

**The Memory of the Past in Toni Morrison's Beloved**  
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**العنوان: ذكرى الماضي في مسرحية توني موريسون الحبيب**

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**الملخص:**

لقد جاءت نظرية المساواة بين الجنسين الأفريقية الأمريكية في الغالب بسبب الزيادة في الأدب الأمريكي الإفريقي منذ القرن العشرين. في هذه الحقبة، حاول الأمريكيون ذوات الأصول الأفريقية أن يعكسوا بعض الصعوبات الكبيرة التي يواجهونها، مثل التهميش الاجتماعي والقمع في الجوانب الاجتماعية والسياسية والاقتصادية لحياتهم.

توني موريسون (١٩٣١) كاتبة كانت رواياتها قد أدت إلى تغييرات جوهرية في أدب النساء. وهي مهتمة للغاية بالمشاكل التي تواجهها المرأة، لا سيما المرأة الأمريكية الأفريقية، بسبب عرقها والمجتمع البطريركي الذي تعيش فيه. في رواية الحبيب (١٩٨٧)، شغل هذا الموضوع موقعاً خاصاً لأنه يتعامل مع واحدة من أكثر المشاكل المزعجة التي قد تعانيها أي امرأة. إن أهم موضوع في رواية الحبيب هو إعادة بناء الذكريات السابقة. هذا لأن الشخصيات الرئيسية في الرواية تشعر بالانزعاج من تجاربها المريرة. كما وتحقق الرواية في تاريخ الشعب الأسود المشحون بالألم والمعاناة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الأمريكية الأفريقية، نظرية المساواة بين الجنسين، توني موريسون، الحبيب، ذكرى الماضي.

**Abstract**

African-American feminism has its advent mostly due to the increase in African-American literature since the twentieth century. In this era, the Afro-Americans tried to reflect some of their major difficulties, like social marginalization, oppression in social, political and economic aspects of their lives.

Toni Morrison (1931) is a female writer whose novel has resulted in fundamental changes in the women's literature. She is highly concerned with the problems that a woman, particularly African-American one, has faced due to her race and the patriarchal society in which she is living. In **Beloved** (1987), occupied a special position in this regard because it deals with one of the most irritating problem that any woman may suffer. The most important theme of **Beloved** that of history the reconstruction of the previous memories. This is because the chief characters of the novel are troubled by their bitter experiences. The novel investigates the black people's history, which is charged with pain and suffering.

**Keywords:** African-American, Feminism, Toni Morrison, Beloved memory of past.

Toni Morrison (1931-), tackles the position of black in the American society. In addition, she hits upon the black-women's position in society as being both black and women living in patriarchal black-society. She is one of the most well-known writers of African-American descent whose novels have been a great encouragement for the writers of the same race. Morrison, like other black writers, always argues the black people's humanity, stands against social prejudice that belittles blackness, and celebrates the rich customs of African and African-American life. Morrison is always looked at as one of the most renowned authors in modern American (Bader & Reef, 2011, p. 4). She is best known as a writer who adopts the African-American literature in which modern authors use the context of slavery as a political agenda for their fiction exposing as such the evilness of slavery.

Toni Morrison's writings pay special attention to the issues such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and intragroup relations in a more direct way. However, these topics are within the jest of African American literature, which always serves as a literary record of African American experience. A writer

within this sphere should struggle against three conceptual issues: racialism, institutionalized racism, and Eurocentric. Racialism "refers to the belief in racial superiority, inferiority, and purity based on the conviction that moral and intellectual characteristics...are biological properties that differentiate the races" (Tyson, 2006, 361). This aspect implies the unequal power relations whose source lies in the sociopolitical domination of one race by another. The outcome of such domination is the systematic discriminatory practices as segregation and persecution. Therefore, for one to "be a racist—in order to be in a position to segregate, dominate, or persecute—one has to be in a position of power as a member of the politically dominant group, which...means...to be white" (Tyson, 2006, 361). Then, the black writers must increase their strife to achieve recognition within a white-dominated tradition if they are to write black literature.

Now, Morrison is considered as an important writer in this regard because all her novels, including *Beloved* (1987), discuss the slave past highlighting its negative role in the creation of the female self. In fact, Morrison emphasizes the relationship between the past and the present in all her novels. What makes her novels distinguished is that she probes the marginal space of literature and history so that she can provide her audience with different experiences of subdued black mothers. Morrison also follows another goal by emphasizing the miseries of black people. Her intention was to question the issue of liberation in America in order to criticize the fact that unlike what is believed of America as a free country. Her belief was that the black people's life is based on suppression offered by a supposedly free country, and paradoxically deprives its people of some of the simplest rights (Peach, 1995, p.2), such as freedom and treating them as citizens with complete rights.

Toni Morrison is able to contribute to African American tradition through emphasizing its authenticity compared to other literary schools. Morrison writes with a black consciousness tackling all issues that matter to African American writers. She is also able to stress black women's rights by exposing their sufferings under slavery system. She often presents her audience black heroines equipped with strong will to overcome their miseries.

Morrison's *Beloved* can be seen as a living document depicting the history of black people, which is characterized by the maltreatment practiced by the white slave-masters. This novel by Morrison shows the persecution conducted against the black families and how this act affects the familial relationship. It tells the story of the painful and bitter experiences undergone by a number of slaves, but its major focus is a female character, Sethe, and her dilemma as a slave mother. Morrison's *Beloved* is about an African-American female slave, Sethe, who escapes slavery in 1856 in Kentucky by resorting to the free state of Ohio. Sethe's condition is further complicated as her white master arrives to get her together with her children back. Sethe decides to kill her two-year-old daughter instead of allowing her to be a prey to the slavery life in Sweet Home, the Kentucky plantation from which she has recently fled. Years after this accident, a woman who is supposed to be her daughter, called Beloved, returns to haunt Sethe's home at 124 Bluestone Road, Cincinnati, Ohio. Morrison's *Beloved* explores the violence, either psychological or physical, caused by slavery, how it affected the following generations and the mother-child relationships. Sethe is so tortured both by her slave-master and by the haunting murder of her daughter that she wants to get rid of her memories of her entire past-experiences. Nonetheless, attempting to do so causes her to suffer more. Sethe becomes free only she decides to face those bitter memories.

In her celebrated novel *Beloved*, Morrison has attempted to illustrate the African Americans' past and present history in order to reproduce a new history, which narrates their true history. She believes that the black's history was not truly revealed. She does this so that she can cure the psychological pain of the black people and help them reconstruct their history as real as it really was. When Morrison was asked about the reasons behind writing *Beloved*, which is primarily a novel about a black mother's brawl to save her children from the evil of slavery, she said that she was actually concerned with what history had omitted. Hence, she meant to depict the truth about the life of people whose history was not written.

The black narratives often serve as historical documents that highlight the black's lives as they experience the maltreatment under the code of slavery. Finding the black's issues ignored by the common white tradition, the black novelists set out to explore facts about the disastrous incidents occurred to the black people, which other narratives do not tackle. In so doing, these writers present their readers autobiographies, which often rely on memories. Erll and Nünning (2008) see that the autobiographies written by women and ethnic writers "illustrate the usefulness of acts of individual remembering for oppositional, if not subversive, expressions of group concerns" (p.49).

The black writers, then, work as resistance-providers who seek to refute the old values concerning the position of black people among the society. They make their objective to emphasize the presence of black experiences in literature. They reconstruct the literary tradition in such a way as to insert incidents from black culture, which is long kept absent. Rody (1995) points out that

For these novels, much as for abolitionists, slave narratives, the burden of communicating an authentic truth remains, and the inherited conviction of slavery's evil renders the word of fictional slaves true in a sense not solely epistemological or even political but moral. Postmodern fictions with battles still to fight, today's African-American slave "histories," (p.94).

Therefore, black writers share the goal of writing a literature that is uniquely black. By including black allusions, black writers grantee the continuity of black culture in the minds of humanity.

On the general outset, however, the black novelists attempt to present a comprehensive version of history, which they believe to be incomplete. They tend to emphasize the issues that are rarely mentioned in the writings of white writers, specifically the black people's issues. It follows that these writers bear the heavy burden of presenting the real facts about what their peoples really experience. They aim at making their readers conscious of the suffering the black people experienced as they are shipped to America. Therefore, writing novel becomes a tough responsibility handled by the black writers, who become obliged to employ their narrative abilities to highlight their own history. For Toni Morrison, the responsibility is the necessity of filling "the gaps in historical records and archives in yet another way" (Erll & Nünning, 2008, p.106). Morrison makes her concern tackling the chasms related to the "wounds in memory itself, the scar of a trauma that resisted representation and can only belatedly, long after the deeply destructive events, become articulated in the framework of a literary text" (p.106). Nonetheless, when readers are directed to the missing facts in history, they become able to construct the details needed in attaining complete version of history. Therefore, in her *Beloved*, "Morrison's imaginary literary supplement to historical memory is not a filling of the gap but a marking of it" (Erll & Nünning, 2008, p.106) and hence it is possible for readers to recognize the bias in literary writing.

In interview with Angels Carabi (1993), Toni Morrison makes it clear the fact that she is unsatisfied with what has been said about the miseries of the black people. She sees a shortcoming in including history in the writings of literature, even when written by black people. This case causes Morrison to endeavor the black history in order to present it fresh to her readers. When asked by the interviewer why she explores the bygone incidents in black people's lives, Morrison argues that she cannot find anything written on the suffering of these people as they are shipped during the Middle Passage. "I thought that in the folklore and in the songs and in early poetry or lyrics, there was never much mention of the 'middle passage.' The poems that I know about this period are recent – after the 60s –, so there was a part of history, of that journey from Africa to America, that Black people themselves had never spoken about," Morrison reveals (p.105). Then, it is the black writers' responsibility to talk about these significant events in the black people's lives.

Toni Morrison, then, sets out to refute the history written by writers other than the blacks, who she believes to present half-truths. She is always after historical account stripped of any white influence, which she believes to smash the truth. Considering the history to dismiss the misery of the blacks, Morrison aims at writing her people's history depending on her details, which she considers

authentic. She therefore relies on memories recollected by the characters in her novels, and hence she can present history from a black point of view, as hers. Morrison (1994) explains

I depend heavily on the ruse of memory (and in a way it does function as a creative writer's ruse) for two reasons. One, because it ignites some process of invention, and two, because I cannot trust the literature and the sociology of other people to help me know the truth of my own cultural sources. It also prevents my preoccupations from descending into sociology. Since the discussion of Black literature in critical terms is unfailingly sociology and almost never art criticism, it is important for me to shed those considerations from my work at the outset (p.386).

Then, memories are paramount for a black writer if he/she is to present authentic details to his readers. Other resources would provide false details or incomplete yearnings serving the prevailing cultures.

However, Morrison in fact presents an example of the reliance on realism crystalizing the main aspect of novel, which is especially characterized as a being realist genre of literature. However, Morrison makes another step by resorting to detaching the readers from the literary hues in her novels. She asserts that she deliberately gets her readers involved in the non-narrative side of her writings. "I want my fiction to urge the reader into active participation in the non-narrative, nonliterary experience of the text, which makes it difficult for the reader to confine himself to a cool and distant acceptance of data," Morrison argues. Morrison mentions the analogy of looking at a painting in order to explain her point of view of getting readers involved in the events of the novels. She explains that looking at a painting is deeper than just viewing the artistic elements that the painting has. Similarly, Morrison argues, the literary value of literature is limited with certain set of critical constraints that the literary work should escape to deliver a message. She affirms that glory was attained by the sixteenth-century English drama or the Greek poetry "or religious narrative in the Middle Ages, when literature was need and did not have a critical history to constrain or diminish the writer's imagination" (Morrison, 1994, p.387). Therefore, black literature should abolish the constraints specified by the widespread culture if it is to revive the black culture. In addition, in Morrison's view, black literature should focus on subject matter more than ornaments regardless of the assumptions set by literary schools that will probably belittle it.

Critical or literary competence, then, confines readers to certain interpretation to a literary work depending on his/her experience. Readers will follow the common rules of reading the literary text neglecting whatever falls outside the presumptions of such rules. Morrison, therefore, sees to be "magnificent not to have to depend on the reader's literary associations – his literary experience – which can be as much an impoverishment of the reader's imagination as it is of a writer's" (Morrison, 1994, p.387). It follows that Morrison tends to focus more on what is historical rather than on what is literary enriching her readers' minds with a bunch of historical facts. She sees it "important that what I write not be merely literary" (p.387). Resorting to what is real and true; Morrison becomes "most self-conscious about making sure [not to] strike literary postures. I avoid, too studiously perhaps, name-dropping, lists, literary references, unless oblique and based on written folklore" (Morrison, 1994, p.387). This objective, however, will affect the process of characterization, which should suit the purpose of the literary work. Morrison explains that "The choice of a tale or of folklore in my work is tailored to the character's thoughts or actions in a way that flags him or her and provides irony, sometimes humor" (Morrison, 1994, p. 387) and as such mingling the real with the literary to deliver the black experience.

However, Morrison (1994) aims at exposing the muted voices of the black people, whom she sees to be blinked at by the common trends of literature in America. She understands that considering subjects about slavery will mean to tackle devalued themes, because the western readers are not accustomed to read about such subjects. Morrison explains:

If my work is to confront a reality unlike that received reality of the West, it must centralize and animate information discredited by the West- discredited not because it is not true or useful or even of

some racial value, but because it is information held by discredited people, information dismissed as "lore" or "gossip" or "magic" or "sentiment." (Morrison, 1994, p. 388)

Morrison then is conscious of the challenge that she will experience as she endeavors to write a uniquely black literature. On one hand, she would never find factual references about black people in the widespread literary schools. Therefore, on the second, she would rely on memories establishing the facts that she needs in crystalizing the mold she is seeking. It follows that Morrison's novels can be seen as products of these two elements interacting with her literary faculty.

Therefore, Morrison's *Beloved* sets to reveal the facts about those who are belittled, not because of anything but of being black, covering a wide variety of issues that are persistent to the black consciousness. *Beloved* serves as a multi-layered narrative woven to produce a sophisticated account on Morrison's beliefs. This novel by Morrison is partly a ghost story, since it is about a ghost appearing to agitate the lives of people. It is also considered a partly-slave narrative, because it tackles the aftermath of slavery. In addition, it is "part history book, part tribute, part warning, and part celebration. It is a story of failure and triumph, of commodification and resistance. It is all of these and none of these. Beloved, the character, is part ghost, part slave who has both perished within and survived the treacherous voyage from Africa to America, the Middle Passage, part Sethe's daughter returned from the dead, part past, part future, part no one, part everyone. She is all this and more" (Perna, 1998, p.1). The presence of all these layers provide *Beloved* with the richness that any literary work aspires to have increasing readership, and hence helps spreading the calamities of the sufferer black people.

Such people are often considered second-hand to the white ones, and thus enslaved to assist the whites' own lives. After being enslaved and exploited in farms and houses, the slaves can never forget the bitter memories of such humiliating experiences. This novel, then, "deals with the after-effects of slavery, and refers back to the period of slavery" (Wall, 2014, p.1), which is equally devastating for them. Slavery leaves the slaves psychologically and emotionally scattered. The main challenge is how to attain the self once again after losing it to the slave masters. The events of the novel after the civil war, in 1873 in the state of Ohio.

From the very beginning of Morrison's *Beloved*, the memories of the past appear important to the characters' lives. It seems that all their lives are based on reminiscences from their bygone experiences. As the novel opens, the protagonist, Sethe, is shown haunted by her past relic, the ghost of her daughter Beloved. When she discusses the presence of this ghost in her house, her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs explains that all the black people's lives are full of the ghostly experiences of losing their endeared family members caused by slavery:

"What'd be the point?" asked Baby Suggs. "Not a house in the country ain't packed to its rafters with some dead Negro's grief. We lucky this ghost is a baby. My husband's spirit was to come back in here? or yours? Don't talk to me. You lucky. You got three left. Three pulling at your skirts and just one raising hell from the other side. Be thankful, why don't you? I had eight. Every one of them gone away from me. Four taken, four chased, and all, I expect, worrying somebody's house into evil." Baby Suggs rubbed her eyebrows. "My firstborn. All I can remember of her is how she loved the burned bottom of bread. Can you beat that? Eight children and that's all I remember" (Morrison, 1987, p.5).

For Sethe, however, the memories of the past are prerequisite to black people's lives explaining that Suggs herself is reluctant to recall the past. She tells baby Suggs, "That's all you let yourself remember" (Morrison, 1987, p.5). Sethe is very committed to embracing the memories of her past, in which she can feel the presence of her lost sons and husband, Halle. The narrator depicts Sethe as being recalling the faces of her two sons, Buglar and Howard, "but she was down to one herself—one alive, that is—the boys chased off by the dead one, and her memory of Buglar was fading fast. Howard at least had a special head- shape that nobody could forget. As for the rest, she worked hard to remember as close to nothing as was safe" (Morrison, 1987, p.6). Then, the bond between Sethe and her lost family is the memory she has about them, which she is striving to keep forever.

However, Sethe also can never let go the memories of Sweet Home planation, which is the place where she has been enslaved for many years. This place imposes itself on her memorizing of her sons. It seems that Sethe's memories are mingled with what she has experienced in Sweet Home. When she tries to recall the faces of her boys, the memories of Sweet Home come suddenly to her mind, "Then something. The splash of water, the sight of her shoes and stockings awry on the path where she had flung them; or Here Boy lapping in the puddle near her feet, and suddenly there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes and although there was not a leaf on that farm that did not make her want to scream, it rolled itself out before her in shameless beauty" (Morrison, 1987, p.6).

What Sethe can remember about her sons makes the place tolerable, though it is in fact a prison for her. The narrator explains that this place "never looked as terrible as it was and it made her wonder if hell was a pretty place too. Fire and brimstone all right, but hidden in lacy groves. Boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world. It shamed her—remembering the wonderful soughing trees rather than the boys. Try as she might to make it otherwise, the sycamores beat out the children every time and she could not forgive her memory for that" (Morrison, 1987, p.6). Morrison, therefore, shows that though the black people's past is bitter but it signifies their lives. The black past must be accepted by all the black people if they want to continue living.

The same idea is emphasized by Collins (2000), who sees that memories of the past operate to crystalize the whole black nation. According to Collins (2000) "Race, class, gender, and sexuality all remain closely intertwined with nation...A nation consists of a collection of people who have come to believe that they have been shaped by a common past and are destined to share a common future. [Such a] belief is usually nurtured by common cultural characteristics, such as language and customs; a well-defined geographic territory; the belief in a common history or origin" (p.229). It follows that without the past there would be no real sense of black community.

However, much of the memory of the past in Morrison's *Beloved* starts with the coming of Paul D after he has been wandering for eighteen years. When Sethe is sitting on a porch outside her home, she notice someone approaching her whom she can finally recognize as Paul D:

When the last of the chamomile was gone, she went around to the front of the house, collecting her shoes and stockings on the way. As if to punish her further for her terrible memory, sitting on the porch not forty feet away was Paul D, the last of the Sweet Home men. And although she could never mistake his face for another's, she said, "Is that you?" (Morrison, 1987, p.6).

Paul D can be seen as an instigator for Sethe's bitter memories of the suffering she has experienced in the past under the impact of slavery. Being the last Garner, Paul D serves as reminder of Sethe's life in Sweet Home. Paul D also represents a new life for Sethe, who feels more energetic as she sees him. When Paul D addresses Sethe as girl, the latter blushed as if she is a young girl once again: "What's left." He stood up and smiled. "How you been, girl, besides barefoot"? When she laughed it came out loose and young. "Messed up my legs back yonder. Chamomile" (Morrison, 1987, p.6). This condition can signify the regenerative aspect of the memories of the past on the Sethe's life.

It follows that the memories of the past in Morrison's *Beloved* are expressed with an idiosyncratic term, 'rememory', which signifies both verb and noun. It can also refer to the ongoing process of remembering due to the deep impact of the experiences that the black people witness, which wax them with troubled minds (Rody, 1995, p.101). Sethe shows such a mental aspect as she explains to Denver:

Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened. (Morrison, 1987, p.36)

According to Rody (1995), the notion of 'rememory' refers to possibility of linking the past to the present, which is mentally experienced. This phrase suggests "the interconnectedness of minds, past

and present, and thus neatly conjoins the novel's supernatural vision with its aspiration to communal epic, realizing the "collective memory" of which Morrison speaks" (p.101). Being prefixed with the repetitive prefix of 're-', such a word indicated "active, creative mental function, Sethe's explanation describes a natural – or a supernatural – phenomenon" (p.101). Therefore, for both Sethe and Morrison "to 'rememory' is to use one's imaginative power to realize a latent, abiding connection to the past" (Rody, 1995, p.101) only those who can live with these memories can find peace in their lives.

Paul D, however, first seems reluctant to deal with or to remember even a single occurrence of the past and he, instead, tries hard to forget. He has seen many bitter experiences that he does not want to remember, particularly the seeing of the other slaves dying, which is an incident that renders him almost mad. In order to prevent being totally mad, Paul D "has forced himself not to remember as a way of staying alive" (Wall, 2014, p.18). Nonetheless, this former slave enlivens his past memories as he meets Sethe, deciding to "take his shoes off and start a new life together with her. He is emotional and he is tired when he enters 124. He locks away his memories in his heart and he is ready to open it at 124" (Wall, 2014, p.18). Only when he reaches 124 again and meets Sethe, Paul D is able to unfold the truth about his suffering, because he encounters the relic of the past, Sethe. Morrison describes the meeting of the two as being a surprise for both of them and a trigger for Paul D's memory: "By the time he got to Ohio, then to Cincinnati, then to Halle Suggs' mother's house, he thought he had seen and felt it all. Even now as he put back the window frame he had smashed, he could not account for the pleasure in his surprise at seeing Halle's wife alive" (Morrison, 1987, p.41) and now Paul D can realize a sense of life, which is only possible with the presence of Sethe and her daughter.

Nonetheless, those who resort to the 124 Bluestone Street attempt to mold their life on being free, before the schoolmaster arrives to disturb their lives. He aims at getting Sethe back to Sweet Home, from whom she runs and hides, but finally he manages to find her. Seeing that she is about to be taken back to slavery, Sethe tries to kill her children, managing to murder only one, Beloved. This shocking act occurs as an inevitable move by Sethe, who feels desperate about conducting freedom for her child. In Wall's (2014) view, this act reflects the gigantic pain that the characters suffer because of slavery, which Morrison aims at revealing. It is "a way of portraying the main character's struggle [that] Morrison lets Sethe kill her youngest daughter with a handsaw in the barn, where they are hiding from the men taking them back to the plantation" (p.18). This experience from the past can never be forgotten, it keeps agitating the whole black community. It appears as a spectrum that hovers around the slaves reminding them about their sever past. The murdered daughter comes back to the same house, but "in the shape of a ghost which leads both Sethe, her daughter Denver as well as the community to deal with what happened in the past" (Wall, 2014, p.18). Every single detail of these incidents is conducted by means of memory that the characters contribute to the course of the novel.

It follows that both Paul D and Sethe are attached to their previous experiences as slaves, which they initially try to forget about. They seem obliged to address their pasts because only then they can lead a peaceful life in the present. Wall (2014) explains that "Paul D and Sethe both have to deal with a past and present self to heal and move beyond their traumatized history" (p.18). Therefore, Paul D begins thinking to start a new life, which is signaled by his looking for a job in the place where Sethe lives. He consults Sethe, "I was thinking of looking for work around here. What you think?, who suggests him a work in the River mostly. And hogs" (Morrison, 1987, p.41). With such communal sense that they both finally attain, Paul D and Sethe become able to build a new life. Morrison reveals the reviving effect of Paul D's appearance on Sethe's life as she narrates: "The fact that Paul D had come out of 'that other one' into her bed was better too; and the notion of a future with him, or for that matter without him, was beginning to stroke her mind" (Morrison, 1987, p.42). For Paul D, "the only way he has been able to survive the horrors from the past is by alienating himself from his emotions. He believes that his present is unsatisfactory and together with Sethe he can allow himself to dream of a new beginning" (Wall, 2014, p.18). Therefore, even if he survives the brutality of slavery, for Paul D

to continue his life he needs to embrace his past, which is attained in yearning the memories together with Sethe.

Nonetheless, the major relic of the past is represented by the murdered daughter, Beloved, who keeps appearing and re-appearing in the novel. In her appearance, Beloved is Sethe's beloved baby who returns after eighteen years at a young woman. Although she causes Sethe to experience great pain, but nonetheless, Beloved "also inadvertently acts as a healing force by allowing Sethe, Paul D and the whole Bluestone community to confront the past and thus begin to forge a future" (Perna, 1998, p.100). Beloved, then, mediates the past and present, "life and death, the earthly world and the spiritual world, between Africa and America...and between land and water represented by the bridge she appears on" (p.100).

She becomes a haunting ghost that agitates the lives of those who live in the 124 house. Dominguez (1994) sees that the presence of the ghost points at Sethe's inability to conform to her present, because she cannot overcome the memories of her suffering. This "ghostly presence is a constant reminder that Sethe has not yet come to terms with that past. She never managed to overcome the grief over the last of all the losses she had suffered, the loss of her beloved daughter" (p.38). Sethe then ceases to enjoy life and the newly attained freedom, because she is inclined to Beloved's memory. She continues grieving her dead daughter whom she loses as a consequence of slavery and thus entrapped in a point between her past and present. "Sethe actually stopped living when her daughter did; from then on she just went through the motions of everyday life mechanically, pretending she was indeed alive," (Dominguez, 1994, p.38).

It follows that memories have mesmerizing effect people who attach themselves to their harmful memories. People cannot bear the aftermath of their sad experiences. This what memories cause to Paul D, that is, as Wall (2014) has put, "Memories can tie a person down and therefor [Paul D] chooses to walk and not remember" (p.18). In so doing, he is able to get rid of his memories, though temporarily. While he is wandering, Paul D encounters many people about whom he is envious. Paul D's "walking leads him to meet many people [whose] relationships is something he has not experienced himself" (p.18). Realizing the need for communal life, Paul D comes to Sethe and Denver, who "are the closest he has come to a family since Sweet Home" (p.18). Only then does Paul D manage to change, since he meets Sethe who "changes Paul D and his way of thinking but it is not enough to make him overcome the past" (p.18). Sethe and Paul D together "can put words on mutual memories and remember together, process and then leave them behind. They are at the same time unable of dealing with the memories not belonging to themselves" (p.19).

However, Sethe and Paul D remain as such, especially Sethe who seems fully trapped in the remnants her experiences of the past. Sethe cannot continue her present life freed from the experiences that she had, which are so hard that she is firmly tied to them. She is described as someone whose "brain was not interested in the future. Loaded with the past and hungry for more, it left her no room to imagine, let alone plan for, the next day" (Morrison, 1987, p.70). This aspect makes Sethe apart from other people in her community, who are able to let go their past and continue their lives. Her condition looks different from other people's ones. It is "Exactly like that afternoon in the wild onions—when one more step was the most she could see of the future. Other people went crazy, why couldn't she? Other people's brains stopped, turned around and went on to something new, which is what must have happened to Halle" (Morrison, 1987, p.70).

Then, Toni Morrison presents her characters as living in endless abyss of memories that control their present life. In so doing, she emphasizes the psychological aftermath of slavery depicting it as the determining aspect of the condition in which the previously slaves live and rendering her novel the aspect of a memorial. Rody (1995) argues that, in so presenting her novel, "Morrison illuminates the psychological structure of ethnic historical fiction" (p.98). It follows that Morrison's *Beloved* tackles what the living experience, as all memorials do, "*Beloved* is not a place of the dead but a place where survivors can go to summon and recollect, to look upon the sculpted shape of their own sorrow"



(Rody, 1995, p.98). The novel has nothing to do to the slaves' interior conditions, "but by dramatizing the psychological legacy of slavery, it portrays that 'interior' place in the African-American psyche where a slave's face still haunts" (Rody, 1995, p.98). Morrison hits upon this aspect when she presents Paul D explaining his catastrophic condition to Sethe:

Mister was allowed to be and stay what he was. But I wasn't allowed to be and stay what I was. Even if you cooked him you'd be cooking a rooster named Mister. But wasn't no way I'd ever be Paul D again, living or dead. Schoolteacher changed me. I was something else and that something was less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub." (Morrison, 1987, p.72)

Therefore, readers can notice how much slavery is devastating to the black people's lives, even when it was abolished. The former slaves can never continue their lives with the heavy psychological burden that slavery has caused to them.

It is this haunting aspect of the aftermath of slavery that rattles the previously slaves' lives incarnated in the novels as physical and supernatural entities. Therefore, both Paul D and Sethe are haunted by the phantom of the dead daughter, Beloved, which represents an allusion to memories of the past. The ghost works to stir the psyches of those who experience the suffering of slavery causing them to render fresh all the forgone crises. For Paul D, he seems unsatisfied with the presence of Beloved and is not content with her from the very beginning, and even has a fight with her. Beloved is able to cause him recollect all the memories from the past coming to him again without being able to resist. Beloved renders Paul D unable to notice anything around, even his tobacco, and "releases the pain that he has held within for many years but at the same time she causes other problems" (Wall, 2014, p.20) which might point out that embracing the past also has its price of suffering.

Nonetheless, Paul D would not be able to have a new life without the act of seduction conducted by Beloved. As she witnesses Paul D approaching her mother, Beloved works to put him out of their house and hence of their private realm. The speaker in Morrison's *Beloved* describes this act as being turning Paul D into a "rag doll" (Morrison, 1987, p.126), who is cannot do anything but to submit Beloved's intentions. Overcome by the inescapable seduction, Paul D offends his relationship with Sethe, and hence causes him so unbearable pain that leaves Sethe's house. As wanders in several places, Paul D finds that he cannot conform to places other than Sethe's house and escaping cannot present him the life he wants. Now Paul D becomes "determined to achieve the life he has never experienced before and he sees the possibility of such a life together with Sethe and Denver [which] Beloved helps him realizing" (Wall, 2014, p.20). Paul D dreams of a "better life but it becomes clear to him that he needs to reconcile with his memories in order to move forward to a satisfactory life" (p.20). Then, a black individual's life seems unrealized without being able to accept his/her past.

However, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* also connects the memories of the past to black women's lives, who she asserts bear the large share of suffering under slavery. Having this done, Toni Morrison is able to expose the fact about the non-tackled issues, such as those of the slave mothers', who "'own' neither themselves nor their children [who also] pose the question of maternal discourse with particular emphasis" (Hirsch, 1990, p. 95). In so doing, Morrison is able present a novel that emphasizes a tough stand against both slavery and patriarchal system, which put heavy burden on mothers. The "maternal subject in Morrison's novel becomes the repository for the most repressed, the most unspeakable cultural memories and narratives, the novel scrutinizes its potential to represent a resistant, even an oppositional cultural voice" (Hirsch, 1990, p.95). In so doing, Morrison calls for breaking the old-fashioned norms abiding to women's experiences and demanding more space for women in social life.

Seen with such a lens, Morrison's *Beloved* presents a unique view to the concept of maternity in general. Maternity is always viewed as supplements to common codes, which will be saved and transmitted mainly by mothers. Hirsch (1994) argues that "It may seem surprising, even counterintuitive, to identify maternal discourse as oppositional: mothers, after all, are usually seen as the conservers of value and tradition" (p.95). Nonetheless, the newly presented concept about the "maternal memory defined in Toni Morrison's novel as rememory [which] serves as a ground of

resistance and opposition [since] Rememory is Morrison's attempt to re-conceive the memory of slavery, finding a way to re-member, and to do so differently, what an entire culture has been trying to repress" (Hirsch, 1990,p. 95). It follows that Morrison attempts to emphasize the women's present by recalling the past memories highlighting the amount of oppression the black women have experienced so far.

It seems that the whole society is ignorant about what maternity means, or how much the mothers suffer in rising their children. This is particularly true to Paul D, as a representative of the patriarchal code. Paul D believes that Sethe's love for her children is too much. He cannot imagine the presence of such a large amount of love, since he thinks more of protecting himself only. When he learns about what Sethe does to Beloved, Paul D leaves Sethe alone facing her psychological crises. He cannot understand that Sethe's intention is to keep her child safe, considering death as one option. Paul D "cannot understand a mother's love and to what extent Sethe is willing to go to save her children" (Wall, 2014, p.20). Then, the writer wants to show that such a specifically motherly condition needs to be acknowledged and appreciated by the male community.

This aspect evokes the patriarchal system, which cannot count for mothers' real feelings. In Morrison's *Beloved*, mothers have to deal with the memories of a double-faceted dilemma represented by being misunderstood by their communities and abused by male enslavers. In this novel, mothers have to deal with the memories of the way the slave masters look at black women and how they sexually assault them, a fate that Sethe experiences and from which wants to prevent daughters. She, therefore, keeps as a tough memory, which is reluctant to be articulated. It is the memory that spoils the women psychologically by reducing them to inhuman entities. Slave women are often associated with animals, as they are looked at bodily only. Perna (1998) argues that this association and "comparison of a black woman to an animal that offends and damages Sethe so deeply, and it is this ideology that Sethe must struggle to reject and resist" (p.88). In so doing, Toni Morrison shows the dehumanizing effect of slavery on the black people, who strive to remove slavery aftermath when they are released.

Khaleghi (2012) sees that Morrison's novel in fact tackles the slaves' conditions before and after slavery. It hinders the readers' compassion towards the miseries experienced by the slaves that lead them to disastrous consequences. It investigates how the former slaves collectively deal with the traumatic effects of slavery supporting one another to step over their shared dilemma. Nonetheless, the support seems to come specifically from women, who appear as healing entities. In so doing, Morrison shows how African-American people "suffer physically and psychologically from the dominant culture; especially women, who learn to heal themselves with sharing stories of their traumatic life" (p.1). In their attempt to gather their scattered selves, women resort to "Female solidarity [which] also empowers the female protagonists to establish their own identity" (Khaleghi, 2012, p.1) and then women serve both to reject slavery and patriarchal practices by relying on one another.

Morrison's *Beloved*, therefore, is seen to be a record that recalls the memories of the hardship the black people suffered. It is about "the lives and deaths of the Black slaves who lived and died in slavery from the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade to the wane of enslavement on the American continent with the end of the Civil War" (Kotecki, 2013, 934). Seen with this lens, the protagonist, Beloved, becomes merely a memory that points at the long-term injury attained by the people who experienced slavery. In other words, "she may be interpreted as the ghost memorizing particularly those African captives who perished aboard the slave ships amidst the hardship and suffering of the Middle Passage" (p.934). Seen from broader prospect, Beloved represents the suffering of anonymous people in general. Beloved can allude "to as the ghost of Everyman who lost life during those high death-rate overseas crossings loaded with human cargo" (Kotecki, 2013, p.934) with special emphasis on women's calamities.

Furthermore, the character of Beloved can also be understood as a symbol of the cruel elements within the American history. It operates as an instigating factor that helps awaken people about the wrong doings conducted against the black people. Although depicted as a ghost that is "haunting the

main protagonist of the story, Sethe, is not only an embodiment of Sethe's traumatic and painful past, her guilt and shame that haunt her present, but also, in wider sense, a reminder of America's greatest sin" (Fischerova, 2006, p.9). Having read Morrison's *Beloved* within this scope, readers will be conscious about the "horrors of slavery are still as real as the manifestation of the ghost in flesh in the shape of Beloved that appeared in the novel" (Fischerova, 2006, p.9). This condition will still be agitating the black people's lives until they become able to reconcile their memories of the past.

This is also the case with Denver, for whom the past is always a blurred idea, because her mother keeps distancing her from everything related to the past. Sethe does not want her children to experience what she herself witnesses. Her love for Denver, and for Beloved too, is 'too thick' that she wants her to be away of the memories that would affect her life. As a result, Denver becomes alienated from her mother. When Denver notices something white beside her mother, she asks the mother about it, but she never gets an answer. Denver keeps theorizing about the core of her seeing, believing that what she sees is in fact her sister:

She was certain that Beloved was the white dress that had knelt with her mother in the keeping room, the true-to-life presence of the baby that had kept her company most of her life. And to be looked at by her, however briefly, kept her grateful for the rest of the time when she was merely the looker. Besides, she had her own set of questions which had nothing to do with the past. The present alone interested Denver, but she was careful to appear uninquisitive about the things she was dying to ask Beloved, for if she pressed too hard, she might lose the penny that the held-out palm wanted, and lose, therefore, the place beyond appetite. (Morrison, 1987, p.120)

Then, Denver starts alienated from the past, and hence she is hesitant about the goal of her own life. When she knows and embraces the memories of the past, Denver is able to experience a happy life.

Keeping Denver unaware about the past will ultimately lead her to lose her identity, which attempts to find from a resource other than her mother. Vick (2003) argues that "The unarticulated past stands like a barrier between Denver and Sethe" (p.7). This condition keeps Denver to be mediated between by her mother's memories and her own present. In other words, "Trapped in Sethe's past, Denver is secluded and has no means to find herself within her own life, family and culture. She finds herself resentful and scared of her life and her mother. She clings to Beloved as her own possession, because it is through Beloved that she defines herself" (Vick, 2003, p.7) and therefore is able to find a significance for her life.

Denver then seems able to lead her own life as she is exposed to the memories of the past. She keeps questioning her position within the community finding that she is totally isolated from the world outside her house. In addition, the exposition to past also renders Denver the healing power that helps cure the people around her. In other words, "Only by knowing her history, Denver is able to take action to save her life, as well as Sethe's" (Khaleghi, 2012, p. 273). For Denver, the past becomes "an ancestral spirit, a voice of history—her Grandmother's, which indicts her for not knowing her history and prompts her to take action, "You mean I never told you nothing about Carolina? About your daddy? You don't remember nothing about how come I walk the way I do and about your mother's feet, not to speak of her back? I never told you all that?" (Morrison, 1987, p. 244). It seems that "countering Denver's caution to act through stories of her family's resistance to slaveholders, Baby Suggs inspirits her to reach the community beyond the porch of 124" (Khaleghi, 2012, 273). It follows that the memories of the past are in fact what make the black people's lives possible. Without these memories, black people will remain oscillating within a cyclic course of meaningless life. In fact, the memories of the past cannot be avoided, even if one tries hard to do so.

This condition can be seen in Sethe's act of killing her daughter, When Sethe escapes the slavery planation of Sweet Home, resorts to her mother-in-law's, Baby Suggs', house to live with her together with her own four children. All of them live as a happy family, but this house also alludes to further affairs related hiding experience. The property owner, Edward Bodwin, announces that "all the Bodwin

women had died there" (Morrison, 1987, p.259). Nonetheless, the house is also used as a place where valuable things can be saved. Edward Bodwin "remembers how he had used to bury around the house those precious things he wanted to protect, presumably from his father's authority and power" (Dominguez, 1994, p.35). Edward Bodwin's memories, in fact, point at Sethe's act of murdering Beloved, whom she wants to hide from the slave master. In other words, these "memories, though belated, actually prefigure Sethe's attempt to murder her children, her own precious possessions, in order to save them from slavery that is, to protect them from the white men's attempt to seize them in the episode known as "the Misery" (p.35). Nonetheless, it is not too long when the memories of Sethe's past appear to face her in the shape of Beloved's ghost preventing her from having a quiet life. Then, for Sethe to live quietly, she must keep the memories of her past.

Only then do former slave manage to comprehend their beings in the newly realized bright life. What slaves encounter under slavery is so intolerable that causes them lose whatever humane within them. In order to escape the trauma of slavery, the former slaves should be able to keep the memories of his/her experience as living ones. This act requires the slaves to be aware of the atrocities of slavery system in order for them to heal. It follows that Morrison's *Beloved* reveals the author's belief that "the past of slavery must first be fully remembered in all its horror before it can truly be reconciled" (Perna, 1998, p.90) and then slaves can continue their lives.

Examining *Beloved* with such a lens reflects Morrison's view concerning the issues related to the black community. Morrison believes that for black community to survive, it is essential to be united and supportive to one another. It is "only through remembering and collective healing can the characters of *Beloved* recover from the physical and emotional abuse that slavery has imposed upon them" (Sveinsdóttir, 2008, p.1). Furthermore, she aims at presenting the readers a new vision about the importance of the past to the black people. In other words, "Toni Morrison offers the reader a view of a larger picture, telling contemporary Americans that the past needs to be revisited if black people, whose unacknowledged beginnings are rooted in slavery, are to come to terms with their identity" (Sveinsdóttir, 2008, p.1). Therefore, Morrison's *Beloved* closes with "It was not a story to pass on" (Morrison, 1987, p.275) leaving no space for forgetting the past.

In Morrison's *Beloved*, the black identity can only be constructed bit by bit in terms of memories recollected by the characters. It is reflected by the black people's own past, which is gathered by means of juxtaposing the characters' yarns piece by piece until they becomes a complete whole. This process causes Morrison's narrative to be complicated but simultaneously effective. That is to say, "Instead of following a linear storyline, it jumps back and forth in time and slowly reveals Sethe's traumatic past. Most of the action in the book takes place in the past, which stresses the impact it has on the present lives of the characters" (Fischerova, 2006, p.9). In other words, the memories gradually constitute the entire past of these characters; each of them contributes with what he/she has in his/her package to the overall frame of the black historical account. These memories shape the black identity without which the black people's experiences may remain unvalued. "The same memories are repeated over and over again and every time something is added to it. The reader has to put the bits and pieces of memories together to create and realize the whole story" (Fischerova, 2006, p.9). Such a construction of the novel makes clear the importance of the memories of the past in realizing the present life of black people.

### Conclusion

African-American people lived for a long time in the United States as slaves not as human beings. After several centuries black people gained emancipation but discrimination was still clear. The idea that black means slaves, ugly, and less in status than the white person who is respectable, beautiful and better than the black person still existed.

In *beloved*, Morrison investigates what happens when a character refuses a postmodernist world, that is, when a character clings to one interpretation, one meaning of the past. Unable to change her understanding of a painful past. Sethe becomes its prisoner. Also the memories of the past represent the core theme in the Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, since they are related to slavery experiences that agitate the

entire black community. Although hurting and often traumatic, the characters of *beloved* are first reluctant to admit the presence of their memories of the former state of being slaves, and hence they appear losing track of their lives. Without these memories, the former slaves cannot reconcile with their future. For Morrison, the memories of the past also represent evidence on the deep effect of slavery on the African American people. They narrate the stories that have long remained untold because of racism and ethnicity.

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