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Slavery and the Everlasting Struggle for Selfhood in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*(1987)

A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English Language in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement of a Master Degree in Literature, and Language Teaching.

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Dedication

In loving memory of my late father who protected and guided me along the way.

To all our famillies and friends.

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Table of contents

Chapter One

The African American Struggle from Enslavementto Liberation

African Americans have experienced a difficult, often tragic, but uniquely inspiring journey from their introduction into the new world as slaves in the seventeenth century to the modern day. The struggle of African Americans for equality and prosperity defined much of the history throughout the twentieth century, leading to the great changes created by the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.In this chapter we shall provide a brief overview on African American history, starting from the establishment of slavery to long after its official abolishment. Moreover, we shall try to give a glimpse on the African American struggle from the inhumanity of the slave system, to a post-emancipation culture generally unwilling to accept them as social or legal equals.

1. The foundation of slavery

When the North American continent was first colonized by Europeans, the land was vast, the work was harsh, and there was a severe shortage of labor. Men and women were needed to work the land. White bond servants[1], paying their passage

[1] White bond servants: someone bound to labour without wages.

across the ocean from Europe through indentured labor, eased but did not solve the problem. Early in the seventeenth century, a Dutch ship loaded with African slaves introduced a solution—and a new problem—to the New World. Slaves were used on large farms where labor-intensive cash crops[2], such as tobacco, could be grown. By the end of the American Revolution[3]; slavery had proven unprofitable in the North and was dying out. Even in the South the institution was becoming less useful to farmers as tobacco prices fluctuated and began to drop. However, in 1793 Northerner Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin: this device made it possible for textile mills to use the type of cotton most easily grown in the South. Cotton replaced tobacco as the South's main cash crop and slavery became profitable again. Although most Southerners owned no slaves at all, by 1860 the South's "peculiar institution" was inextricably tied to the region's economy. Torn between the economic benefits of slavery and the moral and constitutional issues it raised, white Southerners grew more and more defensive of the institution. They argued that black people, like children, were incapable of caring for themselves and that slavery was a benevolent institution that kept them fed, clothed, and occupied. Most Northerners did not doubt that black people were inferior to whites, but they did doubt the benevolence of slavery.

In reality, treatment of slaves ranged from mild and paternalistic to cruel and sadistic. Husbands, wives, and children were frequently sold away from one another and punishment by whipping was not unusual. The United States Supreme Court in the 1857 Dred Scott Decision ruled that slaves were subhuman property with no rights of citizenship. They had no legal means of protesting the way they were treated. The enslaved lost customary rights, served for life, and passed their unfree condition on to their children. From the start, those subjected to slavery sought

[2] Cash crops: any crop that is considered easily marketable, as wheat or cotton.

[3] American revolition: the war between Great Britain and its American colonies, 1775–83, by which the colonies won their independence.

freedom through self-purchase, court action, escape, or, more rarely, rebellion. Southerners feared open rebellion but it rarely happened. However, slaves would pretend illness, organize slowdowns, sabotage farm machinery, and sometimes commit arson or murder; and running away, usually for short periods of time, was common.

2. The civil war and the abolishment of slavery

The outbreak of the Civil War[4] changed the future of the American nation. The war began as a struggle to preserve the Union[5], not a struggle to free the slaves, but many in the North and South felt that the conflict would ultimately decide both issues. Many slaves escaped to the North in the early years of the war, and several Union generals established abolitionist policies in the Southern land that they conquered. Congress passed laws permitting the seizure of slaves from the property of rebellious Southerners. On September 22, 1862, following the dramatic Union victory at Antietam, President Abraham Lincoln presented the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. This document decreed that, by the power of the United States armed forces, all slaves in states that were still in rebellion one hundred days after September 22 would be "thenceforward and forever free." Furthermore, Lincoln established an institution through which blacks could join the U.S. Army, an unprecedented level of integration at that time. The United States Colored Troops (USCT) served on many battlefields, won numerous Medals of Honor, and ensured eventual Union victory in the war. On December 6, 1865, eight months after the end of the Civil War, the United States adopted the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, which outlawed the practice of slavery.

[4] Civil war: the war in the U.S. between the North and the South, 1861–65.

[5] The union :a group of states or nations united into one political body, as that of the American colonies at the time of the Revolution,

Chapter One: The African American Struggle from Enslavement to Liberation

Despite having gained their emancipation from slavery in 1865, African Americans faced discrimination in every aspect of their lives until at least the 1950s. The 14th Amendment (1868) to the United States Constitution promised "equal protection of the laws" to all the nation's citizens. In practice, many US lawmakers, law courts and law enforcers approved a systematic segregation according to race. This resulted in African Americans being forced to use separate entrances to buildings, separated in theaters and on buses; and denied access to "whites only" swimming pools, hospitals, schools, housing and even cemeteries. They had to endure inadequate and sub-standard facilities, were intimidated into not exercising their voting rights; were referred to by the derogatory terms "nigger"[6] and "coon"[7]; and were at risk of becoming victims of mob rule, horrific violence and even lynching's.Known as the Jim Crow laws[8] enforced this segregation and the unequal distribution of the nation's resources that accompanied them.

Segregation and racial intolerance were worse in the southern states, where over 50 per cent of African Americans lived. In the early 1950s, US President Harry Truman, despite his own long-held racist attitudes, made some symbolic acts to address this situation, including ordering an end to discrimination in the armed forces and the civil service. He recognized that discrimination damaged the United States' international reputation. His leadership in this area helped to bring the issue of civil rights for African Americans to national attention. During the 1950s and 1960s, African Americans, along with people of other racial groups within the United States, embarked on the Civil Rights Movement to challenge discrimination and achieve equality that the American Constitution promised for its entire people and which was part of its claim to being a democracy. One of the early actions of this movement was to challenge the education system.

[6] Nigger: a contemptuous term used to refer to a black person.

[7] Coon : a rustic or undignified person.

[8] Jim crow laws: any state law discriminating against black pople.

In the case Plessey v. Ferguson in 1896, the United States Supreme Court upheld the legality of separating races on the basis of the principle 'separate but equal'. As a result, in the 1950s, African American children attended schools that were lacking in toilets, running water and even desks. Local education authorities only purchased new books for the white students in their districts. In Alabama in 1949, the state's expenditure on African American students amounted to 27 per cent of its expenditure on white students. In 1950, eight-year-old Linda Brown became the center of a Kansas court case demanding an end to segregated schools, which existed legally in 17 states. Spurred on by her father, she wanted to attend the well-equipped "whites only" school six blocks from her home rather than the African American school at four times the distance. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and its lawyer, Thurgood Marshall, brought the case to state and federal courts, and finally on appeal to the US Supreme Court. Throughout this process, supporters of segregation fought strongly to maintain separate schools for white children. They argued that the Constitution did not give the US federal government the power to overrule state law on education.The Supreme Court demanded the desegregation of schools.

In 1955, It reinforced this decision by ordering officials to comply with its guidelines for bringing African and white American students together in schools. In the South, many community leaders responded with plans to continue segregated education. Politicians gave their signatures in support of the Southern Manifesto[9], aimed at defeating the Brown decision. People formed Citizens' Councils to organize resistance to the ruling. Others supported the white supremacist group, the Ku Klux Klan[10]. By late 1956, six southern states had not even attempted to integrate education. It was clearly going to be very difficult to enforce a Supreme Court decision that had so much organized opposition, especially considering that US President Eisenhower had no personal commitment to integration.

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[9] Southern manifesto :a document by congressmen declaring their intentions to ignore fereral desegregation laws.)

[10] Ku klux klan : an organization founded originally in 1865,whose members engaged in campaigns of terror and intimidation against African Americans.

In 1957, nine African American students tried to attend Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. They had to endure threats and attempted violence from the racist crowds lining the streets that led to the school. Pro-segregation Arkansas governor, Faubus, sent in the Arkansas National Guard to preserve order. Little Rock degenerated into mob rule as pro-segregationists engaged in campaigns of hatred and violence against African Americans. African Americans suffered beatings, had their property attacked and lived under constant threat from the racist groups who controlled the city. Finally, President Eisenhower, more concerned to enforce the federal law on integration than committed to desegregation, ordered 1000 federal troops into Little Rock. Two days later, on 27 September 1957, the nine African American students entered Central High School under the protection of the United States army.

When the Arkansas National Guard troops took over a month later, violence against the new students resumed. Governor Faubus used this as an excuse to close the high schools for a full year. The state then established private schools, which excluded African Americans. Despite a court order that schools be reopened, desegregation lacked strong support from either state or federal governments and remained difficult to enforce. In 1960, only about 13 per cent of African American students in the southern states attended integrated schools. In 1964, the figure was 2 to 3 per cent for the nation as a whole.

The campaign to enforce desegregation in schools began a series of small-scale protests aimed at the achievement of African American civil rights. On 1 December 1955, in Montgomery, Alabama, 42-year-old Rosa Parks began another phase of this movement. Tired after a long day's work, she refused to give up her seat on the bus. The law reserved the front seats of the bus for whites. African Americans could sit in the back of the bus or in the middle if whites did not require these seats. Rosa Parks sat in the middle and refused to move when the "whites only" section had filled up. The bus driver called the police, who arrested her. Rosa Parks, a well-respected member of the NAACP, went to jail for violating the law. In protest, the African American community, who comprised 75 per cent of bus users in Montgomery, began a boycott of the city's buses

that continued for 382 days. This was in addition to African American demands for equal and polite treatment from bus drivers and the provision of jobs for African American drivers. African Americans wanted recognition of their equal rights to bus seats. Bus companies faced massive financial losses but refused to give in. The bus companies had the support of large sections of the white community, especially people who belonged to the Ku Klux Klan and the Citizens' Councils formed to resist integration. The boycott demonstrated African Americans' determination to take unified action in the fight for their rights; the value of economic power as a weapon; the extent of racism that existed within many southern communities; and the changed attitudes of many whites. The African American slogan was "People don't ride the bus today. Don't ride it for freedom". Montgomery's African American residents walked or gained transport through car pools, often with the help of sympathetic members of the white community. Martin Luther King, a young Baptist minister working in Montgomery, took on an important role as president of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), the organization directing the bus boycott. His church became a center for planning tactics and for providing inspiration and emotional support to help make the boycott unanimous. In November 1956, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the MIA's case for desegregation. The boycott ended on 20 December 1956, when the bus companies agreed to allow all bus travelers the same rights to any vacant seats.The bus boycott and moves towards desegregation in schools made President Eisenhower conscious of the need to gain support from potential African American voters.

In the United States, people have to register in order to vote and at this time only about 20 per cent of African Americans had done so. Eisenhower initiated the 1957 Civil Rights Act, significant as the first civil rights legislation in 82 years, although limited in scope. It declared discriminationt illegal and established the Federal Civil Rights Commission[11] to prosecute anyone in breach of this law. While technically it provided improved opportunities for African Americans to register to vote, it provided only weak sanctions for anyone trying to prevent them from doing so. Increased violence against African

[11] the federal civil rights commision : is an independent commission of the United States federal government, created in 1957, that is charged with the responsibility for investigating, reporting on, and making recommendations concerning civil rights issues in the United states.

Americans, including bombings of churches and schools, led to Eisenhower putting forward a new bill, which became the 1960 Civil Rights Act. It imposed penalties for anyone violating a court order to integrate a school or prevent someone either from voting or registering to vote. An additional 3 per cent of African Americans registered for the 1960 elections.

Martin Luther King admired the example of non-violent protest that Mohandas K. Gandhi had used in India in the 1920s. Gandhi had encouraged Indian people to practice non-violence non-cooperation in their protest against British rule in their country. Like Gandhi, King advocated a program of civil disobedience[12] that used non-violent methods. In 1957, King joined with other members of the clergy to establish the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). The SCLC began a campaign of "direct action", that was a dramatic change from the NAACP's focus on court battles. The campaign involved non-violent protest in the form of boycotts, demonstrations and marches to increase national consciousness of the denial of civil rights to African Americans. While many of these were successful, the harder thing was to establish and maintain the organization that would inspire ongoing effort for the cause.

In February 1960, in North Carolina, four African American college students refused to leave the seats they had taken at the local "whites only"cafeteria. With other students supporting them, they maintained a presence on the seats for the entire day, forcing cafeteria business to a stand-still. Martin Luther King encouraged this non-violent initiative. In 1960–61, over 70 000 people took part in "sit-ins" which succeeded in integrating public eating areas and also in desegregating other public facilities in 150 cities.

[12] Civil disobediance : the refusal to comply with certain laws considered unjust, as a peaceful form of political protest.

King's work in the early 1960s gained increasing national and international support for desegregation in all areas of American life. In 1961, he led demonstrations organized by the (SNCC) in Albany, Georgia, protesting against segregation in hotels, housing and restaurants. The "Albany Movement" achieved some integration of facilities but local authorities took their revenge by closing the parks, selling the swimming pool and removing the seats from the newly integrated public library. This led King to believe that it was better to pressure authorities into ending discrimination, not negotiate with them.

In early 1963, Martin Luther King and the SCLC began a series of protest marches in Birmingham, Alabama, a city renowned for its racism. King increased publicity for the movement by encouraging children and teenagers to participate as well. King was arrested and imprisoned for eight days. While there, he wrote his "Letter from Birmingham jaill", arguing that people were right to disobey unjust laws but must be willing to endure imprisonment. He described himself as standing between two distinct forces that characterized the black community at the time: those whose self-respect had been so worn-down by years of oppression that they were now complacent about the injustices of segregation; and those who harbored a growing bitterness and hatred of white people and had lost all faith in God and their country.

Following King's release, 1000 school students of Birmingham walked and sang in protest against segregation. Police arrested 90 per cent of these students aged between 6 and 16. King organized another march for the following day. Two thousand five hundred people of all age groups marched. The local police responded with clubs, attack dogs and electric cattle prods. Firefighters turned their high pressure hoses on the demonstrators, knocking them into the walls of buildings or onto the pavements. Dogs attacked the protestors' arms and legs. Newspapers published dramatic photos of these events all over the world. President Kennedy sent federal troops to restore order in Birmingham.

Police brutality in Birmingham provided a marked contrast to King's leadership and tactics and encouraged Americans to support calls for antidiscrimination laws. When African Americans staged another march a few days later, the police refused to obey the order of Police Chief Connor to turn fire hoses on the demonstrators. On 10 June 1963,

President John Kennedy called on Congress to pass more civil rights laws. Two nights later, NAACP activist, Medgar Evers, was shot dead outside his home in Jackson Mississippi. African Americans, shocked and outraged at the circumstances of Evers' death, decided to organize a march to Washington DC, the seat of American government.

For African Americans, the goals of the March on Washington in August 1963 were: to pressure the government into passing the proposed new Bill on civil rights and improving employment prospects for African Americans; and to stage an event that would attract worldwide media attention and demonstrate the success of non-violent tactics, especially among those angered by the slow pace of change. The march, orchestrated by long-term activist A. Philip Randolph, was a huge demonstration in favor of civil rights for African Americans.

On 28 August 1963, Martin Luther King faced a crowd of over 200 000 civil rights supporters crammed in between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial. It was the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation that ended slavery. King spoke of his dream for a different America:

> "Those who hope that the Negro ... will now be content will have a rude awakening if the Nation returns to business as usual. There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights'(295).

The Civil Rights Bill became law when the new president, Lyndon Baines Johnson (installed after Kennedy's assassination in November 1963), signed it on 4 July 1964. Johnson had pushed the Bill through Congress partly out of a sense of obligation to Kennedy and, more significantly, because he believed discrimination to be morally wrong. Martin Luther King was present at the signing ceremony. In late 1964, the Swedish Academy awarded King the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts in the Civil Rights Movement. However, his influence in the movement was already diminishing.

In 1964, the SNCC called on young volunteers, both black and white and from all over the United States, to devote their summer holidays to help end segregation in Mississippi. One thousand volunteers came to help run Freedom Schools, teach typing and reading

and provide general information about US laws and African Americans who had fought for civil rights. They also assisted 17 000 African Americans to complete voter registration forms, although the lack of cooperation from officials meant that less than 10 per cent succeeded in actually registering.

On 21 June 1964, civil rights workers James Earl Chaney (19), Andrew Goodman (20) and Michael Schwerner (24) disappeared while driving between Meridian and Philadelphia in Mississippi. They were on their way to investigate the burning of an African American church. Police arrested them just outside Philadelphia for a minor driving offence and later said that the three were released from present a few hours later. Federal Bureau of Iinvestigation agents found their car in a swamp two days later and six weeks later located the activists' bodies. They had been beaten and shot. Of the 18 white men accused of the murders, 11 were acquitted and seven were found guilty of lesser charges. The murders highlighted the dangers of involvement in the Civil Rights Movement,and the law's failure to uphold the rights of its citizens.

The "Freedom Summer"[13] volunteers were under constant threat of violence. Whites burned 37 churches, bombed 30 houses and buildings, beat up 80 people involved in the project, arrested over 1000 and murdered Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner. The failure of the newly established Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) to gain full representation at the Democratic Party Convention supported the view of many African Americans that integration was unrealistic and non-violence was ineffective.

On 7 March 1965, 600 SCLC activists embarked on an 80-kilometre march from Selma to Montgomery to highlight the cause of voting rights. Only 23 of Selma's 19 000 African Americans were registered to vote and King's campaign to change this had led to police violence but no progress. Police waited for the marchers at Selma's Edmund Pettus Bridge. They attacked the crowd with clubs and tear gas. People called the day "Bloody Sunday". Two days later, Martin Luther King led a second protest march to the bridge

[13] Freedom Schools were temporary, alternative free schools for African Americans mostly in the South. They were originally part of a nationwide effort during the Civil Rights Movement to organize African Americans to achieve social, political and economic equality in the United States.

and, on Sunday 21 March 3200, protesters began the walk to Montgomery. By the time they got there, on 25 March 1965, the crowd had grown to 25 000. Similar marches in key US cities highlighted the growing popular support for this issue.

In August 1965, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law. The protest march from Selma to Montgomery contributed to its successful passage through Congress. By the late 1960s, voter registration in the South had increased by over 200 per cent.

While King inspired many individual initiatives and provided leadership for a number of individual events, he never managed to unite civil rights activists behind his vision. King's campaign for civil rights became less influential as many activists, including King himself, devoted their energies to anti-war protests against US involvement in Vietnam, and also as more radical supporters of the Civil Rights Movement began to openly question the effectiveness of King's use of non-violent protest. Members of groups such as the SNCC felt King gained credit for a lot of their hard work.

By the late 1960s, the words "Black Power"[14] had come to dominate the Civil Rights Movement. The two words were coined by Stokely Carmichael, a leading supporter of the Black Power movement. The words encouraged African Americans to pursue self-determination and to take control of their own communities. Civil rights' campaigns had focused mainly on discrimination in the South. The fifty per cent of African Americans who lived in the North also suffered inadequate housing, poor access to facilities, high unemployment and white control of government and law enforcement. Stokely Carmichael argued that many whites remained violently opposed to civil rights despite King's appeals to their consciences and morality. Some Black Power supporters saw their goal as supremacy over whites; others aimed at improved conditions for workers. Some interpreted it as political and economic power.

[14] Black power : Militant slogan for immediate equality coined by Stokely Carmichael prior to joining the Black Panthers.

Another prominent African American leader, Malcolm X[15], also believed that African Americans needed to become militant in order to defeat white racism. While serving a prison sentence for burglary, Malcolm X had become interested in a religious group known as the Nation of Islam. Its teachings incorporated the goal of a separate African American state as well as concern to promote economic self-help for African Americans. While mainstream Islamic teaching was non-racist, the Nation of Islam preached the opposite view that whites were "devils" who would soon be destroyed, thus enabling black rule.

When released from prison in 1952, Malcolm took the symbol "X" to signify the absence of an inherited African name and worked to spread both the religious and the political goals of Islam throughout the United States. He was a powerful speaker and succeeded in recruiting thousands of young African Americans to the Nation of Islam. By 1963, around 30 000 African Americans had joined the Nation of Islam and Malcolm X had become its best-known spokes person.Initially, Malcolm X's views differed markedly from those of Martin Luther King. Malcolm X wanted the separation of races, not integration. He spoke of King's non-violence as "the philosophy of the fool" and called for a "black revolution" to overthrow white power. Malcolm X made fun of King's famous "I have a dream" speech, with the line, "While King was having a dream, and the rest of us Negroes are having a nightmare".

The Black Panthers were another militant political group. Founded by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale in October 1965, they produced a ten-point program advocating the restructuring of American society to achieve social, political and economic equality for African Americans. The Black Panthers patrolled black communities to protect their residents from abuses of police power. However, by the late 1970s, problems and divisions within the party had eroded its political force.

[15] Malcom X Black Muslim (NoI) spokesman who called for armed self-defense against white racism & violence.

From the mid to the late 1960s, riots broke out in many United States' cities. Malcolm X was assassinated in New York on 21 February 1965. This provoked riots in over 100 cities.

On 11 August 1965, two weeks after President Johnson had signed the Voting Rights Act[16], Los Angeles police arrested Marquette Frye, an African American, for drunk driving. During the arrest, in the black ghetto area of Watts, one of the police officers aimed a gun at Frye, as if to shoot him. This event provoked six days of rioting as African Americans gave vent to their outrage at the ongoing injustices they had to face. Rioters burned cars and shopping areas and shot police and firefighters. The Watts riots led to 34 deaths, hundreds of people injured and thousands were arrested. When asked what Martin Luther King would think of their actions, one of the rioters replied "Martin Luther Who?"

In 1966, riots broke out in Chicago, Cleveland, Dayton, Milwaukee and San Francisco. The government sent in the National Guard to restore order in all of those cities. In 1967, African American frustration exploded in even more violent riots in Newark and Detroit resulting in the shooting of nearly 83 African Americans.

3. The aftermath of the civil rights movement

In the 1950s and 1960s, African American Civil Rights activists pressured successive US governments and presidents to recognize and protect their rights. The 1968 Civil Rights Act made it illegal to discriminate, on the basis of race, religion, sex and national origin, against anyone trying to finance, rent or purchase accommodation. It also provided protection for civil rights activists. It was President Johnson's third piece of civil rights legislation and demonstrated his commitment to this issue.

[16] The Voting Rights Act of 1965 is a landmark piece of federal legislation in the United States that prohibits racial discrimination in voting.

By the end of the Civil Rights Movement, significant numbers of the United States' white population accepted the idea of equal political and legal rights for African Americans. They were slower to accept their rights to social and economic equality, especially if it came at the cost of higher taxation. However, African Americans continued to experience disadvantage, resulting from poverty and discrimination. The average wage for an African American was just over half the average for a white person. Nearly three times as many African Americans lived below the poverty line. African American men received prison sentences at seven times the rate of white men. Fifteen states denied ex-offenders the vote, thus disenfranchising 13 per cent of African American men nationwide, and nearly 40 per cent in some states.

To sum up, Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement helped shape the African American history despite all the difficulties brought upon the black community by white individuals and the government, to fully admit their presence among them.To this day, Martin Luther King's birthday — 15 January — is now a national holiday in the United States on the third Monday of January each year. This is indicative of a number of successes in the Civil Rights Movement. By the early twenty-first century, overt racism had become unacceptable and African Americans,to the modern day,still play increasingly significant roles in all aspects of US life.

Chapter Two

The development of individual identity

Toni Morrison's book *Beloved,* is a historical novel that serves as a memorial for those who died during the perils of slavery. The novel serves as a voice that speaks for the silenced reality of slavery for both men and women. In this novel Morrison gives a voice to those who were denied one, in particular African American women. It is a novel that rediscovers the African American experience.

In the first chapter the focus is on the individual aspect of the spiritual quest for self-valuation. Examining Sethe[1]'s and Denver[2]'s struggle for self-affirmation, the study elaborates firstly on the effects that institutionalized slavery had on its victims' psyche. As for Sethe, the discussion concerns not only the problem of the dehumanization triggered by the white oppressors, but also the harm done to Sethe by the black community.

1.The quest for self valuation

In her novel *Beloved*, Morrison conciously sets African Americans's past and their present living situation into her work, for she intends to make use of her literary discourse to reproduce "A New History"—the true history of the American black people that was once veiled by the American white's mainstream society. In this way, she

[1] Seth : is the main protagonist of the novel.
[2] Denver :is among the main characters of the novel.She is also Seth's daughter.

hopes to cure the psychological trauma of the black and call on her people to look for their lost culture and reconstruct their ethnic consciousness[3].

" Worse than that ─ far worse ─ was what Baby Suggs died of, what Ella knew, what Stamp saw, what made Paul D tremble. That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up ." ~Toni Morrison, Beloved

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* can figure as an investigation of the paths that the individual takes to reach self-affirmation. The personal need to re-articulate one's selfhood has its roots in the institution of slavery responsible for the removal of this selfhood in the first place. Therefore, the individual searches for new self-recognition, an impulse traced back to the trauma[4] of past experience. Even though the effects of slavery were experienced primarily within the communal boundaries, the white oppression has also affected the individual. Only by affirming personal individuality, is one able to be reborn in the community. It seems that in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, it is the two female protagonists, Sethe and her daughter, Denver, that represent successfully regained self-value, and recognition in the eyes of the community.

Though apparently white racial oppression aimed at devaluating and abusing all black people without exception, it tended to exercise its cruelty primarily on black women. According to some critics, the cause of black women's trauma in the novels of Toni Morrison is strongly bound with the effect of the suppression of Black race, which reinforces the black obsession with the psychic scars, ontological[5] wounds, and existential bruises. These obsessions are of vital significance for the agency of self-making which is essential to the human struggle for mature black selfhood.

[3] Ethnic consciousness refers to the awareness of membership in a racial or ethnic group by both group members and the larger society in which they reside.
[4] Trauma is a disordered psychic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury
[5] Ontology : the branch of metaphysics that studies the nature of existence

Nevertheless, the search for black space (home), black place (roots), and black face (name) was a big obstacle despite the abolition of slavery. Thus, quoting James Berger's words, "even in a free state and after slavery, the former owners, under the auspices of law and science, can still regard the African American as object, property, and specimen" (Kella 145). In the reality where the abolition of slavery existed apparently only in theory, it was still normal for the whites to continue the practice of slave-holding.

For the white abolitionists, supremacy originates primarily in the degradation of black bodies in order to have control over them, which is best done through persuasion that their black bodies are ugly and spiteful. Therefore, using the device of dehumanizing the body, slavery aimed first and foremost at women. It can be afiirmed that, when considering institutionalized slavery, it is essential to understand that more central than liberation alone was African American women's maltreatment,it was easier to enact cruelty upon women because, apart from being black, they were also most vulnerable in the black society for they were females. This fact encouraged white oppressors to abuse them sexually.Toni Morrison's *Beloved* clearly portrays that there is more to the equality of oppression since under slavery women were routinely the subjects of rape, enforced childbirth, and natal alienation from their children. The fact that they were mothers, also enabled, even encouraged, white masters to dehumanize and deprive women on a higher level of degradation than it could be done to slave-men. Apparently, Toni Morrison found the experience of black mothers who develop a sense of self after slavery worth writing about. Hence, Beloved appears to be a proper illustration of it.

Based on a true story of Margaret Garner[6] the action of the novel takes place in 1873 Cincinnati, Ohio.After escaping from a Kentucky plantation the main character, Sethe, attempts to kill her children to prevent them from being re-enslaved. She succeeds in killing only one of her four children. This event, in all its brutality, condemns Sethe to

[6] Margaret Garner was a slave woman with a national reputation in the years before the American Civil War. Margaret Garner's story of her willingness to kill her own child to prevent her from being returned to a life in bondage received national attention.

being rejected by the society. She then seeks refuge within the walls of her house at 124 Bluestone Road, where she separates herself as well as her daughter, Denver, from the black community.

Hence, the cruelty of dehumanization that indirectly forced Sethe to commit infanticide can be best illustrated with examples from the novel. There are two crucial moments in Sethe's life when she is submitted to the dehumanizing forces of the white oppressors. The first clearly distinguishable incident in Sethe's story that marks a turning point in her life and drastically changes her perception of the future, takes place early in her life, when she is put on the animal side of the list of features according to schoolteacher's education. Sethe overhears the man's lesson, during which he teaches his nephews about the natural features of a human, drawing a thick line between a human being and an animal. To supply his students with a more precise exemplification of the difference between the human and animal world, he classifies Sethe as a representative of the animal realm. Not until she actually acknowledges that "the feature means something naturally assigned to a thing, can she understand the humiliating classification. She begins to trust in the words of Baby Suggs that there is no bad luck in the world but whitefolks" (*Beloved* : 89) seeing no other possibility than to draw a general conclusion about the racism of every single white person . The aspect of dehumanization gains even more meaning when, much later in her life, Sethe is pregnant with Denver. Sethe's milk is then taken from her to feed the schoolteacher's nephews. As it is indicated, feeding white boys with Sethe's own milk, is superimposed over feeding her own children. Such thing deprives Sethe of the role of being a mother, and degrades her to the position of a "breeder," as she is made use of like an animal in service of feeding a human. The humiliation reaches its peak when Sethe learns that her husband, Halle, is a witness to the situation. Since he cannot protect her, he feels emasculated, and therefore abandons her. Much as Halle's behavior is then rationalized by Sethe, she will nevertheless feel disgust for men. This, in consequence, can be a logical explanation of her inability to form a closer relationship with Paul D. As the last from the sweet-home men and the only one who survived, Paul D appears in Sethe's life eighteen years after the event of killing her child and shows readiness to form a relationship with Sethe. In fact, this could give the basis for the substitute of a traditional family, if not for them both, then at least for Denver. Yet, to Sethe's

disappointment, Paul D cannot reconcile with the knowledge of Sethe's committing so barbarous an act as murder, and following the white masters' example compares her to an animal when he says: "you have two legs, not four."(*Beloved*:90). This declaration is all the more hurtful and humiliating for Sethe because here Paul D sides with the white oppressors, simply unable to understand the complexity of her actions. Sethe, who has hoped for Paul D's support in her suffering, receives it neither from the black society, nor from Paul D.

Hence, to talk about Sethe's journey to self-reliance and her reaffirmation in the black society it should be emphasized that it were not only whitefolks who broke her heartstrings. As a direct result of enslavement, every slave created his/her identity[7] based on the definition provided by the white people. In consequence, the members of the black community begin to perceive each other according to the whites' definition of the Black race. Therefore, a significant hindrance to Sethe's self-valuation can be attributed to the actions of the black community which, rather than using their own definition, interpreted Sethe's actions through the definition borrowed from their oppressors. This is why Sethe's killing of her own child can be analyzed at least in two ways, depending on whether the "black" or "white" definition is applied. Some critics consider the act barbaric, while others see it as heroic. Perceiving the murder as an act of barbarism suggests agreeing to be defined by the slaver, whereas calling it heroism, even if controversial, signifies black selfdefinition.

Gurleen Grewal, for example, suggests taking Sethe's deed as a heroic act of resistance that revealed in itself the whole idea of slavery. The critic justifies her position through the statement: "If the master could subject the slave children in bondage to a slow 'social death,' the mother could release them through physical death." The reader is encouraged by Toni Morrison to see Sethe's killing of the child as not an anomaly, but rather as a revision of the stereotype of "the mammy figure" (Grewal : 97). She is not afraid to call Sethe's act "a desperate act of love." All the more unreasonable then, seems Sethe's exclusion from the black community. The

[7] Identity the distinguishing character or personality of an individual.It is also the relation established by psychological identification.

society that has previously heartily welcomed her as its rightful member, now ostracizes[8] her from its range. They invite her to join their free community once she has escaped from slavery, and seeks shelter in the embrace of Baby Suggs, her mother-in-law. Now she is among her people. Still, it is only for a month that she enjoys the status of a black sister. After the unforgivable infanticide, the people who could best understand her motives because of their common experience, reject her: "Those twenty-eight happy days were followed by eighteen years of disapproval and a solitary life" (*Beloved* : 173). Sethe's exclusion from society is justified by other critics who, unlike Grewal , find Sethe's murder unpardonable.

After being rejected, Sethe finds a place of desolation within the walls of 124 Bluestone house and succeeds in isolating herself, and Denver, from the community.This relates the idea of the house, through which women could work out their salvation and define their identities.Accordingly,it determines another interpretation of Sethe's esclusion pointing to the importance of the division between inside and outside, private and public of the house. In the this estimation, Sethe spatially circumscribes life to the house, and as such, is able to see a way to find her true identity. In addition, Sethe's having locked herself in the house can be perceived as an attempt to revise the past in order to free herself from the burden of her murder. The will to re-enact the traumatic experience can be then taken for a struggle for freedom. This being so, the house stands as a device to recollect and recreate memories as a compulsory step to self-redemption. Hence, asserting freedom for oneself called for the revision of the disgraceful past. Sethe's subconscious longing for clarification of the past, and for forgiveness, brings into being the ghost of her murdered child.

"According to West African belief, the dead are not finished with the living because the past (the dead), present (the living), and future (the unborn) are coexistent. Deceased ancestors can and do communicate with their descendants, especially if certain rites of the dead have not been performed. Such a world view posits a fluidity and continuity between the past and present" (Grewal 1998: 106)

[8] Ostrasize is to exclude from a group by common consent.

It takes eighteen years for the ghost of Sethe's murdered daughter, Beloved, to come back in flesh and claim the love she has been denied. Beloved appears as a young woman, but behaves like a child. Being slaughtered by her mother she has never been given a chance to mature, thus, her development was arrested at the point when she was a crawling-already baby. Consequently, her mentality is comparable to that of a child, and she is selfishly demanding. Her infantile egocentricity reveals itself in the nature of her return, mainly, she comes back to claim what was taken from her. To borrow a Freudian term, Beloved's "return of the repressed[9]" denotes the comeback of the suffering soul to "possess" (Grewal, : 105). Initially, Beloved's appearance suggests to the main protagonists that she came to love and be-loved. As time goes by, Sethe and Denver make every effort to provide the regained family member with all the love they previously reserved for each other. Hard as they try, it becomes visible that the feeling of love is not at all altruistic. On the contrary, the notion of "love" is equalized with the notion of "possession." Beloved's behavior is often approached through the spiritual complex that develops into some demonic force, and subsequently leads to Sethe's mental and physical destruction. She resigns from her job to be constantly at Beloved's disposal. In doing so, she gradually loses control over her own life, and progressively ceases to perform the role of a mother. While attempting to make up for the murder, Sethe does not fulfill Beloved's expectations. In reality, what Beloved seeks is a compensation for being abandoned in the past. Incapable of perceiving the true intentions behind Beloved's actions, Sethe exists only as the ghost's possession. At this point in the novel, the ghost appears to be a main threat to her mother's existence. Moreover,the haunted house enhances Beloved's drift to suck the life out of Sethe. This explains that the maternal bond contains a hidden threat endangering both the child and the mother. Through this bond the child remains infantile and dependent, and it has destructive effects upon the mother, especially when she is threatened to lose her children.

[9] The return of the repressed is the process whereby repressed elements, preserved in the unconscious, tend to reappear in consciousness or in behavior.

2.Motherhood and family bond

In *Beloved*, motherhood is strongly associated with the desire to possess the children. This relation is reflected in the extensive use of possessive pronouns that underline the creation of an intimate fusion between females at 124 Bluestone Road. These are three sections in the novel that are Sethe's, Denver's and Beloved's stream-of-consciousness[10], centered around the possessive pronoun mine. Sethe's repeated assertion: "Beloved, she mine daughter, She mine," is followed by Denver's conviction "Beloved is my sister. Waiting for me. Ready for me to protect her," and Beloved's final declaration: "I am Beloved and she is mine. I am not separate from her her face is my own [emphasis mine]" (*Beloved*: 200, 205, 206, 210). These statements testify that the mother-daughter relationship is not nurturing, and that there is a need to decipher the nature of love as demanding and wanting from either of the sides. For instance, taking into account Sethe's words: "Unless carefree, motherlove was a killer" (*Beloved*: 132), one can argue that at this very point in the novel the feeling of "love" lost its original meaning. That is why women need to see themselves as more than mothers in order to prevent themselves from killing their children in the name of love. Paul D seems to share this opinion when he states that "the best thing was to love everything just a little bit, so when they broke its back or shoved it in the croaker sack, well, maybe you'd have a little love left over for the next one" (*Beloved*: 45).Blaming Sethe for her "too thick love," he emphasizes the fact that her major crime lay not so much in the murder itself as giving herself the right to posses her children. Accordingly, Sethe asserts the basic law of mother-right over the bodies of her children in the society which denies her that right. Yet, within Sethe's words: "Love is or it ain't. Thin love ain't love at all,"(*Beloved*:62) Toni Morrison defends Sethe's maternal love. She strongly believes that this kind of love is a sign of the mother's infinite devotion.

Undoubtedly, Toni Morrison's theme of motherhood is difficult to decipher. On the one hand, a woman is the creator and caretaker of home. On the other, Seth's maternal love far from being romantic is rather dark, medicinal and mysterious. Thus, the cause

[10] Stream of consciousness is a method of narration that describes in words the flow of thoughts in the minds of the characters.

of Denver's reservation to the world outside also has its roots in the rapport between her and her mother. The major aspect of Denver's disability to achieve self-confidence is the lack of established family. Sethe's family was neither normative, nor pathological because fatherless the blame for its deformed structure is on the traumatizing forces of white racism. Hence, the family as a unit stands on guard of racial solidarity, and arises in opposition to racism. In this manner, it threatens the institution of slavery and is, therefore, the main target for destruction. Although Sethe is willing to create a substitute of a traditional home for Denver, especially when her two brothers escape, the source of domestic nurturance and familial love does not have its source in her biological mother.

Undoubtedly, it is Beloved's influence upon Sethe that allows her to re-articulate her value and self-definition. Beloved is not only a ghost of Sethe's killed daughter, but also a symbol of the link between the present and the past. It is therefore not only through the recreation of the maternal bond that Sethe searches for her self-affirmation. The formulation of Sethe's identity is also accomplished through the connection with the past obtained thanks to the ghost. Even though Beloved belongs neither to the present nor to the past, she becomes a link between the preset time and the times passed. Thus, the factual events from Sethe's and Denver's lives are inseparably connected with their history embodied in *Beloved*.

Yet, re-memorizing the past can work both ways. In one critic's opinion, Sethe's past could either enslave or free her. It seems that in order to free herself of the burden of the traumatic “yesterday,” Sethe needs to experience it all new. It is not until Beloved's physical arrival that Sethe is finally allowed to reexamine her story with regard to sacrifice, resistance, and mother love. Being a realization of the past trauma, Beloved also becomes “the literal return of the event against the will of the one it inhabits” (Grewal: 98). As such, Beloved may act in opposition to the people she settles to live with. A real adaptation to the scarcely disremembered history, Beloved re-opens the wounds caused by slavery. This confirms the ghost's limiting influence over Sethe and Denver.This postulates that Toni Morrison's female protagonists understood that their historical background hinders the creation of their own positive images. In order to heal the wounds of slavery, black people have to learn to forget and leave the harmful

experience behind. If *Beloved* serves as a revival of painful memories that for black people interchangeably meant the times of slavery, then Sethe's and Denver's journey to self-recognition could be impeded by their unwillingness to undergo the torment all new. *Beloved* should therefore be understood as a symbol of obscure history, the pain of slavery which is constantly being suppressed.

3.The highlights of beloved's re-emergence

The ghost's negative influence upon the main protagonists of the novel is further visible in the competition between Sethe and Denver over Beloved. When the ghostgirl appears in flesh, Denver becomes jealous, because, like her mother, she also forms a possessive relationship to her sister. While Sethe and Denver become rivals in the battle over Beloved's attention, the atmosphere grows tense. This competitive atmosphere is a result of the mother's and the daughter's nostalgia for lost companionship: it indicates Sethe's desire to revive the broken tie with her daughter and Denver's hunger for a sister. Denver first acknowledges the nature of the relation between Sethe and Beloved: "Sethe was trying to make up for the handsaw; Beloved was making her pay for it. But there would never be an end to that, and seeing her mother diminished shamed and infuriated her" (*Beloved*: 251). Witnessing her mother's gradual collapse, Denver decides to prevent her from the destructive influence of Beloved. Even if it is arguable whether Sethe's restoration to the community was this community's or Denver's accomplishment, it is quite clear that without Denver's mature decision, whether rational or intuitive, Sethe's recovery, even her existence, would be highly dubious. The moment of her mother's spiritual death marks the beginning of Denver's quest for maturity. At this particular moment Denver takes on responsibility for her mother and goes out to seek help within the community once lost. In fact, Denver's abandoning the house in search for the dialogue with the black community can be read as a positive effect of Beloved's agency.

Although Beloved's power is devastating, it is also therapeutic. Toni Morrison admits that "the presence or the absence of an ancestor determined the success or the happiness of the character" (Mardberg: 183). It is clear from this explanation that it

stands not only as a symbol of suppression, but also as a key element in the construction of Sethe's self-recognition. Beloved's appearance is indispensable for Sethe and Denver, and the process of finding their identity.

In two places in the novel Beloved's restorative power becomes especially evident. The first episode takes place when Sethe, Denver and Beloved go skating on ice together. " Holding hands, bracing each other, they swirled over the ice,...screaming with laughter... Each seemed to be helping the other to stay upright, yet every tumble doubled their delight... Nobody saw them falling" (*Beloved*: 174). The scene has symbolic reverberations: Beloved brings Sethe and Denver closer to each other, and the mother-daughter tie becomes close-knit. This can be seen the moment in the women's lives as reunion between the mother and the sisters, thus emphasizing the positive aspect of the ghost's appearance. Before Beloved's materialization, any attempt of dialogue between Sethe and Denver was hindered, and therefore abandoned. It was a result of Denver's fear for her mother's "murderous love." But for Beloved, the two women will never have insight into the core of a mother daughter relation. It is Beloved's remedial force too that reconstructs the mother- and the daughterhood in the novel.

Beloved's healing power is further demonstrated when Denver is forced to go out the yard. It is the ghost's agency that provokes Denver's decision to seek help outside the secure four walls. Denver's mother simply prevents her from communicating with the black society.All of the critics'study strongly support the view that communal identities are crucial to the well-being of Morrison's women, where daughterhood preserves an African-American heritage in the sense of cultural continuity. Through alienation[11] in the house at 124 Bluestone Road, Denver is completly aware of the possibility to aspire to the expectancies imposed on her as a daughter and as a member of the community. Instead, she grows up self-centered and lonely, afraid of her mother and the world outside the yard.

[11] Alienation isthe state of being alienated, withdrawn, or isolated from the objectiveworld, as through indifference or disaffection.

As it can be deducted from Denver's decision, she learned Baby Suggs' lesson, for she is the one who claimed that, despite the inability to defend oneself against the white folks, one must claim freedom through action. Taking this advice, Denver leaves the four walls of 124 Bluestone Road, thus breaking the domestic confinement, and transcending the biological bond that disabled her searching for integrity within the whole community.

Much as it may be dscribed to the ghost's damaging influence, the challenging decision to leave the secure domestic space is a monumental progress in Denver's mental growth. The girl's stepping off the edge of the world under the pressure of the evil ghost, puts an end to the infantile stage in Denver's life. The moment she starts functioning as a member of the society, an adolescent girl transforms herself into a grown-up woman taking whole responsibility for her family's future. One critic succinctly summarizes this very act as Denver's "rite of passage into womanhood" (Groover: 74). Though it surely constitutes a "journey into community," it can also be viewed as a voyage into adulthood and self-recognition in the eyes of this particular community. In other words, Denver provides a developmental model of a person who escaped the threat of total alienation and became aware of her place in the social structure.

In consequence of Denver's responsible agency, Sethe's recovery is at hand, and it is triggered by the black community. Not only is it achieved by the black women driving Beloved out of 124 Bluestone house, but also by Paul D's reassurance: "Go as far inside as you need to, I'll hold your ankles" (*Beloved*: 46).

Without doubt, it is Beloved who prompts Sethe's inward journey. The ghost functions as a purifying rememory, and her disappearance signifies the past finally confronted. Now Sethe is released into the present. The prophetic character of Beloved's arrival that gives hope to a promising future is reflected at the carnival. Without a vow or promise, to see how it goes, Paul D decides to take Sethe and Denver to the carnival. During that very night "they were not holding hands, but their shadows

were... she [Sethe] decided that it was a good sign. A life. Could be" (*Beloved*: 47). Sethe's projection of a new life to emerge has a double significance. Firstly, it anticipates the ghost's arrival the following day. Secondly, it envisions the emergence of a family from unconventional sources. As it happens the night before Beloved's materialization into the human body, her appearance can be read as a prophecy of a better tomorrow. For these were the shadows, not people who joined hands: it symbolizes a potential for a family bound to emerge.

Yet, to gain mature self-valuation, Sethe needs to claim it individually. Beloved's significance is undeniable, but in order to recognize herself as an independent person, Sethe has to believe in it by admitting her "Self" aloud. Yet, before spelling out the actual "Me" in the name of self-recognition, she is in danger of losing it forever. Although in the beginning Sethe plays the role of a mother, due to the reversal of roles, she becomes an innocent child as "Beloved ate up her life, grew taller on it" (Groover: 73). It is not until Paul D stimulates her awareness of a true Self, and a need for "some kind of tomorrow," is Sethe finally able to assure her own identity. During one conversation Paul D affirms: "You your best thing, Sethe. You are" (*Beloved*: 273). Through these words he attempts to awaken Sethe's self-perception, and the need for her detachment from her children. Whereas Sethe continues to regard herself through her children, Paul D strives to build her self-conviction of separateness from them, of her as an independent whole. Sethe's subsequent reply: "Me? Me?," though hesitant, is nevertheless a crucial stage of affirming her individual separateness. The development of Sethe's self-value is comparable to Baby Suggs' maturing from the phase of "not knowing what she looked like and not being curious" to the moment of "suddenly seeing her [Baby Suggs'] hands and thinking with clarity: 'These hands belong to me. These my hands' " (*Beloved*: 141). Sethe grows to the final proclamation of herself not in the sense that her children were her best thing, but as a reflection of herself as her best thing.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* demonstrates that the dramatic historical background of slavery may acquire an empowering role. The novel portrays successful development of "black identity" in times when a black person was denied it. During the struggle for

self-definition, Sethe and Denver learn to self-possess their own selves, and overcome the conviction of being someone else's possession. Toni Morrison constructs a story of the personal aspiration of a black individual to be recognized as a human being, which subsequently marks the beginning of the communal crusade to self-acceptance. Only when the individual succeeds in finding his/her own identity does the possibility of gaining the collective self-recognition emerge.

The present study has portrayed the roads to collective as well as personal recognition. The journey to self-reliance takes the novel's protagonists in many directions. Sethe strives to reconcile with her history through self-examination. The process of her going as far inside as she needed to self-identify is gradual. It requires going back to her roots and re-memorizing the horrific past of slavery with its dehumanization and deprivation. Consequently, not only does she have to resist whitefolks' oppression, but she is also subjected to black malice.

Not unlike her mother, Denver also goes through various stages in her development to affirm her personal identity. Devoid a traditional home she sets out on a journey to seek its substitute. Before she is able to change her attitude towards Sethe, she has to overcome the fear of her mother and be willing to rescue her. Yet, it is not until Beloved's appearance when self-recognition for both of them is finally at hand. The ghost of the murdered daughter symbolizes Sethe's past that is ready to be revisioned, and re-experienced with change, which restores her back into the community. Besides, it makes Denver gain mature responsibility for her family and leads indirectly towards her recognition of a place in the society.

What Toni Morrison had strived to achieve when writing her novel, Beloved, was to show the rebirth of black identity through revived agency among downtrodden people. By portraying the struggle for self-affirmation, she most vividly displayed the especially degraded and oppressed people’s hunger for identity, meaning, and self-worth.

" So I've just insisted – insisted! – upon being called a black woman novelist, and I decided what that meant, because I have claimed it. I have claimed what I know. As a black and a woman, I have had access to a range of emotions and perceptions that were unavailable to people who were neither."

To sum up, with these words Morrison reveals that her prevailing wish to acknowledge something that so far has been inaccessible to art can finally become articulated within the space of her novel, *Beloved*. The idea to base this novel on a dramatic, yet factual story of Margaret Garner is derived from a will to deliver truths that even history fails to convey.

Chapter Three

The Development of Communal Identity

The final chapter of this study takes a closer look at the communal struggle for self-redefinition. Much attention is given to the rationale behind an individual being conditioned by the community, and to the function of "the ancestor" and the African American heritage in the discovery of collective originality[1]. Also analyzed here are factors that unite members of a social group, such as the religious ritual conducted by "Baby Suggs, holy." To contrast the common sources of mutual empowerment, this study further emphasizes the threat of losing contact with a spiritual leader and falling into the trap of the whites' degrading definition.

1. The communal struggle for self-redefinition

Toni Morrison has always placed an individual within the context of the society. Or rather, the society performed a crucial part in the formation of an individual. Morrison insists that the place inhabited by the community was not that essential for its single members as it was for the people that formed it. One has always been surrounded by other members of the community, therefore, the development of the "I" could only be achieved among others. Toni Morrison's novel, *it* stands as an example of how isolation from one's community can threaten the well-being of particular individuals. When the novel's two central protagonists, Sethe and Denver, lock themselves at 124 Bluestone Road thus starting to live only inside, they shed every contact with the outside. But for infrequent negotiations with the community, the two women would successfully cease to exist within

[1] Collective originallitye²: Denoting a number of persons considered as one group and involving all members of this group as distinct from its individuals.

the four walls. The novel then marks the significance of revising and re-articulating the relationship between an individual and the community.

What exactly constitutes a community? Accordingly, the notion is equivocal. On the one hand, it denotes actual social group, on the other, it indicates a particular quality of a relationship between the members of a particular social unit. Assigning the latter interpretation a greater silence, it explains that it is the intra-communal relation, rather than the spacial aspect, that decides about the community's condition and status. The community provides the individual with meaning and purpose, with a sense of belonging to something larger and more powerful than the self. This constitutes the very essence of what a community means.It is even more precise when a community provides its members with a strong foundation for resisting the oppressions of systemic and institutional prejudice. This is very true in the case of institutionalized slavery as it is presented in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*.

When it comes to slave narratives[2] the aspect of collective trauma, and consequently, racial solidarity against common oppression seem vital. In The novel, an individual is somewhat removed from the center of the novel so as to give priority to the multiplicity of voices. Personal trauma is less important than the interaction and interdependence of various consciousnesses – this way the narrative becomes collective. "Collective" in the meaning of creating mutual remembrance by generating several individuals' dealing with their past. Ashraf H. A. Rushdy makes a genuine observation that in *Beloved* "memory exists as a communal property of friends, of family, of a people. The magic of memory is that it is impersonal, that it is the basis for constructing relationships with the other who also remembers" (Grewal: 103, 104). The writer finds a way for the dramatic experience by means of "working it through," and developing a sense of unity within the community. Similarly, another critic, David Carr, estimates that the community is in a constant process of composing and recomposing its own history (Kella: 77). This becomes a call for the revision of the past, and especially, in the case of a slave narrative. When in her narration Toni Morrison speaks "we," she uses the technique of speaking about, with and for the community. Such "implied 'we' " is also found in Mahdu Dubey's work on Black

[2] Slave narrative is an account of the life, or a major portion of the life of a fugitive or former slave, either written or orally related by the slave personally.

Aesthetic. Interestingly, Toni Morrison herself presents clues to decipher her writing. About Beloved she says: "the novel should be beautiful and powerful, but it should also work. It should have something that enlightens; something in it that opens the door and points the way... If anything I do... isn't about the village or the community ... it is not about anything" (in Dubey: 34). This potent declaration proves Morrison's strong will to maintain a dialogue within black society. She insists on perceiving her novel not only in terms of aesthetic (the so called "art for art's sake"), but, what is certainly of a greater value for the author, in terms of Black Aesthetic. Morrison invites the contemporary black society to go back to its roots because the black identity[3] is formed in close connection to the historical experience of their predecessors. Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra are convinced that extreme events derived from history, such as persecution or oppression, may provoke collective trauma. Since individuals are always deeply embedded in the social context, this trauma may manifest not only a single experience of one person, but history itself. This is certainly true in Morrison's *Beloved* where personal suffering originates in communal repression. It is then worked out, or re-enacted through the intervention of the community (Kella: 26, 27).

A number of critics agree that, in order to build identity, be it individual or communal, there is a need to return to particular moments in history. Diverse roads to affirming one's selfhood all converge. The experience of being a slave, the ancestral contribution toward collective identity formation, is the element that Toni Morrison wishes to keep alive in today's black consciousness[4].

Maria Mardberg eruditely argues that in Beloved ancestors play a crucial role in the shaping of communal identity:

" The figure of the ancestor constitutes a forceful catalyst in the change of consciousness of the granddaughters. Bearing vital cultural memory, the ancestor embodies the spiritual

[3] Black identity is the racial significance and qualitative meaning that individuals attribute to being black in their conceptualizations of self.
[4] Black consciousness :Awareness of one's identity as a black person, especially as a basis for a political grouping or movement.

links to the community and provides nourishment for the emotionally starving heroine in that she [the ancestor] communicates transformative knowledge. Her mythic wisdom shapes generational continuity and establishes order in a seemingly chaotic world; she preserves ancestral ties and provides stability" (Mardberg 1998: 123).

In African-American society, especially the creation of communal identity was seriously impeded by slavery. A direct result of being tormented by white oppressors was for a black person to feel an urge to unite with others. This union made it easier to manage the pain and disgrace of being subservient to white masters, when understood and compassioned with by those who shared the same experience. Much as all former slaves did try to erase the brutal past from their memories, they were aware of the necessity to conserve those memories for the next generations. This preservation served not as much as a warning, but rather as the basis of cultural legacy. Ancestors are an important connector to the heritage of the servile African-American history. To Maria Mardberg, the forefathers' role is essential when it comes to the formulation of their grandsons' consciousness, which thus ensures "generational continuity." This way African-American existence is rendered meaningful and suffused with the significance it deservedly claims. The expression "community-building" seems appropriate when the reference to slaves' history as "saving history" is made. Satya P. Mohanty confirms that the African-American "experience" provides genuine knowledge (Kella: 225). However, this purely cognitive aspect depends on the subjectivity of an individual, and as such, requires social revision. In view of the above, it seems clear that Sethe's journey inside in search of her own identity could not have taken place without the community's reassessment.

In the study on the notion of community,it declares that whether or not community is associated with notions of inclusion or separation its representation lies in antiquity. For Morrison ancestry stands for timeless people whose relationships to the characters are benevolent, instructive and protective, and they provide a certain kind of wisdom. She further elucidates: "If we don't keep in touch with the ancestor,... we are, in fact, lost... When you kill the ancestor you kill yourself."(morisson 27) Consequently, return to ancestral ties and values seems fundamental to the protagonists' psychological well-being because they are capable of healing emotions. They also have a potential to transform. Such ties allow an individual to grow in self confidence in the reality where a black person

is constantly reminded of his/her subservience to the white race. Morrison is especially susceptible to the danger of the lack of conscious historical connection. A sense of communal identity becomes an anchor in history; the lack thereof signifies disconnection from the nourishing cultural heritage. In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, it is the grandmother, Baby Suggs, who provides this linkage between present black society and its historical origins. She becomes an embodiment of ancestry, the catalyst of the cultural and the spiritual for the whole community, and a leading voice that brings the community to its recovery.

2. Solidarity among members of the black community

Maria Mardberg sees one of the roads to communal identity in the symbolic epitome of "a grandmother." According to Gretchen Bataille, the grandmother functions as "the storyteller, the preserver of the past and the strength for the future" (Mardberg: 122). In *Beloved*, Baby Suggs, "the ancestor," serves as a spiritual nourishment for the emotionally starved community in that she introduces the transformative aspect into each individual's life.

Mardberg argues that the grandmother's agency manifests itself chiefly in rituals and religion, which at times, brings lost individuals back to the community. In an interview on "Rootedness," Toni Morrison portrays the African American church as a source of consolation and personal affirmation within the community:

" There were spaces and places in which a single person could enter and behave as an individual within the context of the community... You can see [it] sometimes in Black churches were people shout. It is a very personal grief and a statement done among people you trust. Done within the context of the community, therefore safe " (Kella 2000: 226).

Baby Suggs' preaching certainly transcends conventional forms of religion. The Clearing was organized at 124 Bluestone Road, and although Baby Suggs was its head, she

would never claim authority or a title of honor, being known modestly as "Baby Suggs, holy." During her sermons "she told them that the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine. That if they could not see it, they would not have it" (*Beloved*: 88). Her religion is a spiritual resistance where people ask not for God's forgiveness but for God's recognition.God, then, has to accept black people before He forgives. But if the acceptance meant naming one "a human being," for Baby Suggs even God perceives people with regard to the color of the skin. For her, the fact of being submitted to whitefolks' definition of the black race remained invariable.She feels she only has power to convince her people that the promise of submission "the black" to "the white" is unfair. Her strong objective is to awake the feeling of freedom in every black person. Baby Suggs' endlessly repeated lesson can be summarized by Morrison who asserts that "the recognition validating black personhood can never come from 'above' – ...from the white men... – but must be sought and must be forthcoming from the black community" (Kella: 127). The remedy for racial oppression can be traced exclusively to collective affirmation.

Not until Baby Suggs affirms her own freedom, can the very ritual take place. Only when she discovers "her heart knocking in her chest and that it was her own heartbeat," does she become an authority to talk about freedom. This, in consequence, empowers her to present the model for reconstructing the community and point at the shared roles within its boundaries, where "women stopped crying and danced; men sat down and cried; children danced, women laughed, children cried" (Beloved: 88).Baby Suggs is nevertheless vulnerable in the face of the destructive effects of slavery. In a single moment, in response to the lack of empathy concerning Sethe, she turns back from her society. This marks the moment of her defeat and surrender. Never again will she address her community, nor revive their belief in a sovereign future.

In *Beloved,* Morrison depicts a community that can embrace its member and be an empowerment in the struggle against white masters. The same community, blinded by jealousy and rage, declare Baby Suggs and Sethe their convicts.The community fails to perform its role,instead of protecting its members against the devastating forces of slavery, it not only loses faith in its own inner power, but actually imitates the white oppressors in

putting a sentence on a black person. The potential to reconstruct Baby Suggs' and Sethe's eroded black morale gives way to its destruction.

Although it is black society that rejected Sethe in response to her infanticide, the actions of this community must be attributed to the devastating agency of whitefolks. The whites' judgment of the black race, undoubtedly, greatly influenced the black people's self-perception. Analyzing Sethe's story, it seems that the black community learns means from their masters. Thus, the black society deliberately remains deaf when the white oppressors come to re-enslave Sethe's family. According to Stamp Paid, one of the members of the black community and a close friend to Baby Suggs, "Nobody warned them, and he'd always believed it wasn't the exhaustion from long day's gorging that dulled them, but some other thing – like, well, like meanness" (Beloved: 157). Enraged about Baby Suggs' giving a welcoming party to her daughter-in-law, Sethe, they cannot stand such wealth and heartiness with which Baby Suggs wants to show her joy.

" Too much, they thought. Where does she get it all, Baby Suggs, holy? Why is she and hers always center of things? ... Giving advice; passing massages; healing the sick, hiding fugitives, loving, cooking, preaching, singing, dancing and loving everybody like it was her job and hers alone... it made them mad... It made them furious " (Beloved 1997: 137).

The thought of Sethe's full benefit of Baby Suggs bounty and her big old heart is unbearable. Baby Suggs'own people cannot stand the perspective of a promising future for Sethe under Baby Suggs' roof, possibly because they do not want to be orphaned. It seems then, that society's greatest sin is in the wrong understanding of Baby Suggs' actions. They accuse her of material privilege while the only thing she wants to express is joy of the reunited family members.

Elizabeth Kella suggests that the community perceives Baby Suggs' celebration as a threat to communal identity and a violation of exchange economy in making reciprocity impossible. She simply gave too much and therefore "offended them by excess" (Kella: 138). Still, Morrison is quite critical about the community's agency. The sole factor responsible for maintaining unity and wholeness – mutual recognition of one another –

when uncompromising, can have the opposite effect. The community's turning back on Sethe and Baby Suggs proves this to be right.

3. The motifs of communal agency

Sethe is expelled from her black family because of the murder of her own child. In the eyes of society this act is unforgivable. The female community especially, rejects Sethe in her motherhood the moment she takes the handsaw into her hands (Payant: 200). Women who share the role of mothers within the community, consider the act of killing one's child an inevitable exclusion from the mothers' range. Yet, in Becoming and Bonding[5], for Morrison's judgmental standpoint regarding the dark side of the community. In Morrison's opinion "the community members refuse to recognize their complicity in the death of the baby." She assumes that the same pride that allowed Sethe commit the crime was a reason for the community's passive conduct and prevented them from warning Sethe of the slavers' approaching.Though Sethe physically cuts the throat of her baby-daughter, the responsibility for this murder lies in the community's deliberate withholding of any action, any sign announcing the arrival of the white oppressors.

Some critics blame Sethe rather than the community. They disapprove of her needless pride upon deciding to isolate herself from the society. Kristina K. Groover estimates "Sethe's self-isolation unforgivable" (Groover: 70). While all this seems relevant, it is worth mentioning that only by means of ritual can the protagonists in *Beloved* be spiritually connected to the community. If this community's function is to prevent an individual from alienation, Baby Suggs' death and the termination of the spiritual Clearings[6] broke the tie between Sethe and her social group, at the same time provoking Sethe's retreat to 124 Bluestone Road.

Therefore, in order to recover and redefine identity, the revision of one's actions has to work both ways. Such decision allows Sethe to preserve her community, and conversely,

[5] Bonding :The formation of a close relationship (as between a mother and child or between a person and an animal) especially through frequent or constant association.
[6] Spiritual clearing : It is a type of healing that seeks to identify and cure the spiritual cause for any problem.

gives a second chance to the community to protect its member by performing its empowering force once more. In *Beloved* Joseph Roach defines the term performance: "[it] is nevertheless useful to a reading of *Beloved* because it calls attention to the agency involved in building community as well as to the ritual and transitory character of the community. Performance as 'restored behavior' or 'twice-behaved behavior'... requires repetition, but repetition with a difference" (Kella: 148). Although repetition indicates a monotonous movement, the stressed with a difference marks a new era for the community as a whole. Due to its revision of the once assigned communal role, the recognition of its uniqueness and, therefore, revival of the collective identity is at hand.

Already on the first pages of the novel readers encounter Sethe's daughter, Denver. Much too infantile at the beginning of the story, she appears to be childish and self centered, partly due to being left on her own within the house at 124 Bluestone Road. She is afraid of the surrounding world – the people outside her house, and of her mother who had already murdered her sister to prevent her from being re-enslaved. Under such circumstances, Denver is particularly eager to seek connection with others. And it is her who eventually reunites her family with the black community.

A strong wish to create a traditional relationship similar to that based on maternal love can eventually come true when the ghost-girl, Beloved appears. Having recognized the girl as her dead sister, Denver seizes the chance for a relationship, which evolves into a sisterhood. Typically for a child, Denver thinks egoistically and is jealous of her sister. While Beloved becomes the embodiment of all her wants, Denver attempts to accumulate the materialized ghost's all attention.

" Denver, who thought she knew all about silence, was surprised to learn hunger could do that: quiet you down and wear you out. Neither Sethe not Beloved knew or cared about it one way or another. They were too busy rationing their strength to fight each other. So it was she who had to step off the edge of the world and die because if she didn't, they all would. The flesh between her mother's forefinger and thumb was thin as china silk and there wasn't a piece of clothing in the house that didn't sag on her. Beloved held her head

up with the palms of her hands, slept wherever she happened to be, and whined for sweets although she was getting bigger, plumper by the day " (Beloved 1997: 239).

Denver's attitude alters when she becomes aware of the authoritative personality of Beloved. Thus, the ghost's excessive demands put Sethe's life under threat. In this situation Denver makes a desperate step towards the black community, who in her mentality personifies the unknown outside-the-house. Through this act, the roles reverse: a mother becomes a fragile and dependent child, whereas the daughter is altered into the independent decisive woman ready to take risk in the name of love. Not until Denver's mature decision to abandon her family home for the sake of her mother, does the possibility of a dialogue between the inhabitants of 124 Bluestone house and their society emerge. In effect, apart from becoming her mother's mother, Denver undertakes the crucial role of a mediator. Katherine B. Payant identifies this point in the novel as "Denver's growth in strength [while] neighbors turn from their cruelty" (Payant: 197).

What is worth mentioning, is the actual revision of attitudes. Under certain circumstances, particular groups or individuals are constrained to leave secure space of convenience, and re-define their roles. It leads to a "social change," which in Elizabeth Kella's opinion "signals the interdependence and interpenetration of the individual and society, of the psychological and the political, the private and the public, existence and agency." Similarly, Amy Binder sees the road to social change in "subjective negotiations of a sense of individual self and identification with a group that aim together at forming collective identity" (Kella: 37). Thus, the affirmation of communal identity necessitates not only communal self re-examination, but more vitally, it requires that each member reconsiders its history through re-memorizing. This in turn, reveals the cyclical character of *Beloved,* where community is building and re-building itself endlessly in its search for identity. As Elizabeth Kella puts it, this reorganization is triggered by constant reassertion, reiteration and infinite performance. Moreover, without the individual's participation in this learning process claiming one's freed self would not be possible, which Sethe's example undeniably proves.

Morrison posits "school" of emancipation to counter the "school of slavery".

"The lessons of liberation are the lessons of and in a racially homogeneous community characterized by an apparently unconditional inclusiveness. Morrison thus revises the notion of an autonomous self, emphasizing that freedom and selfhood are dependent upon social relations of equality – upon community " (Kella 2000: 141).

Inclusion in a larger unit then, is an imperative condition for an individual to become autonomous and self-evident.

The story assumes a circular structure. This narrative technique enhances the protagonists' continuous returns to life episodes, their re-membering and repeating them "with change." However, Sandra Zagarell perceives this circularity as a classic element of communal narratives. She claims that "they ignore linear development or chronological sequence... Rather than being constructed around conflict and progress [they] are rooted in the process" (Groover: 52). Morrison's story is not embedded in the linear flight from slavery,but in the circular journey to recreate a community destroyed by slavery. This need for communal re-definition and the negation of traditional sequential character of the novel only accentuates the periodicity of this process.

Denver is the one to whom the stimulation of social change should be attributed to, since she is the one responsible for resuming the dialogue with the black community. Still, this already changed social group is primarily represented by women. They are first asked for help, and they are the first ones to respond to this plea. Withdrawn from social participation Sethe resigns from the role of utmost importance – being a biological mother. Denver's "going out" and initiating the dialogue is an indirect search for her mother's substitute. Taking over the role of community mothers, black women become the ultimate lifeline, the last chance for salvation. Kristina K. Groover asserts that "whereas the male spiritual quest is traditionally a solitary one, the female characters [here Sethe and Denver] experience spirituality not in solitary flight, but in supportive communities" (Groover: 13, 14). Toni Morrison's choice to place women's community at the center of events highlights the females' indisputable role in the formation of communal unity, and the individual self-realization within its boarders.

In *Beloved*, the group of women obtains an undeniably crucial function in the process of the individuals' identity formation recovery. Although it is often generalized that the black community brings rescue to Denver and her mother, the colossal role of female union in transforming the future of the main protagonists should not beunderestimated. Not unlike Alice Walker in *The Color Purple*, Toni Morrison attributes the whole formation and sustenance of community to women as protectors of domestic space, which is essential to the lives of both women and men (Groover: 13, 75).

In Maria Mardberg's estimation, women are prompted "to go beyond conventional roles and construct new communities on the basis of shared experience" (Mardberg: 226). Truly enough, *Beloved* tackles racial identification, and interrogates matters within the race. By and large, the "common experience" in *Beloved* is studied with regard to slavery. Gurleen Grewal, however, casts light on the "women servile experience." Harriet A. Jacobs claims that "slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, they have wrongs, and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own" (Grewal: 100). The uniqueness of women's anguish derives from the fact of their being mothers. Because of the greater quality of loss in the sense of losing their children, this characteristic adds physical to emotional suffering. Therefore, as Kristina K. Groover puts it, women form an alliance due to their "giving birth and caring for children" (Groover: 54). Maria Mardberg theorizes that through mothering, women are able to take on the function of spiritual leadership in the society (Mardberg: 178). She discusses "community mothers" to emphasize the significance of women's associations bringing comfort to spiritual existence of the younger group members. This aspect is exemplified by the women's attitude toward Denver. Much as they disapprove of Sethe's behavior, they do not refuse Denver's plea. Moreover, they treat it as their "mother-duty" to stand on guard and provide security for Denver, if not for Sethe, who is now regarded more vulnerable than her daughter.

Interestingly, being a mother that unites women to act, is the very aspect that allows them to reject Sethe in the first place. In their mentality, Sethe's infanticide is an action against the law of nature. Killing her own child ostracizes her not only from the black

community, but most of all, from the range of mothers. This way Morrison challenges the traditional definition of motherhood. In Barbara Christian's view, Morrison suggests that "motherhood itself is constructed, affected by specific societal/political constructs, even as it is basic to all human societies as we know it" (Kella: 132). All the more understandable seems Sethe's refusal to be defined as "a breeder." This fact condemned her in the eyes of the female part of the community. Unable to put aside their pride, they refrain from warning Sethe of the masters' approach. At the same time, they withhold the communal embrace, which marks a turning point for both, Sethe and the community. Consequently, Sethe's revision of her actions is not sufficient to heal the past. To gain the feeling of wholeness there is a need for compassion on the part of the society. Yet, it is not until the community reexamines its actions, that a recognition of collective identity is viable. Elizabeth Kella interprets the women's uprising as "a performance" that figures as a reflection of collective re-membering, and in so doing, allows Sethe's reintegration with the community (Kella: 149).

Another strong factor of female agency is illustrated in the way they improvise.

" For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash " (Beloved 1997: 261).

Morrison claims that these were women united by "the power of community" rather than "shared belief or a firm understanding of what they are about to do." They were the ones accountable for "driving off Beloved at 124 Bluestone Road and restoring Sethe's family to a place in the community" (*Beloved* : 255). Rejecting the rational approach, they were led by their intuition as they "had no idea what they would do once they got there" (*Beloved* : 257). One thing that determines choosing women over men is rooted in the female perceptiveness superior to men's logical thinking. When the women reach 124

Bluestone Road “they [stop] praying and [take] a step back to the beginning. In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning there was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like” 33 *(Beloved* : 259).

Therefore, one can draw the conclusion that collective as well as individual healing is rooted in the female community. Through re-memory women can eventually come to understand “the historical circumstances that have limited their own potential” as mothers, which is exemplified by Sethe's dramatic choice to kill her child. “This here Sethe talked about safety with a handsaw... more important than what Sethe had done was what she claimed” (*Beloved*: 164). Despite the community's instability, that was hopefully temporal, women found in their uniting a source of force to keep the community together as one whole. Through restored behavior the possibility to re-gainan empowered identity appears achievable. Elizabeth Kella makes a substantial observation that not until Sethe is freed by and into the community of women, can she finally claim freedom to herself (Kella: 150). Sethe's rebirth into the communal bounds is accepted thanks to the community's regeneration. Through re-building a union with Sethe’s family, the black community affirms its true function. Therefore, apart from Sethe's individual recognition and self-assertion as a free person, her salvation should also be regarded as a cornerstone in the process of the affirmation of collective identity.

Beloved is a fine illustration of the journey to self-reliance on a communal as well as individual level. Here, the black society is given a chance to play a crucial role in formulating individual identity of the main female protagonists, Sethe and Denver. In fact, the process of self-valuation and affirmation of one's identity is reciprocal. Therefore, much as the communal identity depends on the individual, the self-valuation of a single person owes predominantly to the community's agency. Nevertheless, the reconstruction of self-definition, be it collective or personal, should be defined as a quest for subjectivity. It is a rejection of being the defined, and a claim to be given the right to define. Such transformation constitutes a crucial aspect for the development of the future African-American generations. Thus, the role of an individual, as well as collective struggle for self-affirmation contributes greatly to historical legacy. What forms the very basis of an

African-American heritage is the historical burden of slavery and the struggle of black people to gain self-respect.

for communal identity formation, in *Beloved* the common awareness of the tragic experience of slavery is a burden that the black community needs to relieve itself of. Just as on the individual level, gaining collective freedom called for re-memorizing ancestral heritage and uniting through a spiritual quest. The importance of religious rituals presents itself the moment the community ostracizes Sethe. Should Baby Suggs as their spiritual leader still conduct the Clearing, the black society would not have been put to trial to prove solidarity and sympathy towards one of its members. The regeneration of blacks presents the opportunity to repeat actions but "with change." Beloved is the binding figure, who, apart from being the cause of Sethe's family and community's distress, is simultaneously their salvation.

To sum up, In Morrison's *Beloved* there is a distinguishable predominance the reciprocal support between individuals and their society. This mutual understanding, and compassion that stems from common history, contributes to the feeling of wholeness without which the formation of personal identity within the collective frame would not be achievable. This aspect is the main theme of all neoslave narratives, whose primary function is to re-affirm the distressed black identity. In so doing, they partake in the process of "being heard" in the world, and give evidence of African-American indisputable contribution towards global cultural legacy.

Appendix A

Author's Biography

Toni Morrison, original name Chloe Anthony Wofford (born February 18, 1931, Lorain, Ohio, U.S.), American writer noted for her examination of black experience (particularly black female experience) within the black community. She received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993.

Morrison grew up in the American Midwest in a family that possessed an intense love of and appreciation for black culture. Storytelling, songs, and folktales were a deeply formative

part of her childhood. She attended Howard University (B.A., 1953) and Cornell University (M.A., 1955). After teaching at Texas Southern University for two years, she taught at Howard from 1957 to 1964. In 1965 she became a fiction editor. From 1984 she taught writing at the State University of New York at Albany, leaving in 1989 to join the faculty of Princeton University.

Morrison's first book, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), is a novel of initiation concerning a victimized adolescent black girl who is obsessed by white standards of beauty and longs to have blue eyes. In 1973 a second novel, *Sula*, was published; it examines (among other issues) the dynamics of friendship and the expectations for conformity within the community. *Song of Solomon* (1977) is told by a male narrator in search of his identity; its publication brought Morrison to national attention. *Tar Baby* (1981), set on a Caribbean island, explores conflicts of race, class, and sex. The critically acclaimed *Beloved* (1987), which won a Pulitzer Prize for fiction, is based on the true story of a runaway slave who, at the point of recapture, kills her infant daughter in order to spare her a life of slavery. *Jazz (*1992) is a story of violence and passion set in New York City's Harlem during the 1920s. Subsequent novels are Paradise (1998), a richly detailed portrait of a black utopian community in Oklahoma, and *Love* (2003), an intricate family story that reveals the myriad facets of love and its ostensible opposite. *A Mercy* (2008) deals with slavery in 17th-century America. In *The redemptive Home* (2012), a traumatized Korean War veteran encounters racism after returning home and later overcomes apathy to rescue his sister. *God Help the Child* (2015) chronicles the ramifications of child abuse and neglect through the tale of Bride, a black girl with dark skin who is born to light-skinned parents.

Appendix B

Plot Summary of *Beloved* by

Tonni Morrison

The book is the story of Sethe and her daughter Denver after their escape from slavery. Their home in Cincinnati is haunted by a revenant, whom they believe to be the ghost of Sethe's daughter. Because of the haunting—which often involves objects being thrown around the room—Sethe's youngest daughter Denver is shy, friendless, and housebound, and her sons, Howard and Buglar, have run away from home by the age of 13. Baby Suggs, the mother of Sethe's husband Halle, dies in her bed soon afterwards.

Paul D, one of the slaves from Sweet Home: The plantation where Baby Suggs, Sethe, Halle, and several other slaves once worked; arrives at Sethe's home and tries to bring a sense of reality into the house. In attempting to make the family forget the past, he forces out the spirit. He seems successful at first; he even brings housebound Denver out of the house for the first time in years. But on the way back, they encounter a young woman sitting in front of the house, calling herself Beloved. Paul D is suspicious and warns Sethe, but she is charmed by the young woman and ignores him. Gradually, Paul D is forced out of Sethe's home by a supernatural presence. When made to sleep outside in a shed, Paul D is cornered by Beloved. While they have sex, his mind is filled with horrific memories from his past. Overwhelmed with guilt, Paul D tries to tell Sethe about it but cannot, and instead says he wants her pregnant. Sethe is elated, and Paul D resists Beloved and her influence over him. But when he tells friends at work about his plans to start a new family, they react fearfully. Stamp Paid reveals the reason for the community's rejection of Sethe.

When Paul D asks Sethe about it, she tells him what happened: After escaping from Sweet Home and reaching her waiting children at her mother-in-law's home, Sethe was found by her master, who attempted to reclaim her and her children. Sethe grabbed her children, ran into

the tool shed, and tried to kill them all. She succeeded only in killing her youngest daughter by running a saw along her neck. Sethe claims that she was "trying to put my babies where they would be safe." The revelation is too much for Paul D and he leaves. Without him, sense of reality and time moving forward disappears.

Sethe comes to believe that Beloved is the two-year-old daughter she murdered, whose tombstone reads only "Beloved". Sethe begins to spend carelessly and spoil Beloved out of guilt. Beloved becomes angry and more demanding, throwing tantrums when she doesn't get her way. Beloved's presence consumes Sethe's life to the point where she becomes depleted and sacrifices her own need for eating, while Beloved grows bigger and bigger.

In the novel's climax, youngest daughter Denver reaches out and searches for help from the black community, and some of the village women arrive at the house to exorcise Beloved. At the same time, a white man comes into view, the same man that helped Halle's mother, Baby Suggs, by offering her the house as a place to stay after Halle bought her from their owner. He has come for Denver, who asked him for a job, but Denver has not shared this information with Sethe. Unaware of the situation, Sethe attacks the white man with an ice pick and is brought down by the village women. While Sethe is confused and has a "re-memory" of her master coming again, Beloved disappears. The novel resolves with Denver becoming a working member of the community and Paul D returning to Sethe and pledging his love.

Appendix C

Critical Reviews of *Beloved*

Awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1988, *Beloved* is the most celebrated and controversial of Morrison's novels. Inspired by the story of Margaret Garner, a runaway slave who attempted to kill her children rather than have them returned to slavery, Morrison's novel explores the psychological and physical violence caused by slavery, its lingering effects on successive generations of black Americans, and the dynamics of mother-child relationships. *Beloved* became a source of controversy several months after its publication. When it failed to win a 1987 National Book Award or National Book Critics Circle Award, forty-eight prominent black writers and critics signed a tribute to Morrison's career and published it in the 24 January 1988 edition of *The New York Times* Book Review[1].

It is clear from Morrison's dedication "*Sixty Million and more*" that she intends to embrace the social document potential of the novel, as, indeed, any novel that treats injustice and its effects must do. This acceptance of the novel's power to shape opinion actually frees her to do anything she wants artistically.

For Morrison and most other writers of the 1980s, though, everything about the novel, from plot to style to characterisation, that had once seemed fairly neutral was seen to be fraught with political implications. Morrison embraced the novel as a social document and openly used it to express her opinions, and had a theory ,a vision of slavery and black/white relations in America that was in some ways old-fashioned, but still inflammatory and unresolved. The task was to remake the old story in a compelling way, and also to separate her own telling from that of earlier writers[2].

[1] www.nytimes.com/books/98/01/11/home/8212.html?mcubz=1.
[2] www.theguardian.com/books/2006/jul/08/fiction.tonimorrison.

However, Despite its popularity and status as one of Morrison's most accomplished novels, *Beloved* has never been universally hailed as a success. Some reviewers have excoriated the novel for what they consider its excessive sentimentality and sensationalistic depiction of the horrors of slavery, including its characterization of the slave trade as a Holocaust-like genocide. Others, while concurring that *Beloved* is at times overwritten, have lauded the novel as a profound and extraordinary act of imagination[3].

[3] www.enotes.com/topics/toni-morrison/critical-essays/morrison-toni.

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Abstract

Abstract: Through fiction, Toni Morrison projects the history of the African Americans and their everlasting struggle to reach their authentic selfhood. This dissertation sheds light on the experience of African Americans' journey to reach selfhood. Morrison's Politzer winning novel *Beloved*, present the history of African American struggles in America, and how the changing and challenging societies influence the black individual's attempt to reach his self-accommodation into family and society. African American individuals are vulnerable within their own home and society. Thus, this dissertation is devoted to the influence of the society, the mother, and the father in the development or destruction of African American individuals's selfhood.

General Conclusion

The quest of the black individual for an affirmative self-definition as intimately connected to a community seems to be a constant element within Toni Morrison' s philosophy of life as displayed in her literary production. In fact, the self exploration on the part of the individual seems to be only undertaken under the guidelines of a community that holds on to certain traditional beliefs and values. This literary pattern conceming the interaction between the individual and his/her community is clearly present in her novel *Beloved,* which represents Toni Morrison's clearest attempt to take up the subject of the AfroAmerican community' s experience of slavery and its aftermath.

When reading Toni Morrison’s novel, *Beloved,* it is easy to see how readers would question the actions of her characters. Some characters display behavior that would seem barbaric and cruel to the average individual. However, when delving deeper, it is easier to see how the severities of the characters’ actions are built on the psychological repression of their pasts. These pasts are filled with the traumas of slavery, and each character has suffered in his, or her, own way. However, the collective suffering can all be traced back to one character’s actions. Morrison’s main character, Sethe, has caused a great deal of pain to herself and to those around her. Her actions have caused others to respond, both physically and psychologically, therefore complicating their lives in accordance with hers. Sethe’s relationship with others has caused, a pain that all of the novel’s characters must strive to overcome. Morrison guides her readers through the pain of extracting the memories that these characters have so long repressed, and the struggles they face to confront a past they cannot forget.

The unrecorded past of the slaves are unveiled through their recollections and their bitter living conditions are depicted to be more important than the acknowledged history. References are from an important period which was characterized by three major events of American history that takes place between 1854 and 1873: firstly, the Fugitive Slave Act; Secondly, the American Civil War; finally, the Reconstruction

Period. By playing against and through the cultural field of postmodernism, the novel creates an aesthetic identity. Each character has been damaged by being black during the plantation era. The daily life of the slaves in the plantations and their persecutions by their masters are more important than those major historical events.The social life confronts the blacks in a mixed society of blacks and whites. Being a minority, the blacks live a peripheral existence silently accepting their fate, concealed and paralysed while the world of the whites is alive and moving. They appear to be hanging on the very edge of life, hungering after what is lacking, the ownership of property, the enjoyment of comforts and decent living and even little attributes of beauty and charm. The sheer helpless condition of the blacks during and after Emancipation reveals their strong sense of place too.

The brilliance of Morrison's *Beloved* lies in the way it provides twentieth century audiences access to the hrrors of slavery through a written, African-American text. It allows contemporary audiences to move along the same road that Sethe does. Through rememory, individually and collectively, society can become connected again to its cultural memories and history. The rememory of Sweet Home and its desperate attempt to deny the inherent evil of slavery and the realities of the culture surrounding it, should be kept alive as part of history's collective memories.

For the African-American community, Morrison suggests through Sethe's ultimate triumph, that happiness results from the rememory and acceptance of both the pleasures and pains of ther slave history, acceptance of one's self within the context of that history and consequently, an acceptance and revival of a communal spirit among those who have shared similar histories and experiences. Utopia is not a place or a moment in time, rather utopia is a process of reliving memories, recalling pleasures and pains, and succeeding Toni Morrison's *Beloved* in loving the self and maintaining this sense of self while joining and loving others. As for Paul D. and Sethe, a kind of Utopia lies within the very individual and collective minds and rememories. The irony of Sweet Home is that it is ultimately not an irony. Sweet Home, like slavery in general, becomes compatible with the notion of utopia as a process. Sweet Home is a reference point, a

significant focal point for a time. It is a memory to be remembered, rendering knowledge and experience to shape a sweeter tomorrow.

But Morrison does not present rememory as a bandaid for the tragedies of the past. Even though Sethe and Paul D. triumph, Beloved, the tragic ghost child, continues her haunting, though she no longer torments Sethe. "Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her" (*Beloved*: 274). Sethe's rememory of Sweet Home and of Beloved does not undo the tragedy of Beloved and her loss. The Utopian process of rememory cannot help Beloved. It does not diminish the horror of the past. It just makes it possible for the living to go on, to move forward, to survive. As Paul D. says at the end of the novel, "Sethe . . . , me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow" (273).

Overall, *Beloved* is a challenging book in many ways. The purpose of the book is to subjectivise history: instead of history being a simple story of the emancipation of black culture, the book’s primary concern is the various impacts that slavery had upon the black individuals. Additionally, this subjective view of history also allows for a critique of slavery’s symbolic and literary erasure of black culture via its subjugation of black culture. Its themes of individual and communal identitiy, manage to tread the thin line between an appreciation of slavery’s healing effects, while avoiding the moralist and traditionalist view that African Americans should be defined by their enslaved past only.

General Introduction

"Sixty Million and more" is the inscription at the beginning of the novel *Beloved*, written by Toni Morrison. Morrison devoted *Beloved* to the roughly sixty million people who died during the slave trade and who never experienced slavery. These victims never experienced the long disturbing and psychologically painful period that Africans and generations thereafter had to endure. Although the book is dedicated to those who died in the Atlantic trade, however, its story serves to memorialize the institution of slavery itself as it existed in the United States.

In other words, Morrison argues that overcoming the trauma of slavery entails remembering rather than forgetting. In contemporary American culture the institution of slavery has been largely forgotten. But Morrison tries to show that the past never ends. She wants the readers to re-vision and understand African-American history through non-western eyes by re-telling history through the lives of former African slaves.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1988) highlights the importance of confronting, reclaiming and transforming history, and it points to the healing potential of memory. In her novel, Morrison shows what slavery did to black people bodies and minds; what it meant for them to be owned by somebody else as well as the difficulties of claiming ownership of oneself. What is very specific about this story is the mark of alienation that slavery left in African-Americans. Morrison rewrites the life of the historical figure Margaret Garner (1856), who killed her child to prevent her recapture into slavery.

Beloved examines the connection between an enslaved past and the distortion of identity. Slavery, after all, was a system predicated on dehumanizing and impersonalizing human beings; the system was called for the crushing of the language, family names, culture, and tribal history of the slaves. The enslaved Afro-Americans were treated like objects and were "moved around like checkers" with no respect to filial relationships *(Beloved* 23). In fact, most enslaved Afro-Americans were treated worse than animals.Therefoe, in this dissertation we will attempt to answer the following question:

General Introduction

What was the major role slavery displayed in the distortion of individual and communal identity toward African Americans?

On the basis of the previous question, this research hypothesizes that the blacks under times of slavery, were not allowed to have a sense of self, a sense of individuality or self-worth. The dehumanization which Sethe and Paul D(main characters) experience as slaves causes them to lose their sense of self-worth and leaves them questioning their existence as humans. These characters do not refuse to look back. Their history haunts them until they finally reconstruct the pieces of themselves and, in the process, embrace love.

The project of Toni Morrison in *Beloved* is to make a connection between history and personal and cultural memories to participate in the formation of the Black community‘s identity. The author illustrates how the African American identity could be reconstructed through its own cultural heritage and social structure. Morrison depicts an enormous and horrific context which is the period of slavery and reconstruction. After the abolition of slavery, the psyches of the characters are filled with traumatic experiences that they faced during slavery, which have influenced their personalities and damaged their relations with themselves.

The Black community has greatly suffered from slavery and its appalling tragedies. The narrative is filled with representations of the assaults of slavery, especially on enslaved Black women. The hardships and humiliation they have faced have left them with psychic and bodily repercussions. Indeed, in their attempt to isolate themselves and to forget the horrors of the past, they must nonetheless confront what it is left in their memories from the pain of that past. Hence, the trace of trauma follows them, urging them to reconcile with their past, because this is the right path to acknowledge their agency in American society and to affirm their existence.

What is important about this topic, is that this novel was set during the reconstruction era in 1873. It is the story of the emancipated slave woman, Sethe, who kills her daughter and tries to kill her other three children when a posse tries to return them to slavery. The dead daughter, Beloved, returns years later to haunt their house. Morrison borrowed the event from the real story of Margaret Garner, who, like Sethe,

escaped from slavery in Kentucky and attempted to murder all her children and succeeded in killing her baby girl when the slave catchers caught up with her in Ohio. Morrison paints a dark and powerful portrait of the dehumanizing effects of slavery in this novel.

At the heart of *Beloved* are Denver's and Sethe's journeys toward self-definition and a newly constructed sense of self. The baby girl, who has come again eighteen years later, is the actual characterization of Sethe's psychological torments. She embodies Sethe's quest for social freedom and psychological wholeness. *Beloved* does act as a catalyst for the liberation of Sethe and Denver from their years of isolation and of incomplete or distorted identity. Sethe refuses to accept oppressive ways of living that do not allow her to love her children freely. Sethe with a fierce desire gives her children all that had been denied to her mother's milk, freedom and love. In her role as mother, she loves, and thereby provides an example of resistance to oppression.

Beloved is not only a ghost of Sethe's killed daughter, but also a symbol of the link between the present and the past. Therefore, through the recreation of the maternal bond, Sethe searches for her self-affirmation. It is not until Beloved's physical arrival that Sethe is finally allowed to reexamine her story with regard to sacrifice, resistance, and mother love.

The aim behind choosing this topic is to give a fine illustration of the journey to self-reliance on a communal as well as individual level. The novel portrays successful development of "black identity" in times when a black person is denied it.

For this study, we will apply the analytical and thematic approaches in order to discuss the factors which led the main characters of the novel during the struggle for self-definition, learn to self-possess their own selves, and overcome the conviction of being someone else's possession.

The dissertation is divided into three chapters. Chapter one will explore the dark experience of slavery and its horrors, to give a general idea about the African American struggle. In chapter two, we shall analyse the main characters of the novel and how they express their identity. Chapter three will emphasise the importance of communal

participation in the processes of emotional and spiritual healing and stability both for the individual and for the race.

Résumé

Résumé : Par la fiction, Toni Morrison projette l'histoire des Afro-Américains et leur lutte éternelle pour atteindre leur identité autonome. Cette dissertation met en lumière l'expérience du voyage des Afro-Américains pour atteindre l'identité. Le roman gagnant de Morrison, le Belgrade, présente l'histoire des luttes Afro-Américaines en Amérique et comment les sociétés changeantes et stimulantes influent sur la tentative de l'individu noir de se familiariser avec sa famille et sa société. Les individus Afro-Américains sont vulnérables dans leur propre foyer et société. Ainsi, cette dissertation est consacrée à l'influence de la société, de la mère et du père dans le développement ou la destruction de l'individualité des individus Afro-Américains.

ملخص : من خلال الخيال و تاريخ الأمريكيين الأفارقة ونضالهم الأبدي للوصول إلى هويتهم المستقلة. هذا المقال يسلط الضوء على تجربة الأمريكيين الأفارقة الذين يسافرون إلى الهوية. الرواية الفائزة بجائزة بلغراد، تقدم تاريخ نضالات الأميركيين الأفارقة في أمريكا وكيف للمتغيرات والشركات التاثير في محاولة الشخص الاسود ليصبح مألوف مع أسرته و الأفراد الأمريكيون من أصل أفريقي معرضون للخطر في منازلهم ومجتمعاتهم. وهكذا، فإن هذه الأطروحة مكرسة لتأثير المجتمع والأم والأب في تطوير أو تدمير الفردية من الأمريكيين من أصل أفريقي.