes that Whites live in harmony because of their fair skins, blond hair and blue eyes. In order to resemble Whites, Pecola seeks Whites' features to be loved and accepted in her society. Therefore, she prays to have blue eyes.

As being black, she is considered ugly and unimportant by Whites and her family alike. She does not feel any affection within her family which lives in poverty. Pecola's parents regularly dispute and her father, Cholly rapes and mistreats her. These acts make Pecola develop self- hatred and after getting pregnant, her desire to get blue eyes becomes an obsession to her. Every time she looks to a mirror, she hopes her wish to become true. Morrison shows, through Pecola, that Whites prejudices and beauty measurements make Blacks associate their disordered family to their own "ugliness". Finally, the novel ends with a tragic end where Pecola becomes mad.<sup>45</sup>

**c. Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982)**

*The Color purple* is Walker's Pulitzer winning novel. It depicts the way Afro-Americans were living during the 1900s, in Southern United States. The novel tells the story of a young African American woman named Celie. Throughout letters written to God and to her sister Nettie, Celie narrates the pain she was living. During her childhood, she was subjected to sexual abuse and was raped by her step father Alphonso. Celie got pregnant and gave birth to a girl and a boy. Later on, she was forced to marry Mr\_\_\_\_, Albert, in order to take care of his house and children. Mr\_\_\_\_ mistreats her; he always rapes and beats her.

Celie is so close to her sister Nettie who ran away to Africa as a missionary in order to escape sexual abuse by Alphonso and Albert. Celie is left alone, she often writes letters to her sister but she never receives from her. During that time she learns that Mr\_\_\_\_ has a lover, a beautiful woman named Shug Every, she was a singer and Mr\_\_\_\_'s mistress. Shug comes to live in Mr\_\_\_\_'s house after she fell ill. She becomes a friend to Celie. Emotionally, Celie was completely lost because of mistreatments of her husband and her separation from Nettie. During that difficult period, the relationship between Celie and Shug Every was transformed into a love relationship. Celie finds all the affection she missed during her life and it is thanks to Shug Every that she finds the letters Nettie sent to her and which Mr\_\_\_\_ was hiding. Shug Every and Nettie make in Celie a confident and independent woman. At the end of the novel, Celie left her aggressive husband Mr\_\_\_\_ and started a new life far from oppression; she constitutes a business of her own after she has found her children. Celie is, now, a successful woman.<sup>46</sup>

**2.2. Authors' biographies**

**a. Zora Neale Hurston**

Zora Neale Hurston, an Afro-American novelist and anthropologist, was born in Notasulga Alabama, in 1881. She grew up in Eatonville, Florida. In 1917, she attended the

high school education in Morgan Academy in Baltimore and began writing in Howard University where she published her first story (1921). After moving to New York, Hurston participated as a prominent figure in many Black movements such as Harlem Renaissance. She is known for her anthropological studies on rural Black folklore. Among her major works, *Mules and men folk tales* (1935), *Their Eyes were Watching God* (1937), set in Eatonville, Florida. They were published following the Harlem Renaissance; associated with the American Southern Literature and reflected the living conditions of the South generally and Black women particularly. During the 1940s, Hurston faced several difficulties that prevented her from publishing her works. Then, in the 1960s, her bad situation pushed her to work as a maid. In 1960, within these hard conditions, Hurston died. She was buried in an unknown grave until Alice Walker discovered her and marked her as “A Genius of the South” in the graveyard and made her works available again<sup>47</sup>.

#### **b. Toni Morrison**

Toni Morrison, one of the well known African-American authors, scholars and public intellectuals. She was born in Lorain Ohio 1931. She grew up in the times of the Great Depression, which later appeared as the setting in most of her literary works. In 1949, Morrison entered Howard University where she studied Literature and Art. Morrison started her writing career by publishing her first novel *The Bluest Eye* in (1970), then she started writing the other novels among them, *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Beloved* (1987), etc. Beside the Pulitzer Prize she won for fiction(1988), Morrison also received a Nobel Prize for literature in 1993. Her writings are known for depicting the Southern Black community and voicing the issues of slavery, racism and gender violence<sup>48</sup>.

#### **c. Alice Walker**

Alice Walker, an Afro American feminist author and activist, was born in 1944 in Eatonton, Georgia. In 1961, she entered Spelman College in Atlanta where she was involved



in political activism. During this period, Alice Walker became aware of African Americans' social issues like racism and violence. Walker was influenced by Black movements, like The Civil Rights Movement in which she gets involved later. In 1973, Walker published a collection of short stories named "In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women" and a volume of poetry; *Revolutionary Petunias and other poems*. Her writings reflect the social issues that black people experienced within the Southern American society. Alice Walker continued her writing career by publishing her best known novels such as *Meredian* (1976) and the Pulitzer prize winning novel *The Color Purple* (1982) which is considered as one of her most known and successful works<sup>49</sup>.

### **End notes**

<sup>20</sup> Alexander C Jeoffery, *Social Trauma Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012) 1.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 2

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>43</sup> Sparknotes, *Their Eyes were Watching God*, Zora Neale Hurston, viewed 10 Juin2015 <<http://www.sparknotes.com/free-pdfs/uscellular/download/eyes.pdf>>, 4.

<sup>44</sup> Hurston Zora Neale, *Their Eyes were Watching God* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc, 2004).

<sup>45</sup> Morrison Toni, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Vintage, 2007).

<sup>46</sup> Walker Alice, *The Color Purple* (Harvest edition: New York, 2003).

<sup>47</sup> Sparknotes, *Their Eyes were Watching God*, Zora Neale Hurston, viewed 10 Juin 2015 <<http://www.sparknotes.com/free-pdfs/uscellular/download/eyes.pdf>>, 2.

<sup>48</sup> Li Stephanie, *Toni Morrison: a Biography* (Greenwood: California, 2010) 15- 20.

<sup>49</sup> Whitted Qiana, *"Alice Walker"* *New Georgia Encyclopedia*. Viewed 10 Juin 2015, <<http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/alice-walker-b-1944>>.

### III. Results and Discussion

Our work highlights the trauma of slavery and one of its enduring effects which is rape in the black communities. It examines the significance and the predominance of such phenomenon in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Walker's *The Color Purple*. To achieve our study, we relied on Alexander's theory of Social Trauma. After discussion we have reached the following results.

In the first chapter of our discussion, we have dealt with the way the selected authors shape and interpret the experience of slavery as a cultural trauma that contributes in the formation of blacks' identity and future. They make of the trauma collective since it affects all the African Americans, victims or not. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, we have analyzed the victims' reactions towards the black female after they witnessed a traumatic experience of slavery. We have found that the two black males, Joe Starks and Tea Cake mistreat their wife, Janie, because they are so affected by Whites' stereotypes and segregation. Both of them represent every black man who has the complex of superiority, who looks for a weak black woman to possess and rape.

We have also analyzed Cholly and Pecola Breedlove's relationship in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* to come into conclusion that what the two characters share is hatred and disgust. Cholly repeatedly rapes his daughter Pecola because he hates every black female and considers her the source of his traumatic experience of segregation and racism he witnessed in his childhood. Like Joe Starks and Tea Cake, Cholly also develops a complex and sees himself as fully entitled to abuse the black female.

As for Walker's novel, we have investigated the reason behind Albert's mistreatment, insult and rape of his wife, Celie. We realized that Albert, like the three previous characters, injures Celie because she is weak and black. She is in the same situation with the blacks in their relation to whites. Even if he didn't directly witness the traumatic experience of slavery,

his behavior is the same as Joe's, Tea Cake's and Cholly's which is characterized by hatred, anger and more importantly rape. This implies the extent to which the trauma of slavery concerns all African Americans. Whether they directly or indirectly witnessed it, its marks are clearly shown through black males' relationship with their folks women.

The second chapter of our discussion has been devoted to the way the selected authors and their writings contribute to the healing process of the traumatic experience of slavery. We have analyzed the intentions of the authors which are mainly to free the black communities from rape by presenting to the audience the source of such phenomenon and then make them react in order to find solutions or at least to sympathize with the victims and support them. We have concluded that the three selected authors work as a carrier group whose role is to make a claim in order to enlarge the circle of the "we". By voicing the trauma of slavery, the authors tend to make the audience recognize the seriousness of such a phenomenon, question the blacks' state of being, define the perpetrator and then take action to cure the black communities from self-denigration and self-hatred. The authors tend to make the blacks believe in their own importance and proud of their blackness.

## **Chapter One: Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity**

Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker tend to make of the trauma of slavery a feeling that affects not only the victim but the whole community in their sense of identity. In other words, the trauma of slavery is a collective one whose marks are clearly shown in Afro-Americans' reactions towards each other; every African American is concerned with the effects of slavery and become aggressive towards others especially, the black female. Although the three selected novels were set in the twentieth century, where the institution of slavery no longer existed, racism and segregation still haunt the younger generation of the Afro-Americans in their hearts and psyches. Each of the selected novels makes reference to the traumatic experience of slavery, racism and segregation which result consciously or unconsciously in aggressive attitudes towards the black female.

The trauma of slavery is a cultural trauma that threatens the whole community's order and its members' identity formation. In other words, the trauma of slavery hurts every member and thus results in disorder and violence in the black communities. In this case, rape becomes an inevitable phenomenon that can be considered as a direct reaction to slavery and all manifestations of racism.

"Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women."<sup>50</sup> Like most of post-modernist Afro-American women writers, Harriet Jacobs confirms that sexual violence is a result and kind of tradition born from slavery which marked the Afro-American memory and identity. Rape and incest have been dominant issues in the lives of afro-American women from the period of slavery up to the present time.

Generations of African American females experienced and lived sexual violence either by their masters during the period of slavery or by their husbands and fathers after the abolition of slavery. This second kind of sexual abuse is frequent in the black communities

where the Afro-American males manifest and impose themselves through reproducing on their women the Whites 'attitudes'<sup>51</sup>.

The three selected authors deal with the phenomenon of rape as an outcome of the segregation and humiliation of Afro-American men. These authors refer to slavery in every corner of their works to show that the history of all the black women in America was characterized by humiliation and more importantly rape. Through their works, the authors share the view that rape was hardly inescapable for black females.

In the coming pages, we are going to interpret the way the selected authors here use rape as a motif in their works. We are going to focus on rape as a direct result of the collective trauma of slavery focusing on Alexander's understanding of Cultural Trauma.

### **a- Rape as an Effect of Slavery in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes were Watching God***

Zora Neale Hurston shows that sexual violence is the outcome of black males' feeling of inferiority in relation to white masters and thus the desire to resemble them in their power and status. Hurston tends to make of slavery and the sufferings of the black women collective trauma that affects and hurts all the African Americans in their sense of identity. The writer refers, first, to rape during the slavery era to link it to the state of the black community after the abolition of slavery. It is shown through Janie's grandmother-Nanny-and her mother-Leafy-and their traumatic experience of rape by White Americans and humiliation by their folks men when slavery was at its zenith. Thus, black women were punished because of their race.

Although slavery was abolished, black women, like Nanny, still remember what they probably want to forget. From this point, one can notice that Hurston understood the way trauma works even before it was theorized. It is explained in these simple words by Nanny when she instructs Janie:

“[...] de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out. Maybe it’s some place way off in de ocean where the black men is in power , but we don’t know nothin’ but what we see. So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don’t tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see [...]”.<sup>52</sup>

As far as Nanny can see, the white man dominates and humiliates black men to maintain power. Black men, in their turn, reproduce and adopt the same attitude as their white masters to exert power over their “womenfolks”. Nanny finds out that the black woman is the mule which bears the sufferings caused by whites and blacks alike.

Nanny’s experience of sexual abuse justifies her insistence to make Janie get married. Being a former slave, she lived in a period where sexual violence was legal and institutionalized mostly for economic reasons. In Southern United States, the Whites needed slaves for the cultivation of their plantations; each time they had to reinforce labour and increase the number of workers. Thus, either they rape female slaves who have to bear children or they force Black men to rape them<sup>53</sup>. Janie’s grandmother has experienced the same situation. She was repeatedly raped by her white master and was humiliated and beaten by her husband.

Nanny develops fear and hatred towards black men because she noticed that the black man does everything that whites do like rape. Nanny seeks to make Janie’s life different from hers and her daughter’s by making her legally married. By doing so, she would prevent her from being raped by “[...] a trashy nigger, [...] lak Johny Taylor”.<sup>54</sup>

Marriage to a rich man is so important for Nanny like any other ex-slave-who was the subject of rape- to avoid being a victim of sexual violence and exploitation by a poor black man. Hurston’s work reflects the experience of Afro-Americans in the South during the Great Depression. They lived in poverty because they were segregated and were considered as second class citizens in the United States<sup>55</sup>. One can deduce that racism makes the black man a victim of his environment; many black men fall in inferiority and poverty. Thus they

developed a great desire to maintain authority and power in the black community and they did this at the expense of black women.

The traumatic experience of slavery hurts black men and contributes in the formation of their identity and personality. Thus, reproducing the same acts of whites against the black women is a reaction to slavery and racism that survived after its abolition. Nanny wants Janie to get married to a rich man in order to keep her from any danger of sexual abuse.

Marriage, however, is not a solution to secure Janie from being abused and humiliated. Although her three husbands didn't rape her physically, symbolically they largely did. In this sense, rape may have two significant meanings: the first is physically forcing the black women to have sexual relation. The second is symbolically forcing her to be dependent, inferior and subject to black men. Janie doesn't allow her husbands to physically rape her but she cannot prevent them from treating her violently and beating her. The idea is that the state of Janie resembles that of her grandmother despite her effort to not to be like her. In other words, both cases result in a situation of inferiority, subjection and humiliation.

Janie's second husband- Joe Starks – may represent every black man who mistreats his wife because of his traumatic experience of slavery. At the beginning, Joe promised Janie to treat her like a respectable woman: "Janie, if you think Ah aims to tole you off and make a dog outa you, youse wrong. Ah wants to make a wife outa you."<sup>56</sup> However, what he does is completely the opposite. Joe tends to mentally and physically possess her even though he loves her. She is desired because of her physical beauty. This implies how the Afro-American man, primarily, seeks his sexual satisfaction and the black women are asked to fulfill it. In addition to this, he always considers her a slave who serves his master, obeys his orders and who is not allowed to make a claim or even to speak when the master does. From this, we notice that the relationship between Joe and Janie is that of master/slave relation. He plays the



role of a white master in his community and Janie is his slave who sexually satisfies him and serves him.

Joe's mistreatment of Janie may be explained through the harsh conditions in which he was grown up:

Joe Starks was the name, yeah Joe Starks from in and through Georgy. Been workin' for white folks all his life. Saved up some money—round three hundred dollars, yes indeed, right here in his pocket. Kept hearin' 'bout them buildin' a new state down heah in Floridy and sort of wanted to come. But he was makin' money where he was. But when he heard all about 'em makin' a town all outa colored folks, he knowed dat was de place he wanted to be. He had always wanted to be a big voice, but de white folks had all de sayso where he come from and everywhere else, exceptin' dis place dat colored folks was buildin' theirselves. Dat was right too. De man dat built things oughta boss it. Let colored folks build things too if dey wants to crow over somethin'. He was glad he had his money all saved up. He meant to git dere whilst de town wuz yet a baby. He meant to buy in big. It had always been his wish and desire to be a big voice and he had to live nearly thirty years to find a chance.<sup>57</sup>

Joe witnessed a traumatic experience of slavery; he was segregated and subjected by white masters in Georgia. He worked for them without any complaint. This silent object in Georgia becomes a mayor with a big voice and status in Eatonville. Joe's experience makes him reproduce the same attitudes of whites towards blacks. He develops a superiority complex; he views himself superior, more intelligent and wealthier than his "men folks". Joe represents the white for whom he worked and Janie represents him. In this sense, he does not consider her a wife. She is rather his weak servant and he thinks he has a complete right to possess and beat her. Joe's attitude towards Janie may be a kind of revenge to all what he had experienced. In other words, Joe is so hurt by his traumatic experience which was caused by whites that instead of punishing them he turned his anger to women.

Similarly, Janie's third husband-Tea Cake- represents every black man who represses his feelings of anger and inferiority that unconsciously manifest through his aggressive behavior towards the black woman. Although Tea Cake loves Janie, he always tends to show his superiority over her and that he is her boss "Being able to whip her reassured him in

possession. No brutal beating at all. He just slapped her around to show he was boss”<sup>58</sup>. Like Joe Starks or any black man, Tea Cake finds a woman that is weaker than him to dominate reproducing thus the deeds of the whites.

Like all colored people, Tea Cake cannot escape the segregation of the “white folks”. He was terrorized by the obvious discrimination between Blacks and Whites when he was ordered to look for victims of the horrible storm. He has to examine the color of the victim to make coffins for Whites and just cover black ones up. Tea Cake is so frightened of the segregation he and his fellow people were witnessing. He recognizes that they-as colored people are treated like dogs both in their lives and after they pass away. He thinks: “it’s bad bein’ strange niggers wid white folks. Everybody is against yuh”.<sup>59</sup>

Tea Cake’s trauma of slavery is unconsciously manifested when he fell sick and had his mind confused. He cannot recognize who is his friend and who is his enemy. He thinks that Janie is like Whites; she is his enemy that treats him like a poor sick dog. Thus, he mistreats her and never trusts her.

#### ***b- Rape as an Effect of Slavery in Toni Morrison’s The Bluest Eye***

Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* may also be considered a perfect example of colored people’s daily sufferings and miseries because of the legacies of slavery. The story is set in the forties but also reflects the sixties and the seventies where the institution of slavery, no longer existed. Like many Afro-American female writers, Toni Morrison gives voice to the black minority and tends to show the way the trauma of slavery breaks the black families. In her writing, she describes the state of the black family and shows its members’ history that is a succession of misery and trauma. Like Hurston, Toni Morrison tends to present a social and collective situation in which she shows the whole black community through the Breedloves, a representative of every black poor family. This family witnesses segregation and this affects all its members in their personalities. They believe in the beauty of whites and their own

ugliness. For them, God has the same features as Whites: “God was a nice old white man, with long white hair, flowing white beard, and little blue eyes that looked sad when people died and mean when they were bad”.<sup>60</sup> The author shows, here, the extent to which African Americans have come to reproduce themselves the age-old stereotype associating blackness to the Devil.

In her writing, Toni Morrison insists on the “collectivity’s” misery and trauma rather than the individuals’. Through Cholly’s aunt, Jimmy and her two friends, miss Alice and miss Graines, the reader gets knowledge of the collective misery and the destiny of all the Afro-American women ever since they came to the New World. The black woman is the first victim in the black community and the American society as a whole. She is the bearer of the Whites’ injustice and black men’s violence.

“[...] everybody in the world was in position to give them orders. White women said, “Do this”. White Children said, “Give me that”. White men said, “Come here”. Black men said, “Lay down.” The only people they need not take orders from were black children and each other. But they took all of that and re-created it in their own image. They ran the houses of white people, and knew it. When white men beat their men, they cleaned up the blood and went home to receive abuse from the victim.”<sup>61</sup>

In this quotation, we notice that Toni Morrison tells us the history of all the African American females. All the black women live in the same way. They were made only to serve Whites, obey their orders, look after Whites’ children and often leave their children alone. In addition to this, they have to be under the mercy of their husbands or/and fathers. The black woman never feels freedom; she works for and takes care only of her masters, white and black males. When she gets older, she keeps working even though she feels weariness and weakness; she accepts the idea of pain. Sometimes she ignores its presence and only this makes her feel free. There is no relief in black females’ life; they only rest when they die.

Toni Morrison shapes her novel to reflect the way black men are condemned by Whites’ ideas and visions towards them. However, the way these black males reproduce the

Whites' attitudes towards "petty things and weak people"<sup>62</sup> is more emphasized. Males live only to cause pain to the black female. They are aware of the misery of the black women but nothing changes. All what they do is worsening their situation. Because he has no right to express his hatred towards Whites, the black man turns his anger to sexually abusing black females. Cholly is the best example of this kind of males. Listening to the testimonies of other black women didn't prevent him to produce the same deeds of Whites. The black man is a victim of segregation and humiliation in the American society. He avenges himself by sexually abusing the black female. In this case, Rape becomes inevitable in any black family. Toni Morrison emphasizes the issue of rape as a prevalent and an inevitable effect of the trauma of slavery.

Toni Morrison presents rape as a social and daily phenomenon that destroys the identity of the whole black community. She provides the history and experience of Cholly in order to show at what extent the black males are so affected by Whites' mistreatments and humiliation and as a consequence of their traumatic experience of slavery, they behave violently with any weak black woman.

Cholly is a mirror of African American males that are affected by racism and the oppression of the dominant White society. He witnessed a traumatic experience of slavery in his childhood: he was the victim of two white men. They caught him with Darlene, a little country girl, and forced him to rape her. This situation made Cholly "a misanthrop", he hates every black woman and makes him want only to make her suffer and rape her. Instead of hating the hunters, he turned his feelings towards Darlene and thus all women. He dares not hate white men; he can't even think about it because he views them as superior to the black man he is. Thus, he hates the one who created the situation, the one who made him appear weak, the black woman:

"[...]Never did he once consider directing his hatred toward the hunters. Such an emotion would have destroyed him. They were big, white, armed men. He was small,

black, helpless. His subconscious knew what his conscious mind did not guess—that hating them would have consumed him, burned him up like a piece of soft coal, leaving only flakes of ash and a question mark of smoke[. ..] he hated the one who had created the situation, the one who bore witness to his failure, his impotence. The one whom he had not been able to protect, to spare, to cover from the round moon glow of the flashlight. The hee-hee-hee's".<sup>63</sup>

Cholly cannot show affection, nor love to his family and has no idea how to love or raise children“[...] he could not even comprehend what such a relation should be”<sup>64</sup> because he had never experienced the taste of a true and unified family in his childhood. He does not know the meaning of tenderness and love and has never experienced them .He was “Abandoned in a junk heap by his mother, rejected for a crap game by his father, there was nothing more to lose. He was alone with his own perceptions and appetites, and they alone interested him”<sup>65</sup>

He is a victim of loneliness; he does not feel belonging. His mother went mad and ignored him, his aunt was dead and his aggressive and irresponsible father abandoned him. Thus he cared less about social relations. He cared only for his desires. His being a black and abandoned child affects his behavior and his relation with females. He mistreats his wife and rapes his daughter, Pecola. This behavior is caused by his loneliness and his mistreatment by the Whites.

### **c- Rape as an Effect of Slavery in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple***

As the two previous works, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* tackles the issue of rape as a direct result of slavery. The novel makes reference to racism and discrimination and refers to Africans in the past to show the way they were deprived of their right of belonging. Alice Walker tends to make the experience of slavery a shared experience and thus every African American is concerned and so affected by Whites' mistreatment. *The Color Purple* is set in the twentieth century, Southern United States. It refers to slavery and history in order to reflect and depict the way the phenomenon of rape is so prevalent in the black communities.

Celie, the protagonist, represents every African- American woman who lives only to serve and obey her father and then, her husband. She is oppressed and repeatedly raped by her father. She is not allowed to go to school to be educated and know her rights. Only what she knows is how to take responsibility of the house. This makes her know nothing except how to stay alive. When she got married, she found another greedy and selfish black man to serve. All what she has to do is to raise children, cook, clean and sexually satisfy her husband. The relationship between Celie and her husband is that of Whites and Blacks. She cannot express her feelings of tiredness and illness. The state of Celie is that of every weak African- American woman who has no personal life. She speaks only when the black male, her master, orders her to do. From this point, one can realize the reason why the Afro-American writers of the twentieth century make of the sufferings of black women collective. In other words, no black woman has escaped oppression and sexual abuse in a racist society and patriarchal community. Celie reminds the other character, Sophie of her mother's subjection to her father:

“[...]you remind me of my mama. She under my daddy thumb. Naw she under my daddy foot. Anything he say, goes. She never say nothing back. She never stand up for herself. Try to make a little half stand sometime for the children but that always backfire. More she stand up for us, the harder time he give her. He hate children and he hate where they come from. Tho from all the children he got, you'd never know it.”<sup>66</sup>

In this quotation, Alice Walker clearly shows the collective sufferings of black females. They all live under the mercy of the black males, who only strive to make themselves superior and stronger than weak black women. Although they belong to the same racial category, the black male sees blackness, ugliness and inferiority only in the black female. He adopts the attitudes of Whites towards the colored people. The black male suffers from the way he is perceived by Whites that he becomes aggressive and violent at home and within the black community where there's no white to mistreat him and thus he feels free to oppress women that are weaker than man. To explain, Black men are nothing in relation to whites; they are just objects of oppression and subjection. In their communities and with their families, they tend

to show their power and their maleness by raping their females. Thus, one can deduce that in a racialized society, the black men are traumatized and thus transpose their sufferings on the weaker members of their community by inflicting on them the same mistreatment they received from Whites.

The relationship between Celie and her husband is that of master/slave. She calls him Mr.\_\_\_\_\_ and never dares to call him by his name. A slave cannot call his master by his name because they are not in the same position. The master gives orders and the slave has only to serve and work for him without any complaint. Mr.\_\_\_\_\_ treats her like an object because she is weak, black and woman. He often beats her and speaks in a sexist language. He even advises his son Harpo to beat his wife Sofia: “You ever hit her?” “Well how you spect to make her mind? Wives like children. You have to let ’em know who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating”.<sup>67</sup>

Suffering from sexual assault continues throughout Celie’s life, her relationship with Mr.\_\_\_\_\_ is seen as rape because it lacks affection and love. He never cares about her and her feelings. “I [Celie] don’t like it at all. What is it to like? He git up on you, heist your nightgown round your waist, plunge in. Most times I pretend I ain’t there. He never knows the difference. Never ast me how I feel, nothing. Just do his business, get off, go to sleep”.<sup>68</sup>

Albert’s mistreatment of Celie is justified through the history of colored people and their experience in the New World. Alice Walker uses Nettie, Celie’s sister, to take the reader back into the origins of Afro-Americans, their rituals and how Africans were colonized and brought to the new world as slaves “ [...]I [Nettie] read where the Africans sold us because they loved money more than their own sisters and brothers. How we came to America in ships. How we were made to work”.<sup>69</sup> Through her readings of the bible, we get knowledge of the traumatic experience of slavery that haunt all the colored people and affect them in their identity, their self perception and their behaviors towards each other. The history of black

people from their existence in the “virgin forest” (Africa) is full of humiliation and subjection. The twentieth century colored man feels humiliation and this affects him in his personality. The black males’ mistreatments and sexual abuse become part of their existence and personality. For them, “a girl is nothing to herself; only to her husband can she become something”.<sup>70</sup>

Although there is no direct reference to Whites’ mistreatment of Albert, we can deduce it from his superiority complex and violent attitudes that are direct effects of slavery. As he is a black man, he is directly or indirectly concerned with the issue of race in the United States since the legacies of slavery still hurt the younger generation of blacks. Albert is from this generation and through Nettie’s letters we get knowledge of the traumatic experience of slavery that every colored man had witnessed, if not him, certainly his surroundings. This experience contributes in the formation of black man’s personality and his relation with his fellow citizens in the black community, especially weak black women.

The trauma of slavery, then, is a cultural trauma that affects not only the victim but the whole order of the black communities. This perfectly fits with Alexander’s definition of Cultural trauma. According to him, Cultural Trauma leaves the victims in a situation of anger and depression. It also shapes and changes their future. The three selected authors of our dissertation interpret the trauma of slavery in the same way as Alexander. They make of the traumatic experience of slavery a social trauma that affects all the members of the black communities in their relation with each other. In addition to this, the authors’ main concern is collective trauma rather than individual one since they deal with slavery as a trauma that hurt black males in their sense of identity. These victims of slavery become monstrous within the black communities. They cause pain and suffering to the black female by raping her. Thus, the whole community is so hurt by the social phenomenon of slavery and its legacies. The idea is that by considering slavery as a cultural trauma, one understands that it is so frequent



in the black community and that being a direct victim of slavery or not, every African American is concerned. The younger generation is so 'injured'. This is why slavery may be called a cultural trauma that affects the entire black race and that injures them in their personalities.

In order to help the blacks recover, these authors tend to show the effect of the trauma of slavery that is rape in the black communities. In other words, the selected authors here show the source and reasons of the prevalence of rape in the black "collectivities". In doing so, they make the reader question the state of the black communities and then, take the responsibility for sharing the miseries of others.

## **Chapter two: Literature as Healing Process**

We will examine, in this chapter, the healing process Hurston, Morrison and Walker undertake in their novels. Jeffrey C. Alexander, in his *Social Trauma Theory*, considers that each community needs carrier groups to be cured. He refers to them as active agents who construct claims in which they identify victims and perpetrators of a social trauma<sup>71</sup>. We will investigate how the selected novels claim to voice the trauma of slavery and its legacies and how they shape the reality of Afro-Americans and their suffering from the racial differences of their society. Then, we will shed light on how these three authors work as carrier group in order to shock and shake the reader through informing him about the trauma of slavery. Finally, we will deal with the audience whom these social agents address in their claims in order to make them react.

### **a- The Claim Making**

The trauma of slavery and racism continue to live in Afro-Americans' memory. It is the subject matter of many African American female writers' narratives. Hurston's *Their Eyes were Watching God*, Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Walker's *The Color Purple* are among these literary fictions which tend to represent and voice the trauma that threatens the self estimate of the African American community. These authors aim to make the trauma of slavery publically known and understood both by those who experienced it as well as by those who did not.

The three selected works provide an insightful depiction of the way the Afro-Americans are living within the American society. Each novel as a unique production tells a specific story, but they all tackle a common issue which is representation of the trauma of slavery and its impact on Afro-Americans. These black female writers share the same perspective in their narratives; they construct the plots of their stories in a symbolic way to

reflect the African Americans' sufferings from a dominant oppressive and racist culture inherited from the times of slavery.

Hurston, Morrison and Walker aim to make the public aware of the trauma of slavery, as a not yet known social problem. Their works are considered as claims made to voice this trauma that is still living in every Afro-American's consciousness. They intend to persuade the audience about the danger of the trauma of slavery that threatens the Afro-American community and call them to react in order to heal their society and reappraise their culture. Hurston, Morrison and Walker as writers have the objective to preserve the Blacks' identity from disappearance, as Donald P. Spence argues in this sense: "We are all the time constructing narratives about our past and our future and . . . the core of our identity is really a narrative thread that gives meaning to our life, provided . . . that it is never broken."<sup>72</sup> Spence confirms how important are literary narratives in shaping the society structure. In this context, Hurston, Morrison and Walker contribute, through their novels, in shaping their society and identifying the trauma of slavery as the cause of the suffering of African Americans with the hope to enlighten and affect the reader.

Although the three novels are set in different periods of time, they introduce the same cultural context of their society. The three authors tackle one social issue which is the trauma of slavery. They raise their claims through various symbolic representations including imaginative plot, setting and characters to reflect the Afro-Americans' way of living. These novels represent Whites' oppressive culture inherited from slavery and based on racism, segregation and oppression. They show a society which perceives the Blacks as "ugly" and inferior due to the colour of their skin. They also, discuss the continuing effects of the trauma of slavery on black people during the twentieth century

In addition to slavery and racism, the three narratives portray sufferings from hatred, violence and abuse as experienced by the African American families. Hurston, Morrison and

Walker demonstrate how the African American males are affected by the Whites' oppression and racism. Their violent attitude towards the black woman is seen to be the result of their painful experiences<sup>73</sup>. Each novel shows the way black men are treated by Whites in order to relate it to the predominance of rape and violence in the black communities. The three selected works claim the issue of rape through imaginary and representative characters. As such, Joe Starks and Tea Cake in *Their Eyes*, Cholly in *The Bluest Eye* and Albert in *The Color Purple* are victims of the Whites' oppression. They are portrayed as destructive characters due to the racist and oppressive experiences they went through within the Whites' culture. Each character lived a traumatic experience that marked his memory and leads him, later, into adopting violent attitudes and a bad behaviour, mimicking thus his white oppressor. The three male characters are represented from the same perspective; the selected authors depict the reality of African American men who are affected by the oppressive Whites' culture and the attitude of the white oppressors.

This similarity is also present in the representation of Afro-American women as victims of males' oppression and sexual violence. Janie, Pecola and Celie, as symbolic characters, stand for the real victims of racism and males' domination. Each of these female characters is an image of the suffering of African American women under the hands of white and black men. The selected authors depict their protagonist female characters in a similar way. They all face the same sufferings which are males' violence, rape and even incest. If the three selected authors portray negatively the Black community, it is to denounce the Whites' oppressive culture. Therefore, they try to instil pride in their African origins, by referring to African history, to counter the Whites' prejudice and stereotype about African Americans.

Hurston is said to be the first who celebrates the black folklore of the Black culture. Through her novel *Their Eyes were Watching God*, she shows the Black culture with its spiritual and oral traditions such as sermons and stories.<sup>74</sup> This is apparent mainly through Joe

Starks who speaks in sermonic tone. He is described as mimicking the preacher John Pearson, “Then he set his hat like John Pearson and imitated his preaching”. In addition, Hurston instills pride of African origins by making Africa a heaven where all Afro-Americans dream to be when they pass away. This appears when Tea Cake tells Lias: “If Ah [Tea Cake] never see you no mo’ on earth, Ah’ll meet you in Africa.”<sup>75</sup>

Accordingly, Morrison implicitly affirms her pride of being black from African origins. Her perspective is shown through Claudia, the narrator. She is portrayed as confident and a fighter. Despite her suffering from racism within her society, she accepts her identity and defends it against the white oppressors, she argues:

We had defended ourselves since memory against everything and everybody, considered all speech a code to be broken by us, and all gestures subject to careful analysis; we had become headstrong, devious and arrogant. Nobody paid us any attention, so we paid very good attention to ourselves. Our limitations were not known to us—not then. Our only handicap was our size; people gave us orders because they were bigger and stronger. So it was with confidence, strengthened by pity and pride, that we decided to change the course of events and alter a human life.<sup>76</sup>

Claudia represents Morrison’s point of view, she implicitly asserts her pride of being black and supports the “Black is Beautiful Movement” which is raised in the same period she wrote her novel. Morrison states: “I really think the range of emotions and perceptions I have had access to as a black person and as a female person are greater than those of people who are neither...So it seems to me that my world did not shrink because I was a black female writer. It just got bigger.”<sup>77</sup>

On her side, Alice Walker makes reference to African ancient civilizations. This is apparent through Nettie’s description of her journey in Africa. She tells Celie about the great cities in Africa: “did you know there were great cities in Africa, greater than Milledgeville or even Atlanta, thousands years ago? That the Egyptians who built the pyramids”.<sup>78</sup> She also refers to the African culture and its various traditions that are celebrated by the black people. Nettie describes Olinka village when the villagers celebrate the building of the road, she states: “The road is finally reached the Cassava fields about nine months ago and the Olinka, who love nothing better than a celebration, outdid themselves

preparing a feast for the roadbuilders who talked and laughed and cut their eyes at the Olinka women the whole day.”<sup>79</sup> Alice Walker aims at showing to the coloured people that they, indeed, have a culture, a civilization and thus they are not “savages” as Whites view them.

Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker construct the stories of their novels in a way to depict the African Americans’ suffering from the legacies of slavery. These stories are claims made to voice the trauma the Afro-Americans still suffer from. They construct these claims to denounce the situation of the damaged black society due to racism and oppression. Through these fictional representations, they tend to make the audience aware of the trauma that destroys the African American society. Therefore, their intention through these claims is to make the reader look for a safe, peaceful and unified society.

#### **b- Hurston, Morrison and Walker as “Speakers”**

Hurston, Morrison and Walker occupy an important position in their society as well as in the world as a whole. They are known for their literary fiction which reflects the Afro-American way of living. Being members of the African American society, they live the same traumatic experience resulted from slavery and racism. These writers live in the periods when the African American people were marginalized for the colour of their skins. Therefore, being deeply affected by racism, they contribute in African American activism in order to obtain the African Americans’ civil rights. They are among the important figures of the African American literature. Their works tend to depict the real life of the Afro-Americans and reproduce the history of their society through literary narratives. In addition to writings, they have their position as activists in many political and social movements conducted by the African Americans with the aim to get equality.

Zora Neale Hurston was an anthropologist, she is considered as an important figure in Harlem Renaissance during the twenties. This makes her among the most powerful women writers in the Afro-American literature. During her participation in the Harlem Renaissance, she has received many prizes as a successful writer. In 1925, she won many prizes at the

*Opportunity* magazine award dinner. She has received the second prize for her short story “Spunk” and for her play *Color Struck*. In addition to this, Hurston was given two honourable mentions for her short story “Black Death” as well as for her play *Spears*.<sup>80</sup>

Toni Morrison, on her side, is considered as an important woman of peace. Her works are seen as canons in the Afro-American community and US as a whole. Interviewers describe her as “having a magnetic personality and a rich, compelling voice.”<sup>81</sup> Morrison’s fiction highlights the African Americans’ experiences to question their position in the American society. This makes her one of the most influential figures in recent history. As a writer, she has received many awards for her novels such as Ohioana Book Awards for fiction, for *Sula* in 1975, *Paradise* in 1999, and *Love* in 2004, and National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction, for *Song of Solomon* in 1977. She has also received Pulitzer Prize for publishing *Beloved* in 1988 and in 1993 she won the Nobel Prize in literature. In addition to this, Morrison’s novels have received a wide range of studies from scholars, and her works are taught in many universities, high schools and colleges in different parts of the world.<sup>82</sup> Morrison is said to be called “critical race theorist” since her writings deal with racism as a part of social construction.<sup>83</sup>

Similarly to Hurston and Toni Morrison, Alice Walker has proved to be a talented author. Her works are subject of many studies and scholarly analyses throughout the world. As an artist, she succeeded to associate art with the real life. She deals with many social issues such as racism, sexism, oppression of Black women and which are frequent within the African American society. Her works depict also some autobiographical elements such as her past experiences as a black child that was raised within a marginalized black community. Beside fiction, Walker was among the most powerful activists in the Civil Rights Movement, struggling to get justice and equality for the African American citizens.<sup>84</sup>

We have seen how these African American writers, as active agents within the American society, have become influential figures. According to Jeffrey C. Alexander, these intellectuals may represent a carrier group who contribute, collectively, in identifying the trauma which affects their community. They refer to history in order to recover the position and the identity of the African Americans as a whole. These authors, hence, contribute in the cognizance of the trauma of slavery as a fundamental issue and make it Collective, through shared memories.

Each of these female writers has her own discursive skills by which she expresses and makes the meaning of her claim in the public sphere. They work to address societal themes in which they offer meaningful narratives about the life of the African Americans affected by the trauma of slavery. The aim in voicing this trauma is to restore the position of the Afro-American citizens within an oppressing society. In this context, Walker restates in an interview “Now that’s when we should be screaming – jumping up and down everywhere – and saying that this is such an insult to the Mother and to the Feminine that we cannot stand it, and we will not”<sup>85</sup>. Walker insists on the emergency to restore the Blacks’ dignity. They should not accept Whites’ prejudices and will never.

The Carrier group performs their claim in order to make the audience concerned with the traumatic experience of slavery. Thus, they construct meaningful and symbolic representations in order to integrate the audience in this trauma, because changing a situation is a collective task and the role of everybody. In Walker’s words:

There’s always something to do – always. And the reason that’s true is that you always can work with yourself. You don’t have to go out and worry about what other people are doing, or how to start this or that out there, you can start ever so much in yourself. And that will evolve outwardly. So if you just hold that thought – that it really is up to each of us, and we’re all trying to get to a place where collectively we can effect change. But we can’t really do it from being a collective before we are actually self-collected.<sup>86</sup>

The above quotation shows the necessity of collective change. This can only be done when every single African American take action of changing himself, correct his mistakes and call



for union. These Afro-American female writers use their talent in representing their themes. Racism as a subject matter and a social trauma is collectively voiced by the three writers. This in order to reach the trauma process of slavery and thus the task of healing from it would be achieved.

### **c- The Audiences**

Each literary fiction has a hidden aim targeting a specific audience. Literature has a great influence. It deals generally with social issues that affect society. The literary works are projected to “collectivities” that share the same issues in order to get them involved and then change the situation of their society.

*Their Eyes were Watching God*, *The Bluest Eye* and *The Color Purple* share the same objective in their claims that is to heal the African American identity. They also aim to voice the trauma of slavery and its effects to make it publically known within the Black community first, then in the United States and, eventually, in the whole world to, at least, attract them, make them imagine the situation and then, to raise their sympathy towards both victims of rape and victims of the traumatic experience of slavery (black females and black males).

The three novels are, first of all, purported to the African American audience. Their intention is to make African Americans care more about the situation of the black community. The authors address their folks men/women and call them for taking responsibility and action. Being Blacks, they have to share their fellows’ sufferings. This can only be achieved by making the Afro-American reader involved in the narrative; placing him both within the victim’s and perpetrator’s consciousness. This allows him to correctly define the real responsible for Blacks’ daily miseries who are the Whites.

Through their writings, these selected authors show to the African American audience the danger of resilience. All of the three present the social phenomenon of rape from the point of view of the victims to provide the reader with the credibility of the facts. They also refer to

the past to justify the black males' deeds and at the same time to make the African American reader strive to restore the dignity of his identity.

Hurston, Morrison and Walker contribute in voicing the trauma of slavery to make of it a social and cultural issue. Although these novels are written and published in different periods of time, they share the same subject and target the same audience. They tend to shock and shake the Afro-American reader and make him react to find solutions to this phenomenon to regain the identity of his society.

Hurston, Morrison and Walker aim to inform not only the African Americans about their past and which still has impact on the memory of all the African Americans, men and women, but the American society at large. By embarking in a process of self-criticism, they tend to make the black man question his state of being and make him proud of his origin and identity as a starting point to stop the social issue of rape in the black communities.

These African American female writers are committed writers who set for themselves the mission of healing and repairing societies. This can be achieved by embarking also the white American audience in self criticism. Blackness should be restored and accepted by both victims and perpetrators. Thus, these writers' prime objective is to make the white reader revise his ideas and prejudices towards Blacks. By doing so, white Americans become able to imagine black communities' situation. They also may consider themselves the source of Blacks' painful life. The writers, then, tend to make Whites take responsibility of their deeds and then either they change their behavior or at least they would know themselves perpetrators. The selected authors address Whites in order to blame them and face them with the reality that they greatly contribute in the formation of blacks' identity. In other words, Whites' ideas are the cause of every act of violent-rape- in the black communities. Black males direct their attention to violence and rape because of his feeling of inferiority that is caused by Whites. The selected authors here hope Whites to contribute in the healing process

of trauma of slavery by making them acknowledge their mistakes that lead to trauma, self denigration and then, rape within each black family.

The selected authors also address and encourage the other institutions to consider the black community's situation. Their works are considered as memories about the injury that threatens the Afro-American community as a result of slavery. The significance of their works is, thus, to make the trauma of slavery collective by addressing a wider audience that may provide the black communities with solutions to completely cure from the trauma of slavery and its' direct effects .

The objective in this healing process, Hurston, Morrison and Walker engage on, is to draw attention of the audiences in order to mobilize them and “institutionalize the lessons of trauma.”<sup>87</sup> Therefore, they will be convinced that they are also affected with the issue represented then; they will go beyond memory and representations of the horrific past of the Afro-American society.

### **End notes**

<sup>50</sup>Sharman, Sarah W. *Moral Experience in Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008) 167.

<sup>51</sup> Tahir, Ary Syamanad, *Gender Violence in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye and Alice Walker The Color Purple*. Istanbul Aydin University, 2014, 3.

<sup>52</sup> Hurston Zora Neale, *Their Eyes were Watching God* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc, 2004), 17.

<sup>53</sup> *A History of US Families with a Focus on African Americans*, viewed 31 July 2015, <[http://www.pearsonhighered.com/assets/hip/us/hip\\_us\\_pearsonhighered/samplechapter/0205699472.pdf](http://www.pearsonhighered.com/assets/hip/us/hip_us_pearsonhighered/samplechapter/0205699472.pdf)>, 64.

<sup>54</sup> Hurston Zora Neale, *Their Eyes were Watching God*, 15.

<sup>55</sup> Hodges karen, *Continuity or Change: African Americans in World War II* (Baltimore: University of Maryland), 2.

<sup>56</sup> Hurston Zora Neale. *Their Eyes were Watching God*, 35.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 33.

- <sup>58</sup> Ibid, 172.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid, 202.
- <sup>60</sup> Morrison Toni, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Vintage, 2007), 84.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid, 86.
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid, 28.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibid, 94.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid, 99.
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid, 99.
- <sup>66</sup> Walker Alice, *The Color Purple* (Harvest edition: New York, 2003), 41.
- <sup>67</sup> Ibid, 36.
- <sup>68</sup> Ibid, 78.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid, 132.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid, 156.
- <sup>71</sup> Alexander C Jeoffery, *Social Trauma Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 16.
- <sup>72</sup> Hwangbo Kyeong, *Trauma, Narrative and the Marginal Self in Selected Contemporary American Novels* (Doctor Diss, university of Florida, 2004), 19.
- <sup>73</sup> Tahir, Ary Syamanad, *Gender Violence in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye and Alice Walker The Color Purple* (Istanbul Aydin University, 2014), 2-3.
- <sup>74</sup> Banu R Sheela, *Folk Pride as Reflected in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes were Watching God* (India, Art College: 2015), 1, 4.
- <sup>75</sup> Hurston Zora Neale, *Their Eyes were Watching God* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc, 2004), 183.
- <sup>76</sup> Morrison Toni, *The Bluest Eye*, 191.
- <sup>77</sup> Morrison Toni, viewed 18 september 2015, <<http://www.africanamericanquotes.org/black-pride.html>>.
- <sup>78</sup> Walker Alice. *The Color Purple* (Harvest edition: New York, 2003), 132.
- <sup>79</sup> Ibid, 169.
- <sup>80</sup> Shea H Renée and Wilchek L Deborah, *Zora Neale Hurston in the Classroom*, viewed 7 October 2015 <[www. Ncte.Org](http://www.Ncte.Org)>, 10.
- <sup>81</sup> *Speaking the unspeakable*  
<[https://www.google.fr/?gws\\_rd=ssl#q=speaking+the+unspeakable+pdf+tobi+morisson.](https://www.google.fr/?gws_rd=ssl#q=speaking+the+unspeakable+pdf+tobi+morisson.)>

<sup>82</sup> Carlacio L. Jami, *The Fiction of Toni Morrison: Reading and Writing on Race, Culture and Identity*, (Cornell University), 7.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>84</sup> Torfes Elizabeth, *Alice Walker's Womanism: Theory and Practice*, ( Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2008), 7, 8.

<sup>85</sup> Walker Alice, viewed 15 August 2015.  
<http://www.feminist.com/ressources/artspeech/interviews/alicewalker.html>.

<sup>86</sup> Walker Alice, viewed 15 August 2015.  
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<sup>87</sup> Alexander C Jeoffery, *Social Trauma Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 27.

## **IV. Conclusion**

Rape and incest are among the most predominant issues in Afro-American female writings. These phenomena are given deep insight and investigations about what is done and what should be. Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker refer to the history of Afro-Americans in order to relate it to the state of the black community in the twentieth century. This technique helps in defining the reason why Black women, repeatedly face aggression and rape by black males.

As it has been stated before, African Americans witnessed and experienced slavery by Whites for decades, in the United States. After the abolition of slavery, the younger generation of Afro-Americans hoped for a new beginning, a new life that would be characterized by equality, peace and harmony. Blacks' dreams for a peaceful life, however, could not be realized because of the legacies of slavery which are segregation, discrimination and racism that didn't disappear in the twentieth century. All African Americans suffer from the legacies of slavery; they are traumatized and terrorized by Whites prejudices and their obvious discrimination. All black men are directly or indirectly subjects of slavery, thus their aggressive attitudes towards the black female are direct results of their traumatic experience of slavery.

Using Alexander's theory of Social Trauma, we have defined Slavery as a cultural trauma that makes into question the Blacks' collective identity and reshapes their future. This trauma leaves horrible sentiments in the black males' consciousness that they become instable, confused and ignorant of their values and their culture. Their aggressive behaviors are directed to the black female who is subject to both rejection and sexual abuse in the American society.

The three selected authors are considered as agents of change and improvement of the black community. Their aim in voicing and presenting the trauma of slavery works at two

levels: to claim the suffering of their fellow blacks and then contribute in the curing process. The three female writers, we believe, achieved their task as being committed writers. They succeeded to shed a new light on the prevalence of rape in the black communities, within the black family to condemn Whites' mistreatment of Blacks and to help the black victims cure from their traumatic experience of slavery. The authors try to restore black's self- respect and make them proud of their blackness. The selected authors here explain and interpret the phenomenon of rape as an effect of slavery. Thus, their contribution lies in the fact that they blame Whites for the black communities' state of being. By doing so, they participate in bringing some relief to African- Americans and restoring Blacks' identity.

In our dissertation, we have tackled the issue of rape as a direct result of the traumatic experience of slavery as it is represented in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Walker's *The Color Purple*. Yet, further research can be undertaken using Jeoffery Alexander's theory of Social Trauma in relation to voicing other cultural traumas through other works of literature.

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