

*Intersectional Magical
Realism: Articulating
Suppressed and Ignored
Realities*

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Introduction

In recent years, there has been a move to re-describe magical realist literature in more specific terms. Scholars such as Jeanne Delbaere-Garant and Patricia Hart have put forward their own terms: psychic, mythic, grotesque realism, and magical feminism. Novels such as *Beloved* and *Nights at the Circus* have been referred to as both postmodern and gothic texts. The need for different categorical labels implies that there is a dissatisfaction with

the ability of the term “magical realism” to account for issues that appear in the novels these scholars have re-framed. Coining the term intersectional magical realism is my contribution to this practice of reframing certain novels to bring attention to their potential in specific arenas.

A term laden with meaning, and plagued with misunderstandings, intersectionality inspires avid debate in many fields. However, though the term’s popularity truly began following legal scholar, Kimberlé Crenshaw’s seminal articles, evidence of intersectional experiences (or at the very least an understanding of their existence) can be seen in literature preceding Crenshaw’s articles. As this essay will explore, authors of fiction would employ specific literary genres to best depict the experience of compounding oppressions that, at the time, lacked a name or even greater societal acknowledgment. While there are many such genres, this essay specifically investigates how magical realism was adopted by authors to acknowledge and voice identities that are characterised by compounded oppressions. By appropriating the dual world tension inherent in magical realism, where distinct realms of fantasy and realism coexist, this form of fiction, which I refer to as intersectional magical realist literature, enables complex identities to be represented in terms that celebrate and recognise difference by acknowledging how their realities differ from identities depicted by dominant canonical literature. The question

that then arises is how a reading of intersectional magical realism differs from that of “traditional” magical realism? At the crux of this paper, I argue that magical realism is the literary genre most capable of representing complex identities, mirroring the “equal but different” nature apparent in both magical realism and intersectionality.

This paper will explore Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), focusing on how the violence suffered by the protagonist, Sethe, is a result of intersecting systems of racism and sexism. Magic in the form of a ghost is a crucial tool in *Beloved* to enable a testimony of personal and collective trauma due to slavery and establish a specifically female voice of experience. In this feminist text, magical realism articulates subjective perspectives that have been suppressed and ignored, establishing them as valid and important accounts of oppression and indescribable trauma.

Intersectionality describes the state of living with multiple and intersecting oppressions of gender, race, class and sexuality, none of which are superior to any other, nor hold any priority. Crenshaw’s articles highlight the ‘problematic consequence of the tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis’ (1989, 139). Crenshaw points out that the ‘need to split one’s political energies between two sometimes opposing groups is a dimension of intersec-

tional disempowerment that men of colour and white women seldom confront' (1991, 1252), demonstrating that the relationship between social circumstances, namely social oppressions, and identity is acute. Moreover, this self-division of political energies ignores that 'individuals typically express varying combinations of their multiple identities of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity and religion across different situations' (Collins and Bilge 2016, 125). Intersectionality specifically engages with social context in the creation of identity, challenging the essentialist models of subjective autonomy.

The complexity of intersectional identities remains largely unspecified and untheorized in literature and at times suppressed by one-dimensional narratives of identity. The notion of intersectionality is emphasised as being a 'work-in-progress' project and as such, intersectionality invites study into unmapped places. One of these places, which serves as the foundation of this dissertation, is feminine representations of the experiences of class, race, and queerness, without which a singular narrative of identity is perpetuated. The experience of compounded oppressions is relatively unmapped and, therefore, cannot be described by a subscription to literary realism, often ideologically motivated and reflecting only that which is already mapped.

Further insights into the ways in which power systems affect contemporary identities can be facilitated by writ-

ing about the unknown by appealing to the unreal, which highlights the complexity of identities. The unreal serves as a metaphor for the traditionally unrepresented or unaccepted identities and behaviours finding a space in which to exist without suppression, just as magic finds a space to coexist with realism in the literary genre magical realism. The genre holds the potential to describe future identities that have yet to make themselves widely known, as intersectionality, in being a ‘work-in-progress’ project, is not limited by which identities it can represent. Indeed, Christopher Warnes (2009) claims that the ‘magical realism of Carpentier, Asurias, Rulfo and García Márquez is shown to develop from an urge to reclaim a space of otherness by appealing to myths of difference’ (5). In referring to some of the foundational magical realist authors, there is inherent exploration of difference through magic ascribed to the genre. The notion of otherness requires exploring the unmapped to claim space that is free from the suppression brought about by normativity.

First and foremost, it is a mode of literature that inspires many contradictions and confusions in the attempts to define it. Maggie Ann Bowers rightfully states that ‘[t]he one thing that the majority of critical works about the related terms “magic realism”, “magical realism” and “marvellous realism” agree upon is that these terms are notoriously difficult to define’ (2004, 2). However, as Fredric Jameson states, magical realism ‘retains a strange

seductiveness' (1986, 302), regardless of the constant disputations. The debate itself begins with the issue of classification, with the inability to determine whether magical realism is a genre or simply a mode of literature. This desire to define magical realism in terms of such limiting categories and its subsequent refusal to fit neatly into those terms, marks magical realism as a method of writing back to the collecting and categorising attempts of the western colonial project. Indeed, traditionally, magical realism has been considered primarily a Latin American 'genre', synonymous with the 'boom' era of Latin American novels in the 1950s, and 60s, one that spoke to a style and mode of expression distinct from the literary west. Credited with being the first critic to explicitly link the genre with Latin America, Flores states that with the advent of magical realist fiction, 'Latin America is no longer in search of its expression . . . [it] now possesses an authentic expression, one that is uniquely civilized' (1955, 116). Carpentier similarly states that Latin American authors 'have forged a language appropriate to the expression of our realities . . . we, the novelists of Latin America, are the witnesses, historians, and interpreters of our great Latin American reality' (1995, 107).

Magical realism has often been considered a genre for postcolonial, subaltern, minority voices. Salman Rushdie, Ben Okri, and Derek Walcott being some postcolonial authors who have made the genre more globally popular in recent years. It is a genre where one 'may witness idiosyncratic recreations of historical events, but

events grounded firmly in historical realities, often alternate versions of officially sanctioned accounts' (Faris 2004, 15). Stephen Slemon contends that, in the view of literary criticism magic realism, 'carries a residuum of resistance toward the imperial centre and to its totalizing systems of generic classification' (1995, 408). While this is now a controversial position, as the globalisation of the genre means that some magical realist authors do reside in former imperial centres, and as such are surrounded by the hegemonic influences in academia from which monolithic academic traditions are reproduced, it highlights the inherent resistance to literary traditions and normative ideals some would see in the genre. Indeed, Warnes (2005) argues that '[m]agical realism's greatest claim to usefulness is that it enables comparison of texts across periods, languages and region' (8). Magical realism inherently deals with realities built from heterogeneous populations. Its assumed literary beginnings attest to this as Latin American culture is historically built from the amalgamation of African, Spanish and Indigenous culture. Like intersectionality, magical realism literature compels a foray into the previously unexamined. This venture into those unexplored areas suggests a suitability of magical realism to represent intersectional identities that deal with two or more different world views.

Exploring Duality

Perhaps the most defining feature of magical realism is its oxymoronic dual focus on both the world of magic and the real. To combine the two seems impossible as

‘magic is thought of as that which lies outside of the realm of the real; realism excludes the magical’ (Warnes 2009, 2). Nevertheless, all magical realist fiction is expected to describe the existence of a supernatural element in a recognisably real world. It is what Wendy B. Faris describes as ‘an “irreducible element” of magic’ (2004, 7) that sets forth a world view in the characters which challenges ideas of logic and reason and ‘disturbs received ideas about time, space, and identity’ (7). It is clear that within magical realism a tension exists, one that not only confuses situations of the real and unreal, but also complicates notions of reality.

A common explanation of magic realism is to describe the genre as a mix of its neighbouring genres of realism and fantasy. Flores describes it as ‘an amalgamation of realism and fantasy’ (1995, 112). Also, frequently described as a ‘hybrid’ genre. I argue that the form of magical realism does not cause either realism or fantasy to disappear and be recreated as a hybrid. The literature provides space for two separate worlds to exist simultaneously, creating a dual world tension. This contributes to the strength of the genre that celebrates the distinctiveness of both conditions. Unlike fantasy, magical realism does not ask for a total suspension of disbelief. The reader is not asked to immerse themselves in a world that is obviously, and comfortingly, not their own. Rather, magical realism thrives in the tension between magic and the real. The realms of fantasy and realism work in tandem to hold equal status, yet simultaneously main-

tain the dichotomy between the two, forcing the reader to consider the possibility of the unreal within a reality they recognize. Faris describes the process as experiencing ‘unsettling doubts in the effort to reconcile two contradictory understanding of events’ (1995, 7). It is, according to Leal, ‘more than anything else, an attitude toward reality’ (1995, 121).

The focus on difference as liberation allows for, what Faris sees as, the ‘potential for the development of female narrative [which] is in part an effect of defocalization, in which the authority of strictly mimetic realism is dissolved, so that alternative possibilities can be imagined’ (1995, 177). Where fantasy uses magic and the unreal to create new worlds, magical realism uses magic to describe that which currently exists, which in the case of the novels in this dissertation includes complex intersectional realities that have been forgotten, ignored or silenced. It is the acknowledgement of magic as something real, and simultaneously contentious, that sets up the environment within magical realist literature to overcome the binaries of fact and fiction, real and unreal, and the projection of dominant discourses of being correct or an error. As such, viewing magical realism through an intersectional lens emphasises intersecting power relations that fundamentally underly the realities of the characters explored in this paper. Intersectionality allows for difference to be regarded as the basis for empowerment as opposed to the reason for marginalisation.

Dehumanizing Trauma

Magical realism in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* functions to recognise, or establish where it is absent, a specifically Black, female testimony of personal and collective trauma due to slavery. Morrison's heart-breaking tale of the trauma women and mothers endured during slavery attempts to reclaim Black historical experiences of slavery for Black women. In *Beloved*, a young Black woman and runaway slave, Sethe, murders her daughter to save her from the horrors of slavery. The deceased baby *Beloved*, named after the only word on her tombstone that Sethe sexually pays for from the stone mason, manifests many years later as a ghost. Morrison revises the narrative history of slavery by emphasizing the perspective of a Black, female runaway slave as being not defined by slavery, but rather by her healing from it. Central to the novel is the way in which Sethe's trauma arises from the condition of being considered less than human due to the compounded oppressions of both gender and race. The ghost of *Beloved* becomes the catalyst for healing and represents the threshold for humanisation.

Crucial to *Beloved* is Morrison's emphasis that trauma, and the memories of traumatic events, is indescribable. Trauma, as '[Sethe] and Baby Suggs had agreed without saying so . . . [is] unspeakable' (Morrison 2007, 69). Contrary to Mary Paniccia Carden's claim that '[t]he captive body is rendered genderless' (1999, 403) as both male

and female bodies within the slave system are considered hardly human, I argue that the trauma Sethe faces is specifically defined by the compounded oppressions of race and gender. Based on real-life Margaret Garner – a runaway slave arrested for killing one of her children and attempting to kill the others rather than have them in the hands of the plantation owner – the tale is a harrowing example of the extent of trauma experienced by slaves and mothers. Though celebrated for her ‘willingness to risk everything for what was to her the necessity of freedom’ (2007, xi), Morrison states that the ‘historical Margaret Garner is fascinating, but, to a novelist, confining’ (xi). The runaway slave narrative is revised, Faris argues, as ‘Morrison endows a former slave woman with the right to violent action’ (2004, 200). In rewriting the slave narrative to include intersectional identities, Morrison highlights the potential for a future beyond the trauma, featuring the agency to act for survival and the survival of others, allowing *Beloved’s* slave narrative to become about healing.

Beloved attempts to fill in the gaps of history and address what parenthood for those affected by oppressions of gender and race would look like. Morrison emphasises that ‘[t]o render enslavement as a personal experience, language must get out of the way’ (2007, xiii). However, without language, the history that brought about the enslavement and consequential trauma is in danger of being forgotten or suppressed. Gina Wisker (2014) ar-

gues, '[r]ealism and testimony are a necessary response to centuries of silencing and a social habit of ignoring and denying experience. However, feelings, hopes, desires, and fears are a part of lived experience' (275). She implies that for slave narratives, a staunch dependence on realism fails to communicate the emotional side of the experience. Indeed, Rosemary Winslow (2004) argues that, in trauma literature, 'another world is created that is discontinuous: the trauma world . . . exists outside of the ordinary' (609). However, Morrison's emphasis is that it is not another world at all but rather very much rooted in the realness of this world, while nevertheless maintaining the distinctiveness of the experience of trauma, much like magical realism. Magic allows the opening of the world of the dead into the world of the living in order to explore the essence of race and gender-based violence and trauma for women and mothers during slavery, two distinctive categories as the latter requires an insurrectionary decision for slaves to become one.

Margaret Garner's story then becomes a limiting narrative for Morrison that does not address what it meant for a Black enslaved woman to decide to be a parent. Being a mother is a specific state of existence that is irreconcilable with slavery, where 'assertions of parenthood under conditions peculiar to the logic of institutional enslavement were criminal' (Morrison 2007, xi). As the property of white men, slaves had no right to their own bodies.

The women were viewed akin to animals, to function as breeders and 'have as many children as they can to please whoever owned them' (Morrison 2007, 247). The expectation to give birth but not mother renders Sethe's worth, and that of all female slaves, as purely economical for slave owners. Sethe defies the hierarchy conceptualised by white slave owners of slaves as animals by making decisions as a mother and taking ownership of her body. This alters the reading of slave women from a narrative of perpetual victimisation to one describing the attainment of freedom and agency, making it a novel about 'claiming ownership of that freed self' (Morrison 2007, 112).

The commodification of Black slaves as items to be bought, sold and possessed by white slave owners accentuates the racial dehumanisation of Black bodies in the novel. Sethe finds herself deconstructed into her separate features, emphasised when the Schoolteacher directs his students during a lesson to 'put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right' (2007, 229). Though she does not fully understand the implications of the action, her 'head itches like the devil. Like somebody was sticking fine needles in my scalp' (228), suggesting that Sethe recognises the human/animal distinction as pseudo-scientific, essentialised justifications that posit a hierarchy of race based on the conceptualisations of white slave owners.

There are also numerous instances of gendered dehumanisation in the novel where the sexual vulnerability of female slaves is emphasised. For example Sethe's mother, who is 'taken up many times by the crew [of slave ships] . . . threw [the babies] away . . . The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away. Without names, she threw them' (74). The women risk deep psychological trauma from having to carry and birth babies conceived from a dehumanised conception of black individuals, and more specifically, black women. In these instances, Morrison draws attention to the way in which female Black bodies are sexually vulnerable and at the mercy of white people for their worth, safety and identity. In having children with Halle, whom she considers her husband, Sethe attempts to transgress the imposed racial divisions, taking ownership of her body and her life. She creates a white wedding dress to mimic the marriage ceremony, wanting to create 'something to say it was right and true' (71). However, it is not up to her but rather her 'owners' to say whether 'it was alright for [Sethe and Halle] to be husband and wife' (71), emphasising that 'definitions belonged to the definers—not the defined' (225). The struggle to define herself plagues Sethe throughout the novel.

Dehumanised threefold—for being a woman, for being Black, and again for being a Black woman—Sethe is unable to bear the thought of her children going through

the same experience. The trauma Sethe feels is that of being a Black, runaway slave mother; It is specifically the condition of being a mother that her trauma acts upon. From the perspective of the white slave owners, Sethe's worth is of a breeding animal, a compounded state of gendered and racial oppressions. Therefore, Sethe's freedom from Sweet Home similarly means her freedom to be a mother. The taking of her breast milk which left Sethe with 'no nursing milk to call [her] own' (236) signified the theft of her ability to nurse, and hence, mother. The decision to kill her children is a radical reactionary act of mothering, stating her job as a mother is 'to know what is and to keep [her children] away from what I know is terrible' (194). The family system that Sethe aspires to build with Halle is a white family system, including a ceremony of sorts to signify a wedding, but most importantly, children born from love rather than rape. Stamp Paid, notes:

The more coloured people spent their strength trying to convince them how gentle they were, how clever and loving, *how human*, the more they used themselves up to persuade white of something Negroes believed could not be questioned, the deeper and the more tangled the jungle grew inside. But it wasn't the jungle blacks brought with them to this place from the other (liveable) place. It was the jungle white folks planted in them. (emphasis my own, Morrison 2007, 235)

The passage offers a psychoanalytical look at white racism, drawing on Franz Fanon's (1952) theory of the internalization of the white gaze whereby, 'Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect' (3). Sethe's aspiration to the white family system is an attempt to assert a racial equality that is violently prevented by the reactions of white folks' essentialised assumptions of an inherent Black animalism.

Sethe's act of infanticide is persistently considered as un-human. Witnessing Sethe's attempt to kill her children, the Schoolteacher believes that 'she'd gone wild, due to the mishandling of [his] nephew who'd overbeat her and made her cut and run' (Morrison 2007, 177). Similarly, after learning what she had done, Paul D tells her '[y]ou got two feet, Sethe, not four' (194). What Schoolteacher, and the others who pass judgement on Sethe, cannot understand is that her actions are intensely human, brought about by compounded oppressions enacted by white folk. The trauma that she experiences 'engenders a complex conceptualization of life and death' (Łobodzić 115), one that mimics the complexity of intersectionality and magical realism as defined by ambiguity and hybridity. It rewrites the typical perception of life being more desirable than death. Sethe recognises that her decision to 'put [her] babies where they'd be safe' (193) could never be explained; 'she could never close in, pin it down for anybody who had to ask. If they didn't get

it right off—she could never explain’ (192). She understands that the specific racial and gendered trauma she faces cannot be understood by those who did not face it. Sethe epitomises a revolutionary attitude towards the traditional slave narrative. Indeed, Morrison writes Sethe as a heroine who ‘would represent the unapologetic acceptance of shame and terror; assume the consequences of choosing infanticide; claim her own freedom (2007, xi). The apparition of her dead daughter is the catalyst for Sethe to assume agency over her life, after having accepted the consequences of infanticide, but never being able to forgive herself for it.

Voicing the Unspeakable

Beloved embodies the magical realist nature of duality with most elements in the novel appearing in opposite pairs: fact and fiction, past and present, victim and offender, slavery and freedom, dead and alive, child and woman, male and female, and human and animal. The dualistic forms are not mutually exclusive and hence complicate notions of binaries, presenting instead a fusion of contraries. Like all magical realism, the duality of fantasy and realism, is paramount to the novel. Morrison describes how ‘the acceptance of the supernatural and a profound rootedness in the real world at the same time with either taking precedence over the other . . . is indicative of the cosmology, the way in which Black people looked at the world’ (1984, 342). Stating that the experi-

ences of slaves has been historically discredited and ignored 'because Black people were discredited therefore what they knew was "discredited"' (342), magical realism then offers 'another way of knowing things' (342). Moreover, it similarly offers the opportunity for 'a radical critique of history' (Faris 2004, 138) where dominant narrative ignores the presence and experience of intersectional identities. Morrison's use of opposites brings attention to 'a desire for narrative freedom from realism . . . a critique of totalitarian discourses of all kind' (Faris, 1995, 180). In doing so, the novel represents complex identities more dynamically and accurately due to the inherent resistance to normative discourses.

The interjections of magic are Morrison's attempts to communicate the female emotional baggage of slavery and subsequent healing. Instances of magic in the novel are unassuming but pervasive, such as a baby's handprints in the cake and 'the house [itself] pitching' (Morrison 2007, 21). Even the arrival of the ghost of Beloved is undramatic, marked only by Sethe's unusually immense need to pass water, when her 'water broke' (239), a metaphorical birth. These instances are effortlessly integrated within the novel, with the magic diffused 'among different figures, so that the magic circulates through ordinary activities' (Faris 2004, 121), making it appear as if these moments of magic are commonplace.

Centred around 124 Bluestone Road, the household is the conduit for the ghost's powers, merging the histor-

ically female domestic space with the magical, situating women at the centre of the supernatural. Moreover, Daniel Erickson (2009) argues that ‘the spectral figure is not used as an ornamental or antirealist gesture, but instead underpins the entire narrative and its thematic structure’ (16). The unique form of the novel creates multiple narratives around the climactic revelation of Beloved’s murder in the middle (a kind of centre) of the novel. The circle Sethe constructs in the kitchen around the subject of Beloved’s death, which Paul D confronts her with, mimics the circle constructed by the multiple narratives in the novel describing their realities. Morrison places Beloved’s death, memory and ghost at the centre of the circle of narratives to convey the essence of Sethe’s trauma. However, importantly, Beloved is an absent centre as she is both there and not, real and unreal, human and inhuman. The central figure of the story is not Sethe, or Denver, but rather Beloved, ‘the murdered, not the murderer’ (xii), representing one ‘who lost everything and had no say in it’ (xiii).

The disjointed narrative where the concept of time is renegotiated is closely tied to the memory of trauma that is clouded and difficult for the victims to recall. In *Trauma Fiction*, Anne Whitehead (2004) argues that ‘the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms’ (3). It is only through the slow reveal, the oscillation from past to present and the disjointed accounts from numerous characters, none of which are prioritised over another,

that an understanding of the infanticide can occur. The multiple narratives provide the 'essence' of the communal slave experience that Morrison is attempting to convey. In *Beloved*, memory is given a physical dimension where it can be witnessed even by those whose memory it is not. Sethe explains this to Denver, describing a scene where, '[s]omeday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it's you thinking it up. A thought picture. But not. It's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else' (43); it is simultaneously a personal and communal memory. Winslow (2004) argues that '[a]lthough a traumatic event may happen to large groups of people, it always happens to each person—to each body, mind and spirit' (608). Sethe falls into the trap of thinking that with Paul D's arrival, '[h]er story was bearable because it was his as well—to tell, to refine and tell again' (Morrison 2007, 118). However, her story is specifically female and her own and cannot be told in tandem with Paul D's.

Memories, or rememories, are described as entities of their own that act out the pervasiveness of trauma and the difficulty to distinguish whose trauma it is in the case of widespread atrocities like the inter-generational trauma of slavery. The altered temporal dimensions of trauma in the novel reflect the hybridity of past and future, where the present is a space in between where the trauma can be redefined for the future. For Sethe, 'the

future was a matter of keeping the past at bay' (51). The arrival of Beloved's ghost forces Sethe to confront the past and create a narrative about the trauma on her own terms. Cathy Caruth (1996) defines trauma as something registered but not experienced, as it overwhelms the person who goes through it (4). The constant presence of memories and ghosts manifesting in physical spaces, like Beloved in 124 Bluestone Road, are examples of the confusion of notions of time and space and, therefore, of realism. The alteration of time is similarly representative of the characters' inability to confront their traumas directly, instead circling the issue through the narrative structure which alternates from past and present.

Notably, Sethe's perspective during the description of the murder is non-existent until closer to the end of the novel. Rather, it is told through the eyes of the school-teacher who viewed her and other slaves as '*creatures* God had given [him] the responsibility of' (emphasis my own, Morrison 2007, 176). His denial of humanity in comparing slaves as animals further emphasises the horror of the white perspective that sees infanticide only as a gruesome horror rather than the reaction to unspeakable trauma that it is, nor their hand in it. This is furthered by their ability to provide an explicit description of what they witness, making it clear that are unaware of the action being a consequence of trauma. As the events of trauma are unspeakable, the voices of those experiencing it are lost in their inability to describe it. Hence,

their healing and reclamation of their voice from that trauma must be achieved without a direct explanation of the event itself. The narrative is about what is yet to come, the hope of a redefined sense of self away from the imposed dehumanisation by white slave owners.

Who is Beloved?

Beloved uses magic specifically in the form of a ghost to depict the indescribable effects of trauma. Moreover, *Beloved* is a catalyst for partial healing from trauma. *Beloved*'s physical manifestation is the representation of the effects of trauma; she is the 'literalization of the haunting past' (Bast 2011, 1070). Ghosts, say Bennett and Royle (2009), 'are paradoxical since they are both fundamental to the human, fundamentally human, and a denial or disturbance of the human, the very being of the inhuman'" (160). As a ghost, *Beloved* is both real and unreal, human and inhuman. The tension between the real and unreal in magical realism complicates notions of reality and *Beloved*'s ghost is fundamental to that complexity. Erickson (2009) argues that 'while it is clear that we are reading about a ghost, it is referred to as if it were the reification of externalized sentient emotion, extended into physical space' (18). This becomes clearer when *Beloved*'s ghost is revealed to be constructed from a combination numerous of intergenerational traumas and the emotions of a spiteful, murdered baby girl compound into a single entity.

The ghost of Beloved is both the manifestation of Sethe's personal trauma from killing her child to save her from the hands of the slave owners and the collective trauma of slaves who suffered the 'middle passage'. The birth of Beloved's ghost is a consequence of past and present meeting and becomes both the hope for healing and reconciliation and the risk of traumatic repetition. Prior to Paul D's arrival, she is the spirit of a baby haunting 124 Bluestone Road. However, Paul D brings with him the memory, and the trauma, of Sweet Home. The disembodied chapters narrated in first person by Sethe, Denver, and Beloved (also referred to as 'lyrical chapters') describe Beloved's return to the world of the living after inhabiting the traumatic memory of being on a slave ship. Beloved describes the state of past and present playing out simultaneously where she states,

I am not separate from her [Sethe] there is no place where I stop her face is my own and I want to be there in the place where her face is and to be looking at it too a hot thing All of it is now it is always now there will never be a time when I am not crouching and watching others who are crouching too (Morrison 2007, 248)

The lack of periods and the blank spaces indicate a collective stream of consciousness, highlighting the effects of intergenerational trauma. Denver recognises that Beloved is not only her sister, noting that 'at times I think

she was—more' (314). With both Paul D's return into her life and Beloved's appearance, Sethe is given no choice but to confront the memories of her suffering and those of her ancestors. The passages emphasise that trauma cannot be captured through language and its limitations of grammar and expression. Both kinds of trauma are sustained and felt across generations and time and are beyond language and realism. Beloved represents slaves of different generations at all times.

The story is about Beloved's death, the very state of no longer being. Whether or not she returns as a ghost, she will always be outside the world of the living, breaking the boundaries between life and death. She is trauma personified, and 'fill[s] herself up with her mother's energies, drained her of her mix of love and guilt, and prevented her from realising her own self worth' (Wisker 2014, 270). Sethe's self-worth is tied with her decision to murder her children and struggles to recall that her decision was that of a mother and not, as everyone else sees it, that of an animal. The manifestation of Beloved's ghost allows the trauma to be described, as she is not a part of the world of the living, and additionally allows it to be felt as unambiguously Black and female, representing those who lost everything.

Intersectional Healing

The trauma Beloved represents is specifically a Black, female one that recalls violations of the female slave's

body and the consequences to their children. The lyrical passage in which Beloved's ghost describes the slave ship recounts the state of being one of the older women on the ships and subsequently being a woman who would have been about the age of Beloved had she survived. She is simultaneously woman, child, and baby. Moreover, by the end of the novel Beloved has 'taken the shape of a pregnant woman' (Morrison 308), implying that she has transcended from child and sister to mother. She is all women, in all different states, just like she is past and present simultaneously. The product of her presence is to revise the history she is born from, critiquing the events that created the trauma. Beloved's presence is the catalyst for the atonement and reconciliation of mother and daughter and the female community.

The community of women, who become Sethe's saviours, share the burden of her trauma as a mother and a former slave. When Beloved is exorcised, it is, 'the community's shared belief in magic that enables them to save Sethe from its negative effect' (Foreman 1995, 299). Beloved represents a past that would not let go of Sethe and could not be ignored by the community who, led by Ella, 'didn't like the idea of past errors taking possession of the present' (Morrison 2007, 302). Where Baby Suggs' preaching had once brought the community women together in the forest clearing for another kind of magic, Beloved now brings these women together again to repair the divide her death initially brought.

The link between mothers and daughters is emphasised as their trauma is shared between them. Faris (2004) argues that ‘the healing power of narration is celebrated in the lyrical passages where Sethe and Denver and Beloved speak their own histories’ (203), solidifying the relationship between them:

You are my sister
You are my daughter
You are my face; you are me. (Morrison 255)

It is a realm where speaking is not required. Nevertheless, Sethe demonstrates growth whereby she imagines explaining her actions to Beloved, whereas she had previously resigned herself to the belief that no one would understand. Similarly, earlier in the novel, Beloved causes Sethe to remember knowledge she had forgotten like that her mother experienced the transatlantic slave crossing first-hand. In these moments, she simultaneously experiences both the grief of being a daughter and losing a mother, and of being a mother who loses her daughter. Denver similarly feels the effects of Beloved’s return and subsequently Sethe’s guilt and shame, further emphasizing that the suffering of the mother is felt by the child. Though she cannot talk about her past without feeling pain, Sethe is surprised to find that she has an urge to do so to Beloved. When Sethe is able to finally recall memories of the murder, ‘what it took to drag the teeth of that saw under the little chin; to feel the baby

blood pump like oil in her hands' (295), it indicates the beginning of her healing from that trauma. It is through the reconciliation that begins with *Beloved's* manifestation and continues with the physical and emotional connections between *Beloved* and Sethe that Sethe is able to articulate personal narratives she was previously unable to voice. The physical reunion of all three women allows for partial healing of the atrocities they have suffered through acknowledgment of the events rather than their suppression.

Conclusion

Beloved demonstrates how magical realism is a crucial tool to articulate historical intersectional identities that have been suppressed or ignored. Magic in *Beloved* articulates a subjective voice of the experience of female-based violence and trauma during slavery. Sethe's trauma arises from the dual oppressions of race and gender and her healing from that trauma is similarly an intersectional experience, supported by a community of intersectional women where a belief in some form of magic is inherent in their culture. Magical realism represents a new way in which to portray their experiences, which takes into account their culture and beliefs, embedding it directly into the narrative form. The story Morrison tells aims to find within the traumatic history of slavery a specific narrative for Black female history. It is a narrative of trauma and healing, but most importantly about articu-

lating a suppressed and ignored narrative from the indescribable, where the Black body can take ownership of their body and actions, just as, Sethe takes back control of the narrative of her body from the slave owners.

Beloved uses magical realism to rewrite, articulate and create narratives of intersectionality to, not only acknowledge their importance, but additionally to accurately portray the complex realities of those facing compounded oppressions. The novel demonstrates the potential to describe complex realities by developing our reading of traditional forms of literary genres, such as magical realism, to coincide with developments of identity politics. Moreover, ignored and suppressed voices cannot be acknowledged solely with a subscription to literary realism without recognising its complicity in the suppression of marginalised and intersectional voices. Hence, magic, which inherently defies the rules of realism, can reveal the fiction of the dominant discourse and construct accurate narratives of complex intersectional narratives. In using the term ‘intersectional magical realism’, which I have defined as magical realist fiction that uses magic in a world rooted in realism to present an opportunity for unspecified intersectional identities to be explored without disbelief and/or resistance, I have emphasised how magical realism sets up the environment in which new conceptualisations of gender, race, sexuality, class and identity can be imagined and represented.

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