

Trauma Ebbs and Flows in Kopano Matlwa's *Evening Primrose*

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Abstract—In consequence of the suffering endured by their country during the colonial era, South African “Born Free” authors have openly output and published their explicit writings as a socio-political critique of the brutal colonial practices. These dehumanizing, brutal actions have violently emerged along various social axes, including abusive gang-violations, slavery, starvation policies, apartheid, and education deprivation, to regard a few. In theory, these severely malicious practices controversially prone the victim, who has been affected by one of them, to trauma. But they are, as investigated by other researchers, not wholly but partly reflected in Kopano Matlwa's *Evening Primrose*. The current article, purposely, endeavors to affirm the traumatic agonies from which the fiction's central persona has been greatly suffered for a number of reasons, gang-rape being the foremost among them. To itemize trauma-agitational ordeals, the paper will referentially invoke Cathy Caruth's certain correspondent elicitations concerned with trauma and its inveterate memories to draw on. Thus, in the analysis process, the paper will methodologically set out to centralize the scope of its framework on Sigmund Freud's ‘denial’ and also Dominick LaCapra's comprehensive views on ‘acting out,’ sticking to different works by these two theorists in addition to making a reference to Caruth's contributive trauma explorations. This is to conclusively see whether the traumatized characters' memories will continue to be flowed or coped with throughout the foregoing fiction.

Index Terms—*Evening Primrose*, sexual assault, trauma, denial, acting-out

I. INTRODUCTION

In the very recent past, a new wave of intellectual authors has arisen in South African literature. These authors, generally referred to as the “born free” movement of literary thought, initially originated, or were approaching maturity, around the time of the apartheid administration's demise (Winstanley, 2018). Politically speaking, Babou Ngom (2019) finds that these authors have rationally deconstructed the uphill socio-cultural dilemmas that burdened many African indigenous peoples under the ideologies of imperialistic regimes. They have notably thematically framed their writing subjects against the chronological documentation of troubling physical abuse. They have strategically polarized the light of their production literature to such political xenophobic facts in a hopeful attempt to de-cover South Africa's “apartheid,” or as it is commonly known, “institutionalized racism” (Mamadou, 2019, p. 2063). The work in apartheid policies was formally revoked in 1994, as it was symbolically well-known. As a result, the country has been heralded with the establishment of governmental democratic institutions.

Omar M. Abdullah (2020) sees that “there is still, far reaching racial and social discrimination between the blacks and whites from one hand and the blacks themselves from the other hand in Democratic South Africa” (p. 490). These socio-political destabilizations have been sarcastically spotlighted in the outspokenly social genuine critiques of the “born free” party. True, these facts are outside the scope of the research's main goal, but they do, in one crucial way or another, have the smooth possibilities of traumatic perturbations. Wan Roselezam Wan Yahya and Ruzbeh Babae (2014) see that authors believe that it is part of their contributive patriotic duties to highlight these historical disorganizations which underscore their “cultural and political role in a traumatized society” (p. 1825). Assumedly, these aching truths must be willingly read in order for the public “to understand the political and social realities in which I am situated and which will wound me no matter how adamantly I deny it [sic]” (Caruth, 1995, p. 109).

As a “born free” member, Matlwa has narratively thematized parts of these social vices in her gynocritical fictional oeuvre, *Evening Primrose* (2018). Although it was reputedly announced by the publisher that “*Evening Primrose* explores issues of race, gender, and the medical profession with tenderness and urgency” (Quercus, 2018, para. 1), the present paper repairs to considerably reflect traumatic psychological disorders that befall victims numerously.

To express its investigative endeavor, the study is conceptually limited to identify the way a traumatic experience is tried to be denied but is abruptly reacted-out again. As so, it will take advantage of the sufferingly broken down

characters' states of mind after experiencing trauma to see in what demonstrative sense these two concepts are applicable to *Evening Primrose*.

However, Matlwa is a young South African novelist who was brought into the world in 1985, while racial segregation was at its height. Occupationally, she, noticeably, has made a name for herself in the world of literature. Matlwa is a doctor and factionalist all at once. Her writings are extensively tended to sociocultural, racial, political, and most importantly, psychological subject matters. That is why Rowan Hisayo Buchanan writes that "Matlwa's voice is one we need" (qtd. in Quercus, 2018, para. 2). Since beginning her writing career, she has fictionalized three works, including *Coconut* (2007), *Spilt Milk* (2010), and finally, *Evening Primrose* (2018), on the latter of which the current research purposely draws to coin and discuss the idea of its subject.

Evening Primrose is Matlwa's latest trauma fiction. It consecutively follows the traumatic journey of its narrator and main but most psychologically tormented character, Masechaba. In fact, it was first published in 2016 under the title *Period Pain*, but it was then renamed to the current title. According to the publisher's suggestions, this empirical change is to generalize the subjects the novel covers and not to make it understood as a feminist novel (Quercus, 2018). Masechaba dreams of being a helpful and kind doctor, hoping to treat her country's sick people and reduce the rate of frequent cases of death there. She was barbarously gang-raped during the internship. As a result, the effects of trauma have disordered her mental organization and memory until she gives birth to Mpho, the newborn female baby who will not know her real father(s). In repeated attempts to get rid of her seemingly unabated traumatic memories, Masechaba employs Freud's *denial*, a defense mechanism through which a distressed subject automatically reassures themselves that nothing has recently truly happened at all. Nevertheless, she has regrettably failed in doing so, supposedly because of the approach of LaCapra's acting-out that makes Masechaba, periodically, live with the flashback of the incident's outrageous repetitions. Based on these traumatic observations, the idea for the present study was conceptually descended.

Researchably, some researchers, however, have newly covered this work of fiction under different perspectives. For instance, before being titled as *Evening Primrose*, Laura Winstanley, in her "The Re-emergence of South African Nationalism in Kopano Matlwa's *Period Pain*" (2018) has politically viewed this trauma oeuvre as an illustrative critique against "the rise of new nationalism, and the re-emergence of old nationalisms which never fully disappeared" (Winstanley, 2018, p. 56). Critically, she believes that this fictional text was mainly purposely written to highlight global and local apartheid issues, the most prominent amongst which are, xenophobia, anti-African immigrants into European white countries. For Winstanley, the novel, contextually, attempts to dissolve colonial and dictator thoughts generally, that is on the one hand. On the other hand, it seemingly tries to completely open the doors of hopes altogether in face of South African individuals who have too long dreamt of achieving the success "of the rainbow nation – the idea that all ethnicities are welcome in South Africa, stressing the positive aspects of postcolonial nationalism – and the immediate aftermath of apartheid" (Winstanley, 2018, p. 57). However, she concludes her paper by claiming that Matlwa's fiction considers the significant possible strategies of establishing a new South Africa away from the old one that was killed by and suffered from poverty.

Moving seamlessly to the feminist perspective, this novel was examined in relation to other literary texts authored by South African writers. Manifestly, Jessica Murray, in her critical paper entitled "Violence and the Gendered Shaming of Female Bodies and Women's Sexuality" (2019), has counterfactually looked at this trauma narrative through the theoretical scope of feminism, asserting that the general traits of feminist bodies should be celebrated, not ashamed of. Along with the other text(s) the research analytically includes, Murray (2019) finds that Matlwa's aforementioned oeuvre was appropriately created on the purpose of reflecting "how discursive and epistemological constructions of gender create an environment where gender violence becomes the norm rather than an aberration" (p. 1). Eventually, through this socio-feminist article, Murray (2019) believes the real shame is to belittle women for being born with the gifted privilege of congenital PMS-ing. As a conclusion, feminist private traits should be praised by both sexes because they are naturally bestowed upon women.

Again, Omar Mohammed Abdullah has also investigated the work from a trauma perspective. In conceptualizing his "From Trauma to Recovery: Mending Wounds in Kopano Matlwa's *Evening Primrose*" (2020), Abdullah applicably uses LaCapra's *working through* to (rightly) find if Masechaba, Matlwa's traumatized heroine, transcendently recovered from her aching psychological troubles. Similar to the above reviewed works, Abdullah (2020) asserts "[t]he novel discusses trauma as a consequence of political and personal issues" (p. 494). South Africa's sociopolitical upheavals are historically established, and thus, these facts cannot be denied. In consequence of so, these turmoils become presently smoothly exposed through the expressive writings of South African authors, profusely in recent trauma literature and studies. Basing on these chronological facts, Abdullah (2020) has theoretically framed his paper, arguing that "Masechaba the heroine is subjected to traumatic experiences not only for personal reasons but also for public political reasons because of the insecurity in the country" (p. 494). Thus, he is right to claim that Masechaba's trauma was mainly stemmed from the gang-rape she had been bodily and further psychologically affected by. But through her employment of LaCapra's *working through*, Masechaba could strikingly overcome her traumas, using her female newborn, Mpho, as a helpful protector who enables her to live away from the flows of her traumatic memories (Abdullah, 2020). Despite Abdullah's detailed study from a trauma theory perspective, he also failed to explore it through Freud's *denial* or LaCapra's *acting-out*. All the above-reviewed research has researchably overlooked the

narrative's examination through the specific concepts forming the basis of this paper. Nevertheless, this is the claimed gap the current paper strives to analytically fill and demonstrate through its upcoming sections.

II. TRAUMA, DENIAL AND ACTING OUT: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A. Trauma

Due to the obvious rise in phobias and their subsequent impact on the human psyche, trauma has undeniably become a vital subject of research throughout the years, and it is now being explored in a range of aspects all over academic psychological studies. Furthermore, trauma becomes today's debate which re-narrates the world's unforgettable experiences. In this regard, Yahya and Babae (2014) write "[b]y the events such as the Holocaust and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima, trauma became (...) the experience of the second half of the twentieth century" (p. 1826). As a term, trauma was allusively derived from the Greek nomenclature of *traumatikos* (literally "wound" or an existing "physical or sexual abuse"), declares Bessel van der Kolk (2014, p. 159; emphasis added). Nick Mдика Hubert Tembo (2017) adds that term of trauma was first appeared in the late 1800s "through the works of three thinkers: Pierre Janet, Jean-Martin Charcot, and Sigmund Freud" (p. 11). These three expert individuals have developmentally investigated hysteria's causes and its reflected consequences in their own environments (Herman, 1992). However, from a psychological approach, trauma is, as an alluded term, used on a purpose of identifying the dangers of "social and psychological injuries to the mind and spirit" (Mollica, 2009, p. 36). Similarly, Jameel Alghaberi and Sanjay Mukherjee (2022) add that "trauma, either imagined or real, is a phenomenon that abruptly and harmfully affects collective and individual identity" (p. 642). This extensively indicates that trauma fragments and further threatens not only one's psychological regulation or health but also one's sociocultural identity. This concept supports Judith Herman's belief that trauma is about various un-expected incidents that "overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning" (Herman, 1992, p. 33). Again, with certainty of her hypothetical presented point, these witnessed incidents do unmistakably have the ability to harm and "destroy (...) the belief that one can be oneself in relation to others" (Herman, 1992, p. 53). As a result, the victim did survive the experience of trauma, although the permanent influence of trauma dramatically modifies the afflicted patient's cognitive and emotional existence, according to Herman. Likewise, she denounces traumatic situations that typically include life-threatening conditions or bodily personal dignity, or perhaps even a strong interpersonal "encounter with violence and death" (Herman, 1992, p. 44). They expose humankind to the extremes of self-doubt, despondency, insecurity, and horror, eliciting disaster reactions in the sufferer's identity, society, feelings, and flashbacks, which become fragmented as a result. Hence, trauma, according to Herman (1992), "tears apart a complex system of self-protection" (p. 34) that likely operates in an improved manner.

Along with the theorists' explanations, trauma emerged as an important and active discipline of research and literary theory in the last years of the 20th century, whereas a group of theorists proceeded to make adjustments to medical suggestions about precognitive traumatic patterns and adapt these new thoughts to the assessment of written discourse, launching what is still known as literary trauma studies. Yet most importantly, Silvia Pellicer-Ortín (2015) affirms that these studies help one to "discover these wounds in the words provided by the literary texts, as well as in non-literary accounts, dealing with traumatic experiences" (p. 6). Cathy Caruth's *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), a milestone and consistent source of respect in the formation of trauma empirical studies of critical theory, remains apart from those authors, declares Tom Toremans (2003). This is particularly with regard to her other groundbreaking efforts as a researcher, such as *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996). Caruth expresses her assertions in each of these influential works, depending mainly on Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Moses and Monotheism*, and *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, which she influentially reviewed and cited. Her purpose is to broaden literary comprehension via an examination of harrowing traumatic experiences since "literature, like psychoanalysis," she assumedly believes, draws on "the complex relation between knowing and not knowing" (Caruth, 1996, p. 3). Accordingly, Ronald Granofsky (1995) claims that "trauma novel" appears to shed theoretical lights on these phenomenon (p. 11). To elaborate, Caruth (1996) basically initializes by defining trauma in general as "an injury inflicted on a body" (p. 3). Since then, she goes on to more accurately define trauma as an intensive reaction "to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully comprehended at the time of occurrence, but return later in flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena" (1996, p. 91).

B. Anna Freud and Denial

Sigmund Freud initially postulated 'defence mechanisms' towards the ego's real conflict with excruciatingly "painful" facts (Freud, 1953, p. 249). Following that, Anna Freud detailed these adaptive defenses in her seminal work, *The Ego and the Mechanism of Defense* (2018). An injured subject, for Freud (1953), resorts sometimes to "an energetic denial of the ailments of which the patient has complained, or in an assurance that he can do something, or in a command to preform it" (p. 111). To relieve the melancholic impact of a particular traumatic ordeal, the patient accidentally distracts himself with other thoughts or actions just to deny the traumatic event he/she has formerly been affected by. Furthermore, Freud, in his *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1955), finds that a patient "employs the dream to deny these stimuli" of a memorable grievous experience he or she has had in hopes of depriving "it of its reality" (p. 93). Herewith,

a patient falsifies the truth of the traumatic ailment by viewing it as a temporal dream. Like Freud, Anna Freud (2018) has meaningfully advanced the term, adding “[w]hen we find denial, we know that it is a reaction to external danger” (p. 78). As such, a traumatically victimized subject psycho-mechanically avoid thinking of or remembering the unpleasure and unwelcome stressful atrocities it has encountered before. Thus, she defines this psychological defense mechanism as “the denial of reality” (Freud, 2018, p. 63).

C. Dominick LaCapra and Acting-Out

Dominick LaCapra, in his *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2014), describes the reliving repetition of trauma recalls as *actin-out*. Besides, he assertively announces that the various reactions of post-traumatic disorders are inseparably gathered to form a futuristic repetition or acting-out the distressful ghost of the agonized “narrator’s confused memories” (LaCapra, 2014, p. 32). In an interview with LaCapra, Amos Goldberg documents that a traumatized individual, sometimes, feels as if he becomes mentally unfastened of trauma, “but it’s especially important with respect to events (or a series of events), that are heavily charged with emotion and value, and that always bring out an implication of the observer in the observed” (LaCapra, 1998, p. 1). So, a victimized observer, advisably, entertains himself a way of a traumatic incident, otherwise, it will timely be flashbacked as long as a victim lives. To this extent, Soumaou Bouacida (2021) theoretically agrees with LaCapra’s elaborations on a traumatic memory by suggesting “that the effects of trauma may extend beyond the immediate victims” (p. 400). This implies that trauma (as an event) has futuristic consequences that may not only befall one at the time of the event but may also perpetually extend to the rest of one’s life. Nevertheless, it can practically be avoided by employing “what LaCapra describes as “empathic unsettlement” (Fernandez, 2019, p. 88). Empathic unrest necessitates a cognitive, self-reflective separation from prior personal encounters so that one can hopefully counteract the harmful impacts of obsessively reproducing (acting out) various historical troubles currently. This pivotal self-reflective displacement prevents unlimited verification with cause and consequence, allowing for new normative reactions in the “now with openings for the future” (LaCapra, 2014, p. 22). Another strategic means for transcending trauma and its memories is the narrative of an incident’s details to others. In investigating the concept, Kate Schick (2011) finds that acting-out “also prepares the way for a narrative reconstruction of what has happened; a reconstruction that should be communicated to those who did not experience the trauma(s) in order to facilitate reflection on accepted social practices” (p. 13). Thus, as a sum, acting-out is a repeatedly reliving narrative process of trauma that has befallen a victim before. Through narrative, LaCapra (1998) believes that a patient, to some extent, can diminish the severity of trauma impact that was brought about him/her.

Based on Caruth’s captions concerned with trauma (as a theory), as well as Freud and Anna’s concept of denial and LaCapra’s psycho-mental process of acting out, the framework/idea of the present paper was theoretically formulated. The study will investigate the selected oeuvre under trauma perspective to see how trauma befalls the victimized character/s after experiencing gang-rape accidents. It is also to demonstrate how the ebb of trauma memories is sometimes unconsciously declined when the sufferers turn on the key of Freud and Anna’s denial with the intention of falsifying the actualities of the heinous accidents they have endured. Finally, it is, however, to conceivably identify the abrupt flows of trauma ordeals that are intolerably re-acted out to fill the injured characters’ brains with their depressive memories.

III. DISCUSSION

A. Trauma Representation Through Matlwa’s *Evening Primrose*

This section is presented on the chief purpose of showing trauma through the words and deeds of the unfairly most traumatized figure, Masechaba. In the initial part of the current study, it is said that sexual assaults the key reasons for traumatic occurrences. Profoundly, Allen (2005) argues “[s]exual trauma, such as rape, interferes more directly with sexual arousal and pleasure” (p. 148). Hence, it is important to have in mind that trauma is not only experienced because of war veterans or the horrors of the Holocaust, but also by “a wide variety of other experiences, such as rape, child abuse auto and industrial accidents, and so on” (Caruth, 1996, p. 58).

After all, the debatable matter seems clear that rape is one of the most dangerous traumatic causes. Rape destroys the victim’s memory, and it will “repeatedly” happen “like a waking memory” despite being a long time ago after the experience (Caruth, 1995, p. 152). However, it is too sad to say that Masechaba, the most actively appeared and traumatically suffered character throughout Matlwa’s fiction, *Evening Primrose*, was savagely violated by three abusive raptures, who brought about her psychological dilemmas till her childbirth (Abdullah, 2020, p. 494).

Masechaba, the narrator of novel, opens the third part of her story with a short quote from *Jeremiah*. By doing so, Matlwa gives a pragmatic sign that Masechaba has undoubtedly been traumatized. The cited words, representatively, describe Masechaba’s state of heartbreak:

I say to myself, I will not mention His name, I will speak in His name no more. But then, it becomes like a fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones. I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it. (Matlwa, 2018, p. 52)

In terms of language, trauma disorganizes the human psyche, making some extended traumatic experiences unforgettable even though the victim is healed from them. In other words, trauma is a memorable experience and,

further, lives throughout its patient's life. Likewise, a traumatized individual, particularly an abused woman, "stubbornly persists in bearing witness to some forgotten wound" (Caruth, 1996, p. 6). As she was raped, Masechaba was traumatized, and then, she became unable to sleep well ever since. As such, she sadly utters: "03:02 [the time at which she was raped] What is it about this time of night that drags me from sleep, pulls my eyelids open, shakes my mind awake? There were three men, and they divided me in two. Or was it three times two?" (Matlwa, 2018, p. 58). In accordance with such stately descriptive words, Masechaba's mind seems completely controlled by the incident's repetitive pursuing memories.

Herman (1992) avows that powerlessness and sleeplessness are symptomatic outcomes of traumatic horrible attack, which damages one's intellectual settlement, reaching the "points of surrendering" (p. 42) in front of trauma. It is exactly what Masechaba suffers from. Similarly, she does not find any kind of rest during her sleep, and if she sleeps, she will be attacked and waken up by the nightmares of the gang-rape she has forcedly encountered.

Again, the moment Masechaba was raped, she wished she "could look inside and see if anything's broken" loudly moaning: "I was raped" (Matlwa, 2018, p. 66). Through these implicative words, the research finds that Masechaba's trauma was unmistakably caused by the violent incident of rape. With this justified accordance, Caruth (1995) assertively adds, "[t]o be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an [injuring] image or event" (pp. 4-5). This case is also evidenced through the text, as Masechaba hugely shouts, "the thoughts in my head begin to move at an ever-increasing pace and there seem to be others threatening to start a conversation in my mind" (Matlwa, 2018, p. 50). Overall, Freud (1922) believes that the ghost of a traumatic incident will live and share the victim's life even when asleep, as he theorizes:

[T]he patients suffering from traumatic neuroses are much occupied in waking life with the recollection of what happened to them. They perhaps strive rather not to think of it. To regard it as self-evident that the dream at night takes them back to the situation which has caused the trouble is to misunderstand the nature of dreams. It would be more in correspondence with that nature if the patient were presented (in sleep) with images from the time of his normal health or of his hoped-for recovery. If we are not to go thoroughly astray as to the wish-fulfilment tendency of the dream in consequence of these dreams of the shock neuroses, perhaps the expedient is left us of supposing that in this condition the dream function suffers dislocation along with the others and is diverted from its usual ends, or else we should have to think of the enigmatic masochistic tendencies of the ego. (p. 9)

Similarly, although she resistantly tries to withstand the trauma, the strong consequences of the incident, robustly and repeatedly, cause her to fail. By turning this view to Masechaba's state, she is, of course, traumatized. The way she speaks, imagines, thinks, and behaves makes one feel that Masechaba is trying to get out of her traumatic prison. Finally, one cannot pass without noting that Masechaba's psyche is almost totally fragmented, especially when she wishes her dead brother, Tshiamo, was still alive.

To Caruth, traumatized individuals suffer from psychological and emotional disorganizations. They act unconsciously and do not know what exactly they want. What is more hurtful, they do heartlessly desire as if they can "bring back the[ir] dead" (1995, p. 73). Those who desire so, hypothetically, seek mental and emotional liberation from trauma and its depressive grip on memory. Like Caruth, Sam Durrant (2004) states that trauma patients "attempt to summon the dead and lay them to rest" (p. 9). Thus, Masechaba needs Tshiamo to be "too near him" (Matlwa, 2018, p. 75), so he may feel solace for her and then she will be amused as she was before, in spite of her knowledge of his death. So now, there is still no way to disagree with Caruth's views on traumatized individuals, whose ways of action are partly applicable to Masechaba's distressful states. Consequently, she, consequently, goes on to defensively activate what Freud has conceptually termed as denial in the hope of vanquishing her traumatic past, whose ghosts seem not to hand her off.

B. Denying a Traumatic Occurrence in Evening Primrose

A traumatic memory is the ghost that overwhelms one's past and ultimately affects their future life. A traumatized character is constantly irritated by the memory of a humanistically or environmentally traumatic event until s/he "overcomes" their reaction to that misfortune experience (Freud, 1953, p. 260). Due to the powerful psychological stress and blunt-force trauma, a tormented individual will employ a variety of strategies to overcome, forget or at least diminish the traumatic stress affecting their psychological behavior and conditions. Accordingly, Anna Freud (2018) finds that *denial* represents a massive part of these strategies. Textually, Masechaba, at the first moments of her rape, tries to misinterpret the real encounter of the incident, mistakably claiming that it was just a "bad dream" and "[e]verything will be fine" (Matlwa, 2018, p. 54). In hoping so, Masechaba seems to console herself by herself. Again, Anna Freud (2018) touches the biological fact that when a person is in depressible trouble, their psychological defenses, unconsciously, "mitigate the trouble" (p. 149). Like so, Masechaba's defence mechanism of denial is presented involuntarily, making her "pretend to forget, to be fast asleep" (Matlwa, 2018, p. 75). Yet, although she avoidably feigns forgetfulness, the living flashbacks of her traumatic past refuse to get out of her mind so she can live freely.

As a victim is sexually abused or emotionally frustrated, trauma will be his/her ultimate fate. Thus, that victim, physically, performs as if they are unaffected by trauma. Moreover, Freud (1953), through an experimental treatment of one depressed patient, observed that "the patient refused to have any further treatment" (p. 120) due to his "fear of distressing mental conflicts" (1953, p. 154). Denial is activated in a significant way to motivate the depressed individual

to become aware of being psychologically interfered with. Likewise, it helps the agonized subject get rid of any memorable traumatic experiences tentatively. That is why Masechaba believes in her false-portrait, arguing that “I wasn’t raped” (Matlwa, 2018, p. 71). She feels so because she imagines the incident has attackingly come in the form of a dream as a heavenly moral punishment for caressing herself before by “putting my fingers where I shouldn’t” (Matlwa, 2018, p. 11).

To put it theoretically, Anna Freud (2018) denotes that injured figures sometimes realize that the psychologically eating disorders of the trauma they have had will definitely end. But, to make it worse, this feeling is just to deny the or at least diminish the pains they feel. In accordance with this announcement, the study agrees that Masechaba, as part of the analysis process, tries to overcome the traumatic wounds she has had by confirming that each single/simple incident will defiantly be suspended. As an evident, she monologues herself, saying, “[i]t won’t last. Yes, from time to time there’s an incident here and there, but it’s definitely on the decline. Things are getting better (Matlwa, 2018, p. 84). This argument is to alleviate the flowing pain caused by the rape trauma she experienced by activating the defensive factor of ebb or denial.

According to Freud (1922), a forced victim of any “sexual assault” (p. 41) identifies him/herself as indigenious, powerless, and ashamed. Besides that, it feels lost emotionally and rationally. Along with these observations, Anna Freud (2018) adds, “[t]he patient himself resists these emotions and feels ashamed, humiliated, and so forth, when they manifest themselves against his will” (p. 18). Hence, Masechaba is abusively compelled to have had the trauma of rape. Ideally, she has no effective defensive means of overcoming trauma rather than denying it. Thereafter, a traumatically violated Masechaba gets her way straightforwardly “to denial in order not to become aware of some painful impression from without” (Freud, 2018, p. 89). Similarly, she monologues herself, hallucinating that if she was really deflowered, the process would take only a few minutes. So, she thinks there is no harmful, problematic complex to be worried about. In accordance with all, Bouacida (2021) affirms that “the effects of the traumatic experience are felt tardily through hallucinations, flashbacks, or nightmares” (p. 400). This is why she continually encounters with the traumatic accident of violation she has endured. Thus, she even “couldn’t sleep for days” (Matlwa, 2018, p. 22) because of the attacking flow of the traumatic memories she suffered from the moment she was forcedly deflowered (as will be explained in the upcoming section). Nevertheless, she denies the existence of the rape occurrence entirely, claiming “[t]hat these sorts of things wouldn’t happen to me” (Matlwa, 2018, p. 72). Again, she consoles herself by claiming that she has only “had a bad dream” (Matlwa, 2018, p. 60) that will end as she wakes up. Clearly, till the current point, Masechaba tries to refuse the actual event of her traumatic experience in hopes of alleviating the painful effect of its chronic memory. But, as long as she attempts, she will utterly fail, because this methodological treatment is tentative. As a final result, a traumatic flashback will repetitively re-act out.

C. Trauma Acting Out Through Masechaba’s Memory

By remarking on traumatic memories, Caruth (1995) writes that “as the memories are restored to the self-representation, and owned up to, (...) pain is experienced” (p. 87). In light of this exploration, trauma is reliving the moment the victim rethinks about. Like Caruth, Alghaberi and Mukherjee (2022) describe “the traumatic experience as a fixed and timeless photographic negative stored in an unlocatable place of the brain” and is flowed when “remembering (...) the collective past” (p. 642). Distinctly, Masechaba describes her unforgettable traumatic sufferings, saying: “when I’m forgetting, drifting into mindlessness, I’m jolted by a breath on the back of my neck, a breath like the one that breathed on me before grabbing me from behind and bringing my legs to the floor” (Matlwa, 2018, p. 57). Here, Masechaba, illustratively, re-narrates the incident of her trauma that was foremost caused by a savage sexual violation. A trauma victim sometimes seems both emotionally and intellectually fragmented by the painful stories he has witnessed or experienced before. Therefore, he will start to memorably reveal how and what he has exactly been traumatized by on the hope of “find[ing] ways and means” of recover (LaCapra, 1999, p. 696). By considering her aforesaid words, Masechaba seems to describe her traumatic experience precisely. This descriptive narration, according to LaCapra (2014), is a representation of acting out.

Like Freud and Caruth, LaCapra (2014) argues that “in a traumatic memory, the event is repeated in its comprehensible, unreadable literally” (p. 92). Through this, disordering traumatic presences influence one’s professional intellectuality, fragmenting his/her psychological regulative conditions and confusing the rational awareness. Ideally, words are capable of expressing trauma exploration, reflecting what the victim interiorly feels (Caruth, 1996; LaCapra, 2014). Alike, the re-rising memories of Masechaba’s trauma are expressively explored through the words she repeatedly hallucinates with and the ways she describes her past status, narrating: ““I was raped.” (...) I’m still being raped even now, even when I’m not. I can’t say when one stopped and the other began. I am being rape” (Matlwa, 2018, p. 66). Here, it is justifiably clear that the trauma of the gang-sexual abuse Masechaba has suffered from is workably still reacting out, “shrug[ing] my head off and inch away from me” (Matlwa, 2018, p. 75). In spite of the defence mechanism of denial she periodically activates, Masechaba’s terrifying thoughts about the time of her de-virginity snap her from the inside. These thoughts cause her new heartbreaking conflict, transporting her to the past time and place where the incident occurred.

Traumatic memories do have the capacity to kill or destroy the victim “from the inside” (Caruth, 1995, p. 66). Such a case is apparently thematized by Masechaba, who miserably laments herself, wailing, “I am dead inside” (Matlwa, 2018, p. 73). So, one can notice that Masechaba’s traumatic power of restored remembrance fragments her psychological

regulation and, besides, confuses her thoughts. Notably, it “drags me from sleep, pulls my eyelids open, shakes my mind awake” (Matlwa, 2018, p. 58). Clearly, it is not sleep that enables one to forget or overcome his traumatic past, since it is contemporary just like the matter in denial.

Acting out trauma, as LaCapra elaborates, makes the survival unable to differentiate between its past and present time(s). Most likely, this clashing conflict occurs in an iterative form, statically, busying the victim’s thoughts with the acting out of his or her traumatic ordeal. To merely describe a trauma patient’s disordering case, LaCapra (2014) adds:

[T]he person tries to gain critical dis-tance on a problem and to distinguish between past, present, and future. To put the point in drastically oversimplified terms: for the victim, this means the ability to say to oneself: “Yes, that happened to me back then. It was distressing, overwhelming, perhaps I can’t entirely disengage myself from it, but I’m existing here and now, and this is different from back then”. (pp. 143-144)

In a commentary accordance with that, a trauma victim openly narrates what he/she has witnessed. It is, perhaps, to diminish the effect of the event or to make others aware of it. However, the patients do not always inform others about the excruciating consequences of the incident unless they achingly revisit them. This continuous narrative, according to LaCapra (1999), is a restart of trauma remembrances, which means the entire details of the gang-rape “may conceivably be reactivated” (p. 700). Such a harmful case is similarly demonstrated throughout Matlwa’s currently discussed novel, certainly in her revelation to her mother, friend Nyasha, colleagues, Dr. Phakama, Dr. Haffejee, and others. Furthermore, she memorably but suddenly reports the time of her overwhelming experience to herself, insofar as she soliloquizes herself, saying:

I don’t know why I bother.

03:02 . . . 03:02 . . . 03:02

What is it about this time of night that drags me from sleep, pulls my eyelids open, shakes my mind awake?

There were three men and they divided me in Two? Or was it three times two 03:02 . . . 03:02 . . . 03:02 . . . time after time. (Matlwa, 2018, p. 58)

Here, Masechaba describes the ominous time at which she was barbarously and forcedly deflowered. She cannot completely transcend or heal all of her traumatic turmoils, owing to the capabilities of unexpected attacks related to the time of the rape, her unwanted pregnancy, and their seemingly terrifying consequences. To specify the applicable perspective of acting out and Masechaba’s trauma, which she attempts to act out, LaCapra (2014) believably declares that any form of “rape, and various forms of victimization and abuse” (p. x) takes almost a while, but it will consecutively have futuristic impacts on the sufferer. The most seriously impactful legacy of Masechaba’s traumatic sexual violation is a refusal or disobedience to free her memory from its dreary occurrence.

Again, her trauma has recklessly befallen her “in the past but may still be recaptured and reactivated, with significant differences, in the present and future” (LaCapra, 2014, p. 147). Even Masechaba herself seems intellectually confused by this fact, thinking about how not to be reminded of her malady when she sees her bastard female child, Mpho. Like so, she hardly realises that “there seem to be others threatening to start a conversation in my mind” (Matlwa, 2018, p. 57). In this sense, she understands that denial is useless, but further investigation is required. At this literarily considerable point, LaCapra’s asserted idea of acting out trauma is actualized through Masechaba’s examined words and states. Verifiably, his assertion that trauma remains and lives for a long time and sometimes continues as long as its suffered patient lives is clearly applied to Masechaba, who rightly thinks that her daughter is an observable memorial result of the gang-rape she fiercely harmed by and suffered from. Thus, she, counterfactually, fails to obliterate neither the actualities of her rape nor their extensive and progressive memories. This failure is tragically and reasonably evidenced when she utterly puts it, raising that “denial [... is a] strange word. The refusal to admit the truth” (Matlwa, 2018, p. 65) of her traumatic sexual ravishment. As a result, she submissively admits that trauma will bitterly act out throughout the rest of her conflicting life. Here, Masechaba will undeniably feel ashamed each time she looks at her daughter and vice versa. This is because she, assumedly, “remains possessed or haunted by the past” (LaCapra, 2014, p. 46).

IV. CONCLUSION

The present paper is formulated to demonstrate how the trauma of rape befell the selected fiction’s most played character, Masechaba, and how she defensively tried to go beyond it by employing Freud’s defense mechanism device of denial; however, it is also to show how she failed in doing so due to the repeatedly excessive flows and acting out of the memories of her traumatic experience. Nevertheless, it is also to find that Masechaba’s trauma is undeniable although she tries to work through/transcend. This exploration provides a pragmatic identification that her disorganizing flashbacks cannot be avoided or resolved indefinitely; rather, they will have occasionally, if not recurrently, broken into her tormented mind. Likewise, they will be flowingly acted out. This repetitive acting-out keeps Masechaba perpetually engaged in her psychologically anguishing trauma till the end of the novel/her life. The distressful memories of her shameful exaction are seemingly endless because rape, in itself, cannot be challengingly repudiated, particularly if she has viciously had an undesired baby. She did not firstly desire to be a mother due to her rightful realization that Mpho would workably but not surely be a double-edged sword that, on the one hand, relives her traumatized past experience every time she sees her. On the other hand, Masechaba finds Mpho as a means for solace and safety, returning to her when trauma starts to act out again. This eventually represents the ebb of her conflicting traumatic memories. However,

based on what was analytically presented before, this article concludes that both Freud's denial and LaCapra's acting-out are fittingly and demonstratively applicable to Matlwa's sufferingly agonized and forcedly virginity-lost character, Masechaba. As such, this study finds that Matlwa's *Evening Primrose* is researchable and can be studied in relation to the trauma hyperarousal or hypervigilance concept, which describes how many biological disorders and changes affect one's psyche as well as physical behaviour, personality, and memory after being disordered by any traumatic experience.

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