



Self-Objectification in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon*

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Abstract:

The research aims at a postmodern reading of Toni Morrison's novels *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon* concentrating on self-objectification as a postmodern domineering term. Since postmodernism as a tendency focuses on relocating the marginalized and on defying the binary opposition that used to be held between the self and the other, one would find in the African American literature a fertile field for discussion. Here, the self/other dichotomy is more specified to the white/black superior/inferior complex. Again, it is in the postmodern emphasis on restoring past and questioning a present in which man is alienated and isolated that Morrison's *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon* prove ideal since they address a past that, though finished, is still hovering over people's lives

and future. The research tackles the ways Black people were held under a cruel system that worked on developing in them a sense of self-objectification which they could not get rid of, even after emancipation. The paper is divided into two parts. The first part looks into the experience of physical slavery before the Emancipation while the second looks into the experience of spiritual slavery that emanates directly from the former one trying to relate the two experiences proving the second to be a s p a i n f u l a s t h e f i r s t .

Key Words:

Toni Morrison, Song of Solomon, Beloved, self-objectification, postmodernism.

Self-Objectification in Toni Morrison's Beloved and Song of Solomon

Portraying the horror of the Afro-American experience of Blacks in America, one should logically start by investigating the physical and spiritual traumatic effects that were imposed on the Blacks before starting to investigate their journey of emancipation with special reference to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and *Song of Solomon* (1977). However, this portrayal would be more effective if it is done within the framework of postmodernism with its emphasis on the past, on one hand, and on defying binary oppositions in general. The past here is epitomized in the effect that African-American heritage of slavery is represented to have on the lives of the characters in the two novels. In addition, the binary opposition defied here is that which used to be held between Whites as superior and Blacks as inferior.

Postmodernism is a general tendency towards viewing the world in its new context. It has many premises among them is its vision of past as a shaping factor. It "defended the possibility to break with the tyranny of innovation at all costs by agreeing the right to connect with the past" (M. Hamouda 97). Another term that flourished within postmodern thought is the decentered subject or individual who is taken out from his/her privileged position, whatever it is. Here, the Black person is taken out of his ethnic culture and origin and is directed toward an objectified position. This "self-objectification is another effect of the decentered subject condition" (Hamouda 101). Consequently, self-objectification becomes a postmodern phenomenon that is to explored along the paper in direct reference to African-Americans and how they were driven to adopt the same objectified view of themselves that the white masters develops in them. This is proven by the fact that, even after emancipation, Blacks are unable to overcome the sense of inferiority they grew up with.

Though the Blacks were formally emancipated, they could not easily get rid of the internalized sense of racial humiliation and frustration that was implanted within their very psyche along the periods of physical bondage and slavery. They

were dehumanized and 'de-membered' to such an extent that they aspired, even after emancipation, to disappear, to "slip into corners, remain silent, strive for anonymity, for invisibility" (F. Fanon 116). In fact, they experienced a real cultural catastrophe being unable to "integrate the experience of their ancestors into their lives, to inform their understanding of social reality with the inherited meanings of their natural forbears, or to anchor the living present in any conscious community of memory" (Patterson 5). Here, Toni Morrison acquires her greatness as an Afro-American novelist who succeeds in speaking in her novels what has long been kept unspoken.

In Morrison's work, readers are faced with "not only the humiliations and traumas the slaves were forced to endure at the hands of their white oppressors but also the insidious effects of internalized racism" (J. Bouson 131), which is mainly a socially oriented feeling of self-hatred at both the individual and communal levels. Both *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved* are heavily loaded with lively portraits of both effects being presented intermingly within one single context. Reading Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, one cannot help that striking feeling of horror that springs powerfully not only from the presence of a baby ghost coming

into a human shape, but from the hair-rising narrative of the experience of a people under traumatic effects of slavery either in physical bondage or in the consequent humiliating treatment that continued even after the Emancipation, and that helped in molding the Blacks' zero image. In fact, *Beloved* "is a shame- and trauma- saturated work in which Morrison bears witness to the horrors of slavery and rips the veil drawn over proceedings too terrible to relate" (Bouson 162). What has been kept in the whites' and the blacks' minds as past is reviewed and revived within a context that does not miss that sense of horror involved in the original experience of the African American experience of slavery in America.

Though it came earlier, *Song of Solomon* concentrates more on the journey of self-emancipation. However, within the journey, one could easily locate that sense of emotional or spiritual suffering from mistreatment and misapprehension that rendered the Blacks in a kind of "Bad Faith" status. Here, the novel "bypasses shame by de-emphasizing the shameful legacy that haunts African-Americans in its suggestion that the real gold Milkman seeks is the golden legacy of his racial heritage" (Bouson 101).

Being of so important a value, history refolds itself in *Beloved* through the artistically used technique of flashbacks in which, like in *Song of Solomon*, the main experience is always made up of threads collected from many voices and knotted together into one thematic core i.e. the de-humanizing situations that led the African Americans to launch on their journey for self-affirmation and communal assurance. As a result, the two novels complement each other, with *Beloved* functioning as a slave narrative that supplies the background necessary for locating the Afro-American experience of assuming a 'being' in its proper place within the folkloric and cultural canon as in *Song of Solomon*.

As a system, slavery was basically built on undermining the subjectivity of the 'other', i.e. the Blacks. White masters worked within a systematic world that worked on developing a sense of self-objectification. Self-objectification is "the adoption of an outsider's perspective of one's physical self and is marked by prioritizing the appearance of the body over its functioning in one's physical self-concept as well as in one's more general sense of value as a person". The white masters began by depriving their slaves from the very thing that could identify a person i.e. his

name. They kept for themselves the role of the "definers" who are free to mold their own definitions of their properties. For the slaves, names became nothing but labels to differentiate their jobs and not their personalities. In "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book", Hortense Spillers describes how African people in slavery were "removed from the indigenous land and culture"; denied their African names, rituals and kinship; and reduced to "quantities" and commodities instead of being subjects (72-73). For example, Baby Suggs in *Beloved* recalls how a master was to re-name his new slave the moment this slave becomes a part of a property; Baby Suggs was named 'Jenny Whitlow' by Mr. Garner before she was bought her freedom and took her own name: Baby Suggs, a name that suggests her 'newness' in the world of the free. Though in a less degree, this idea of not having the right to have one's own name is displayed within the background of *Song of Solomon*. The novel opens with the 'No' Mercy Hospital and the Not' Doctor Street, a "name the post office did not recognize. Town maps registered the street as Mains Avenu, but the only colored doctor in the city had lived on that street...and his patients took to calling the street

...Doctor Street" (Song 4). Letters addressed to people at house numbers on this Doctor Street were kept in the Dead Letter Office. Then some of the city legislators decided to maintain the city's landmarks by posting notices saying that this part of the city would be known as Mains Avenue and 'not' Doctor Street. Since then Blacks found it a way of keeping their memories alive to call this place "Not Doctor Street". Another example is the way by which the 'Dead' family acquired their name. This was when the grandfather was asked by a drunkard officer about his father and he answered that he was dead. The officer then wrote 'dead' in the space allotted to the name of the father. From these examples, it is easily proven that naming became a mark of luxury to be sustained only by Whites and not by Blacks who were not allowed the right to 'name' as an indicative sign of lacking identity.

Destroying the subjectivity of a person, one would start by destroying in him/her any sense of belonging. For this reason, the white masters were keen on breaking this sense of belonging at its first stage of development i.e. they separated the female slaves from their husbands and offspring. Consequently, the mother was taken away, something that has greatly inhibited the

development of the child's subjectivity. As a result, all what a child used to remember about his/her mother was her absence. In *Beloved*, Sethe's most painful experience seems to be her mother's absence. When her mother was hanged for an attempt to run away, Sethe refuses to believe that her mother has ever thought of running because this implied a sense of abandonment. In fact, Sethe never had any intimacy with her own mother "who was pointed out to her by the eight-year-old child who watched over the young ones.... What she saw was a cloth that as opposed to a straw one, singularity enough in that world of cooing women each of whom was called Ma'am" (*Beloved* 30). Sethe is a daughter who knows nothing about her mother except for this mark "right on her rib....[a]circle and a cross burnt right in the skin" (*Beloved* 61). Sethe's mother is the last of those brought from Africa. Together with Sixo, Sethe's mother and Nan provide the text with an African presence that is generated along with a contrasting sense of absence. As a result, Sethe's memories of Ma'am "are buried not only because their relationship was vague...but also because those recollections are inextricably woven with feelings of painful abandonment" (D. Horvitz 159). Deprived of her subjectivity as a daughter, Sethe

loved her children as the only untouched parts of her dismembered body and soul. She has lost the subjectivity that one could only derive from a 'maternal look' the loss of which is accompanied with the loss of identity. As a result, Sethe spends her adult life longing for that feeling of daughterhood that represents a confirming look from the 'other' i.e. the 'mother'. This is confirmed in Barbara Shapiro's words when she writes that Sethe's weeping after she falls while attempting to ice-skate in the frozen creek with Denver and Beloved falling in laughter, then tears, "suggests a child's aching sense of loss or absence specifically the absence of the conforming, legitimizing gaze of the 'other'" (203-4). This loss of the mother figure, though within a different context, is repeated in Song of Solomon. Milkman Dead, the main character, is reared by a mother that herself "ain't nobody" (Song 67) because she herself had lost her mother. She "remains inauthentic, empty and isolated, because she has no independent self on which to stand" (W. Samuels 58). Here, one could easily infer that for those Black women, such an independent self is impossible without the confirming look of a loving mother since she is the only one that could do so in a society in which man is victimized and oppressed the same as women and

is trying to project his oppression onto his Black women. As a result, it is the mother only who remains faithful to her children.

Suffering from the loss of 'the' Mother in a world that deprives her of everything, Sethe decides never to deprive her children from her maternal love. She finds it easier to deprive herself of her children i.e. by killing them, than to leave them in a world in which she suffered from losing her mother. Her children are the only part of her that was not dirtied by the white presence in her life. As a result, it has become her job to keep them away from it. Though she does not know how, Sethe works on getting her children away. She has never thought of the price, as she tells Paul D.: "It ain't my job to know what's worse. It's my job to know what is and to keep them away from what I know is terrible" (Beloved 165). Escaping from Sweet Home, it "look [s] like [Sethe] loved [her children] more...or maybe [she] couldn't love'em proper in Kentucky because they wasn't [hers] to love" (Beloved 102). Sethe feels that she could love her children more if she takes them away from Kentucky and Sweet Home as if she cannot love them properly because she feels they are not completely her own. In Sweet Home, she loves Halle and she is allowed to marry him, to have

children and to raise them. However, she gets the feeling that they are not hers, or as if it is the white master's decision whether she could love them or not. When Sethe moves to 124 Bluestone, they become the children whom she could own. At 124 Bluestone, she is secure and safe; she is not to experience what Baby Suggs passed through when she had lost her eight children except for Halle. Consequently, when she feels insecure at the moment the Schoolteacher appears in Bluestone, she "just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made [i.e. her children]...dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them" (Beloved 163). She believes that killing her children, her own things, would prevent them from suffering the humiliation she has been going through. After experiencing a sense of freedom at her new place, Sethe could not go back to Sweet Home. Thus, she decides to kill her children before killing herself because they were "the best thing she was.... Whites might dirty her all right but not her best thing...the part of her that was clean" (Beloved 251). As a result, she reaches the extreme when she prefers to kill her children than to allow them to 're-live' her own narrative i.e. the narrative of slavery.

In a wonderfully drawn image of a ghost that comes haunting Sethe before it comes into a human shape, Morrison introduces the reader to three different African women. In *Beloved*, *Beloved's* identity is not clearly read as she incorporates a mixed personality of a child ghost, "the true-to-life presence of the baby" (*Beloved* 119), a mother ghost as she speaks "the same language her ma'am spoke" (*Beloved* 62), and an African woman who has really passed through the Middle Passage experience "only to be locked up by some White man for his own purposes, and never let out the door" (*Beloved* 119). Symbolizing Sethe's mother, *Beloved* comes from the geographic other side of the world, and representing Sethe's daughter, she comes from the physical other side of life, death" (157). Consequently, Sethe and *Beloved*, put together within one context represent the impossible choice that was never available to the enslaved mother i.e. whether to abandon her children, like what Sethe's mother did, or to kill them, like what Sethe herself did. Either way the Black enslaved mother fails to protect her children. Taken to be Sethe's killed child daughter, *Beloved* brings into the novel the horrific act of infanticide. Thus, she is not only a ghost haunting Sethe being a part of her history, but she is also a

killed daughter "still with the power to shock an audience blunted by pervasive representations of violence. This has greatly enabled Morrison to capture the horrific contradiction of the slave mother" (K. Sally 72). In fact, this sense of contradiction brings another thread of connection that locates the text within a postmodern context since inherited in postmodernism is a strong sense of contradiction.

Being one of Morrison's basic recurrent themes, the mother-daughter bonding and bondage suffuses *Beloved*. The text is moving in a cycle of mother-daughter loss that all come to present a conclusive note indicating the Afro-American person could ever develop. A daughter would never identify without her mother's love and care, and a mother could never satisfy her own 'selfhood' without the love and care she is supposed to give her children: "the quality of care conditions the growth of the self and the infant's basic emotional self-image" (N. Chodorow 58). As a result, Sethe remains inconsistent throughout her life afterward. She confesses, "I wouldn't draw breath without my children" (*Beloved* 203), and she asks how "a ma'am could run off and leave her daughter" (*Beloved* 203). Thus, she has built her own image of the world on the image of love and

protection of her children. She was ready to do anything to put her children "where no one could hurt them" (163). Representing the other side of the hyphen i.e. in mother-daughter, *Beloved* is the daughter who is back to regain the maternal closeness she was deprived of destroying any barrier that could separate her from Sethe; something that is clear in her language in which punctuation is neglected and grammatical rules are violated.

In *Sweet Home*, where Sethe, Baby Suggs and Paul D. lived before moving to the North, i.e. to 124 Bluestone, Morrison gives a portrait of slaves in a plantation owned by Mr. Garner, a kind and humane master. But Mr. Garner dies and the plantation is run by brother, the Schoolteacher who comes with his nephews and boys to set things in order. He is the typical representative of the white system of supremacy in the era of slavery. His ruling system operates in such a way that regarded slaves as half-human to the extent that he orders his boys to list the 'human' and 'animal' characteristics of slaves. It was Sethe's first time to understand her place in the slave system when she hears Schoolteacher asking one of his nephews "which one [they] are doing" (*Beloved* 193) and

the boy answers "Sethe". Though she does not know yet what 'characteristics' mean, she "commenced to walk backward, didn't even look behind...[her] head itched like the devil. Like somebody was sticking fine needles in [her] scalp" (Beloved 193). Yet, this was just a prelude to her violent milking and the beating in which a "tree" is imprinted on her back. Actually, her physical response has always preceded her body response negatively, even before her mind has completely grasped the implications of Schoolteacher's classifications. Months later, when Sethe kills her daughter, the physical sensation of needles in her scalp recurs as if it has been psychologically related to feeling danger.

For the Schoolteacher, slaves are nothing but animals. When he goes to get Sethe back from 124Bluestone and he finds out that she has killed her daughter, he leaves her saying "suppose you beat the hounds past that point.... Never again could you trust them.... You'd be feeding them maybe...and the animal would revert- bite your clean off" (Beloved 149-50). The Schoolteacher is the owner who alone has the right of defining and giving orders. Sixo, one of the Sweet Home men, has stolen and eaten a pig when Schoolteacher has

started to restrict the diets of the slaves. He argues with Schoolteacher that because he is Schoolteacher's property, eating the pig is only aimed at improving that property and making it work better. This answer is acknowledged as "clever" (190), but its authority is denied: "...Schoolteacher beat him anyway to show him that definitions belonged to the definers-not the defined" (Beloved 190). Under Schoolteacher's guidance, the pupils learn how to turn people into animals. Property is property because of its assigned properties that the pupils are to observe and list on paper. Once the definitions are founded on what is "natural to a thing" (190) they are not alienable, transformable, or escapable. The lesson is one bitterly learned by the slaves of Sweet Home as well i.e. personhood and humanity lie only in the hands of the white definers.

Though Mr. Garner used to be more humane, his slaves realize later that he used to share the same grammar of chattel slavery. For Mr. Garner, the plantation is an idea of good 'ownership'. His method of treatment allows the slaves to exercise some 'selfhood', but still it is a "false position of community. He is a master who is not threatened by the manhood of his slaves. This manhood he provides his slaves with sets him apart from the

other owners whom he tells: if you a man yourself, you'll want your niggers to be men too" (Beloved 10). Garner's perspective of slavery involves possessing the individuals, extracting their labor, and constraining their movements after giving them names- like labels. It is true that he called them men, but "it is only on Sweet Home, and by his leave" (Beloved 220). Garner "acted like the world was a toy he was supposed to have fun with" (Beloved 139), and it was his niggers whom were supposed to pay the price. Halle realizes this as he becomes fully aware that both Schoolteacher and Mr. Garner are owners; they are both slave owners, but each has his own way of "possessing" (195). He tells Sethe: "It don't matter Sethe-what they say is the same. Loud or soft" (Beloved 195). As a result, slaves were to learn that there was no possibility of 'being' brought out of slavery and that there was no way out, anymore. However, they finally decide, without even being able to know what being free means, to risk the known for the unknown.

For Mr. Garner's slaves, Sweet Home is a utopian plantation that provides a sort of home-like feeling other slaves are not enjoying. Sethe tries to find herself a place in Sweet Home; she tries to own her place in the house by decorating it

in a way that makes her feel a sense of belonging, but she fails. In an attempt to claim her own world, and to feel like human, she performs small acts, an example of which is " the salsify she brought into Mr. Garner's kitchen everyday just to be able to work in it ...to take the ugly out of it, and the only way she could feel at home...was if she picked some pretty growing things and took them with her" (Beloved 22). Though she is not allowed to have the proper wedding celebration she has dreamt of, Sethe imposes her will by stealing what enables her to make her own wedding dress that she refused completing her marriage before finishing it. However, with the coming of the Schoolteacher came the impossibility of ' taking the ugly out of' the lives of all the slaves in Sweet Home.

These slaves are later embodied in the statue that Denver sees at the Bodwins' house. This statue is nothing but a representation of the blacks' inferiority and humiliation in the service of the whites:

His head was thrown back further than a head could go.... Bulging like moons, two eyes were all the face he had above the gaping red mouth.... And he was on his knees. His mouth, wide as a cup, held the

coins needed to pay for a delivery or some other small services, but could just as well have held buttons.... Painted across the pedestal he knelt on were the words "At yo service". (Beloved 255)

This statue embodies the hatred the whites felt against the Blacks as inferior and half-human creatures. The dismemberment of this statue figures out the physical as well as the spiritual and mental degradation the Black slaves were subjected to. This hatred is reflected, in a later period, in Song of Solomon. Though the novel is not mainly concerned with white oppression, "Morrison introduces stories of the suppressed humanity and creativity. The effect is to provide a sense of folkloric and historical tradition of oppression" (K. Byerman 114). An example of the white oppression in the novel is Winnie Ruth Judd who is a white woman continually escaping from the State Hospital, killing and dismembering her victims. This woman is symbolically employed as a sign of the white lunacy for tormenting and killing without any reason. This is part of the psychological and mental legacy that Blacks have received from their ancestors i.e. the white hatred for all Blacks.

Being the most influential male character in *Beloved*, Paul D. represents "dicourage[ment of] male supremacy in Black men...since Black women as workers could not be treated as the 'weaker sex' or the 'house wife', Black men could not be candidates for the figure of 'family head' and certainly not for 'family provider'" (A. Davis 7-8). Being always displaced and out of place everywhere he goes, Paul D. is fully aware of the dismemberment slavery had imposed on the Black family. After the Civil War, he witnessed:

odd clusters and strays of Negroes wander[ing] the black roads...some of them were running from family that could not support them, some to family...silent, except for social courtesies, they neither described nor asked about the sorrow that drove them from one place to another" (*Beloved* 52-3).

The Black man can no more play the head of household, nor is he able to protect his family. He is a perpetual traveler who has lost the sense of settlement, ownership and stability. In fact, Paul D. figures this shadowy presence of the black man, a presence that the American supremacist system of slavery imposed upon him. He was brought up with his half brothers, Paul A. and Paul F. in Mr. Garner's Sweet Home plantation. Though Garner

treated his slaves kindly, it was for nothing but for creating his own superior manhood through superior ownership.

Escaping from Sweet Home, Paul D. moves to a "grave", a "ditch", in such conditions that erased any sense of manhood or humanity (Beloved 106). Passing through all these experiences, Paul D. learns the lesson which is "to love just a little bit" (Beloved 45) because whatever one loves is going to be lost. In short, slaves, of both sexes, have experienced a sort of hatred and dismemberment that the white masters intentionally imposed on them. In this regard, Baby Suggs says: "they do not love your flesh. They despise it.... No more do they love your hands, those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty" (Beloved 88). These words lay the basis for the stronger hatred that the Blacks developed against the whites echoed in Circe's words in Song of Solomon: "everything in this world they [the white masters] lived for will crumble and rot... and I want to see it all go, make sure it does go, and that nobody fixes it up. I brought the dogs to make sure" (Song 247). Circe is here expressing her deep hatred for the owners of the house she used to be a servant in. When her mistress found that she could not manage and that she might degrade, she "killed herself rather than

do the work ... [Circe]'d been doing all [her] life" (Song 247). Finally, in *Beloved*, Baby Suggs admits, "there was no bad luck in the world but white people ' they don't know when to stop'" (*Beloved* 104). In short, Morrison is investigating in these two novels all these "collective memories of the physical traumas the slaves endured" in order to point out "the internalized and abiding psychic wounds caused by racial shaming in a white supremacist system of differentiation that imprisons African Americans" (Bousoon 133) in what Frantz Fanon calls "infernal circle" (117).

It is generally expected than inferred that slave holders did not love their slaves, regarding them as mere tools. Consequently, they really hated them when these tools revolted and asked for their right of existence and being within the doctrine of the 'American Dream' on the 'Land of the Free'. As a result, slaves must be separated and slave communities must be destroyed. They are not to feel any sense of intimacy with their origins, their culture, or their own people. Thus, Blacks developed some artistic methods that helped them throughout their existence within these non-human conditions to have a collective identity. As Morrison puts it, Blacks "Americans were sustained and healed and nurtured by the

translation of their experience into art, above all in the music" (Morrison "Living Memory" 181). As a result, Morrison's works are abundant in those mental and psychological attitudes that allowed African Americans to survive.

In *Beloved*, Nan, Sethe's mother and Sixo are three African characters by birth who survived the Middle Passage and who bring into the novel a strong African presence. Nan and Sethe's mother are among the slaves who dance "the antelope" and other dances of African origins, and who speak together in their native mother tongue. Sixo is among the Sweet Home men, who used to dance among the trees at night "to keep his bloodiness open" (*Beloved* 25). He also tries to keep his connection with his native tongue rejecting his master's language because "there no future in it" (*Beloved* 25). All what Sethe knows about her mother's practices through Nan is part of a legacy as it was directly related to her own 'motherlessness'. Because she internalized this "antelope" dance into her very psyche as part of a mother she has lost, it recurs to her mind while escaping from Sweet Home when she feels an antelope following her. She is surprised at being an antelope that occurred to her since she has never seen any. In fact, Sethe remembers the African

songs and dances on the plantation before Sweet Home. This was "when [slaves] danced and sometimes they danced the antelope.... They shifted shapes and became something other: Some unchained, demanding other whose feet knew her pulse better than she did. Just like this one in her stomach" (Beloved 31). In such a dance, the slaves shift from their status of bondage to a temporary one of freedom brought into mind by the speed of the antelope. They concentrated in their dance to such an extent of forgetting all about their bondage, reconnecting themselves to one whole communal self. Another African ritual that hovers around is that they believe that when a person passes away, he/she does not disappear as long as someone remembers him, his name, or his character. In Beloved, Beloved herself is an example of the African belief in incarnation.

Again, in Song of Solomon, Pilate keeps a paper on which her father has written her name in a box which she wears as an earring. By this, she believes that she is keeping her father with her.

In both Song of Solomon and Beloved, songs play a very important role. In Beloved, the songs that Paul D. and Sethe sing are hybrids, with both African and American elements. These songs allow them to express their own experiences of bondage

at the same time of driving a support from their African essence. It is by verbal and musical mark that Sethe identifies her children through the songs she used to sing for them. In Song of Solomon, it is Pilate's song that starts the novel and it is the whole tuned song that signifies the end of Milkman's journey. Thus, it was music and improvisation that permitted the Blacks to have their individual voices suppressed through their experiences on plantations. Consequently, though in physical bondage, people were able to invent what could identify them. Yet, they were forced to wear a mask of submission in order to be able to survive the terrible conditions of slavery.

In Beloved, Morrison has used the technical device of creating a ghost in order, in her words, to "keep the reader preoccupied with the nature of the incredible spirit world being supplied a controlled diet of the incredible political world" ("Unspeakable Things" 32). Through this ghost of multi-faceted identity, Morrison gives a whole panorama of that institution called slavery since its very beginning on slave ships coming from Africa. When Morrison tells how "[Beloved] was always crouching...someone is thrashing but there is no room to do it in" and when she repeats "a hot thing", the "men without skin" (Beloved 210), She

is clearly retelling an experience from the Middle Passage. This recalls what Richard Howard writes about African people aboard a typical slave ship in *Black Cargo* that people were kept:

Enclosed under grated hatchways, between decks, the space was so low that they sat between each other's legs, and stowed so close together that there was no possibility of lying down, or at all changing their positions by night or day. As they belonged to, and were stripped on account of different individuals, they were all branded like sheep...burnt with a red-hot iron. (47)

Morrison could have given this account through Sethe's recollections of her mother and her Nan, but she would have lost that effect that the presence of a ghost has thrown on the text; that sense of haunting. She wants to show that the past (the slave ship) will never get away the same as a ghost haunting its victims. Through the ghost, the slave ship scene is laid bare at the foreground with all its horrific acts and implications. As suggested by Jean Wyatt, *Beloved* has "a collective identity" as she is a representation of the "Sixty million and more" of the novel's epigraph; *Beloved* "describes conditions on the slave ships in fragmented images without connective syntax or punctuation,

reflecting the bewilderment and loss of identity of the transported captives" (Wyatt 474). In addition, the ghost gets into the present scene to dig deep into the past bringing forth the well of Sethe's memory concerning her own life while in bondage. Through her words about the slave ship scene, the novel gets its slave narrative quality that "holds the key to the narrative unity. It is the institution of slavery that supplies the logic underlying the novel, the thematic glue that unifies the text" (Wyatt 96).

Both *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved* are complementing each other in portraying a whole lively portrait of the Afro-American experience of bondage. While *Beloved* functions as a "textual space in which the horrors of [physical bondage] and the equally horrific responses to it by (formerly) enslaved" (M.Sale 47), *Song of Solomon* concentrates mainly on a subsequent stage that deals "with the troubling issue of internalized racism as it crystallizes black cultural anxiety about the class and color hierarchies within the African American community" (Bouson 76). In both novels, 'memory' and 'community' play important roles in identifying such states of bondage, with each of the two novels employing

them within different contexts that serve their thematic goals.

In *Beloved*, Morrison brings in a group of characters that all seem imprisoned in a sense of 'pastness', one that is horribly destructive. Here, characters are haunted by an ever-present past that blocks their advances toward a satisfactory future. Sethe in *Beloved* is a former slave who is now free after escaping from Sweet Home plantation where she was owned by Mr. Garner followed by the Schoolteacher. Driven by her fear that her children could experience what she has passed through in Sweet Home, she kills one of her daughters. Internalizing the notion of being a 'dirty' thing that was mainly dirtied by the whites, Sethe completely approves of the psychological dismemberment that the white system has imposed on her. It is clear that Sethe lacks a sense of herself as a distinct whole being. When she tells Denver the story of Denver's birth, she refers to herself in the third person calling herself "her children's mother" (*Beloved* 30) as if she lost any sense of 'a' self to speak with. Later, she continues to repeat the same words herself: "I believe this baby's ma'am is gonna die in wild onions on the bloody side of the Ohio River" (*Beloved* 31). Sethe has internalized a zero Image that develops in her

a negative definition of self commonly associated with oppressed people who have internalized the image of the oppressors of themselves. In fact, Sethe "was defeated...because at the bottom of [her] heart, [she] really believed what white people said about [her]" (Baldwin 18).

Because deep inside her Sethe believes that she is nothing but an image of her children, her killing of her daughter is not an 'infanticide' as much as it is a 'suicide'. As a result, this view of her children's lives as coinciding with her own demonstrates her lack of a bounded sense of her own identity. She is both reduced down to nothing, finding it hard to say 'I', and magnified, spread out only within the lives of her children. Since that moment in the past, when she killed her daughter, Sethe has been kept haunted by the spirit of her past that she could not escape or resolve. Consequently, she loses any sense of a future as she takes as her "day's serious work" the task of "beating back the past" (Beloved 73). "Her brain" is not anyway "interested" in the future, as it is loaded with the past and paradoxically hungry for more.

Here comes the trauma of the past as it keeps hovering and at the same time is never fully grasped or faced. In fact, Sethe's agonized history

takes up all her psychic space to the extent that "no room is left to imagine, let alone, plan for the next day" (Beloved 70). When Denver, feeling excluded after Paul D.'s arrival, asks: "how come everybody run off from Sweet Home can't stop talking about it?" (Beloved 13), Sethe answers in words that show the pervasive effect of past on people like her. She says that Sweet Home "comes back whether we want it to or not" (Beloved 14). Consequently, Sweet Home becomes the only referent point that lies in the past for its wo/men to identify with. 124 Bluestone itself, though is temporarily located in present, becomes wholly absorbed by the past in the form of a ghost that saps the energy of the living there. In fact, it is Sethe's resistance to 're-live' her past that has cast her into a kind of a limbo, with no judgement and no forgiveness. Together with Paul D., Sethe has taught herself to endure history but never to face it. Their freedom continues as a 'nominal' one because both have attempted to bury their memories of enslavement and its attendant violations. Because it was so horrible, they have cut themselves off from their histories with both negative and positive aspects.

In a wonderfully artistic use of imagery, Morrison expresses how the African American

internalized experiences of slavery have blocked their ways using the images of Paul D.'s tin tobacco box and Sethe's tree. Moving from one place to another, Paul D. has sealed all his memories metaphorically in a tin tobacco box that he keeps near his heart as if replacing it. Also, with Sethe, one finds the tree implanted on her back performing the same function i.e. a continuous reminder of her past. Ema, the white girl, tells her "It's a tree, Lu. A chokecherry tree. See, here's the trunk -- it's red and split wide open, full of sap, and this here's the parting of the branches. You got a might lot of branches. Leaves too.... Your back got a whole tree on it." (Beloved 79). In the words of J. Bouson, "that Sethe remains psychically numbed by her slavery past is revealed in the fact that her scarred back, a visible reminder of her persecution as a slave, has no feeling" (48). All the scars on Sethe's back do not hurt because it has been a long time since they occurred. However, the existence of such scars is in itself an indication that the past is inescapable, even if people do not speak about it.

Sethe believes that she has 'human' as well as 'animal' characteristics as the Schoolteacher has made evident through his experiments on her. Also, Paul D. has fully internalised the concept of

manhood that Mr. Garner has pushed him to perform. Still, he believes that Sixo and Halle are men in their own terms; but he is unable to assume the same manhood. From Sixo's example, Paul D. understands what it means to be a man by African standards, though he is not at all sure that he measures up to Sixo's definition: "when he looks at himself through Garner's eyes, he sees one thing. Through Sixo's, another. One makes him free righteous. One makes him feel ashamed" (Beloved 267). Paul D. meets the criteria established for manhood by the standards of the slave-holding patriarchy; however, by Sixo's standards his behaviour, especially in leaving Sethe alone with Beloved, is disappointing. In the cases of Paul D. and Sethe, the African legacy produces a sense of ambivalence in which a person feels two opposing feelings towards their original African history. Sixo's thirty-mile trips to see his woman fill Paul D. with deep admiration, but he is mostly amused by and somehow fearful of Sixo's dancing amidst the trees at night. Although Sixo, like Sethe's mother and Nan, embodies the integrity of African essence, Paul D., like Sethe, cannot simply adopt this model, just as he cannot simply adopt the white example e.g. Mr. Garner and Mrs. Garner. From here springs the main challenge for those

coming out of slavery which involves how to have their own voice that may contradict with that of a culture that does admit the existence of the 'Other'.

In Song of Solomon, this ambivalence moves to a kind of shame. Milkman's father and then Milkman himself shut themselves from their past as shameful. This sense of shame indicates the degree of white value internalisation. Here, "the fact that the line back to the past was snarled...made the racial past hazy, distant and impossible to know.... The shame that Black men felt about their past was a measure of how much they had drunk up the values of the white world around him" (N. Huggins 61). Like his father, Milkman perceives time as a linear process; he never cares for what happened. All what concerns him is what will happen. Hearing from his father about Dr. Foster's death-his grandfather-Milkman "felt curiously disassociated from all that he had heard. As though a stranger...had turned to him and begun to relate some intimacy" (Song 74). He has a strong desire to remain ignorant of all what had happened; he always feels "secure in unknowingness" (Rushdy 312). This desire accompanies him from the very beginning through the image of driving in the family car. When the

"Dead family's shiny placard rolls...Milkman's view is restricted to what he can see out of the rear window. To watch the passing scenery he kneels on the seat, but riding backward made him uneasy. It was like flying blind, and not knowing where he was going...just where he had been...troubled" (Song 32). Thus, in both novels, 're-memory' has a problematic effect as it keeps characters haunted by shame and trauma. Differing from memory in being imposed on characters without their consent, re-memory is always painful.

In *Beloved*, Morrison uses "memory as the metaphorical sign of the interior life to explore and represent dimensions of slave life that the classic slave narrative omitted" (M. Mobley 357). It represents the psychological and spiritual damage slavery has inflicted upon former slaves. Through re-memory, Morrison seems to suggest that in spite of the fact that slaves have got their freedom, they have never given up the horrible images that became a part of their very psyche. Sethe, for example is "full" of terrible memories of two boys stealing her own milk with Schoolteacher "watch[ing] and writ[ing] it up", of Schoolteacher's voice instructing his nephews to "line up" her "human characteristics" beside her "animal ones" (*Beloved* 193) in their daily lessons.

All memory, however, circulates around the moment Sethe cut the throat of her infant daughter and attempted to kill her other children. As a result, Sethe dedicates herself to "the job...of keeping [Denver] from the past that was still waiting for her" (Beloved 42).

Sethe never gives up Sweet Home from her mind. Deep inside her the place is still waiting for her and her children. She tells her daughter that "where I was before...is real. It's never going away. Even if the whole farm...every tree and grass blade of its dies...it will happen again.... Because even though it's all over...all over and above with ...it's going to always be there waiting for you" (Beloved 36). Thus, although the borders and defining characteristics of the place of dehumanisation may have vanished from sight, its effects and events remain. Slavery is remembered, but still it is more that a memory simply because its immediacy and material consequences resist resolution. Sethe admits this when she says: "what I remember is a picture floating around out what I did, or know, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened" (Beloved 36).

Another important feature of spiritual bondage is the inability to put into words what one

feels or experiences just because there are no words that could carry their horror within a verbal context. Though Sethe and Paul D. in *Beloved* share haunting details of unspeakably painful pasts, both leave gaps in their stories. Sethe, for example, does not reveal why she chose infanticide of her "crawling already" baby over allowing her to be lost in slavery. Paul D. does not speak of his "tobacco tin" or of Alfred, Georgia. Sethe recognises that there are "things neither knew about the other...the things neither had word-shapes for" (*Beloved* 99). It is clear that in *Beloved*, events are not told once and are not told at once. Here, the proposition is that the "story will be repeated and will change with every telling, and that the success of the telling...resides not so much in its similarity to the original as it in its individual nuances and its ability to involve others" (S. Maggie 178). With each telling there is something left because the speaker is so tormented by it that s/he loses the ability to utter it. Even Denver is infected by her mother's traumatic past. Kept in complete isolation and seeking refuge in her hidden boxwood bower, Denver is "closed off from the hurt of the hurt world" (*Beloved* 28). Denver's suffering is unspeakable but still it is expressed and visualised.

Moving to Song of Solomon, Milkman faces the unspeakable most probably in his nagging desire of 'flying'. Most of the time, Milkman's flight fantasies are in the form of dreams: "it was a warm dreamy sleep all about flying, about sailing high over the earth" (Song 302). For him, flight is the only way to get free, to separate himself from all the others. In the beginning, 'flying' is a way of escape, "above all he wanted to escape what he knew, escape the implications of what he had been told" (Song 120). He wants to fly because there is nothing to connect him to himself. Milkman is aware that he lacks 'coherence'. He cannot perceive himself as a "total self". Though he wants to prove himself different from his father, Milkman has inherited his materialistic Western view of success that is based on individualism. He then resorts to his dreams and fantasies. This proves a general tendency in Morrison's works:

In all of Morrison's fiction what is left unsaid is as important as what is stated and specified, what is felt is as significant as what is experienced, what is dreamed is as valid as what transpires in the world of "fact". And none of these conditions of being is rendered as opposites...rather, experience for Morrison's characters is the acceptance

of a continuum, as recognition that the mind is not separate from the body nor the real separate from that which the imagination can conceive. (B. Rigney 74).

Another important technical device that Morrison has used in *Beloved* to speak the unspeakable is the introduction of the "ghost". Through the presence of a ghost, Morrison has successfully dramatised the pain, shame and imprisonment endured by all those former slaves as it throws a nightmarish and gloomy atmosphere over its victims. The ghost in *Beloved* represents that 'image' or 'event' that Cathy Caruth speaks about in her introduction to *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Trauma*. She says "to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" to be the "haunting power of trauma" (1-6). Also in *Song of Solomon*, the recurrent image of flying performs the same function. Milkman's obsession with the idea of flying reveals his state of psychological bondage. This is clear from the very beginning of the novel when one knows that "when the little boy, [Milkman], at four discovered...that only birds and airplanes could fly...he lost all interest I himself" (Song 9). Milkman's loss of "interest in himself" does not constitute selflessness, for he becomes selfish, but rather

indicates a lack of real involvement in life and an ignorance of his true personal and racial identity.

With all these traumatic experiences, Morrison always emphasises the role of isolation in strengthening their effects. In both *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved*, the community is always beyond any traumatic scene. Discussing 'isolation' as a main issue, one should refer to it in direct connection with Sartre's "look" and his "Bad Faith and Falsehood". In *Song of Solomon*, Milkman, the main character, like his father, falls a victim to the West materialistic values Morrison's depiction of the Dead family, except Pilate, demonstrates the incompatibility of received assumptions with the texture and demands of life in Black American communities. Milkman appears to be destined for a life of self-alienation and isolation because of his commitment to the materialism and the linear conception of time that are a part of the legacy he receives from his father. Macon Dead, Milkman's father, has internalised the whites' standards or "look". He adopts their values of success, which is materialistic and non-spiritual.

Macon Dead and consequently his son represent black class racial prejudice. Such Blacks

think that they become human only by 'being' as white as possible i.e. by assuming their views even if degrading their own fellow men and women. Such Blacks are thus fashioning a life that Sartre called "Bad Faith and Falsehood" in which they remain dishonest with themselves by adopting not what they believe but what they are supposed by the white man to do. Consequently, they fell victims to their failure to transcend the imposing definition of the "Other's" look. They "remain frozen in a world of being-for-the-other and consequently live a life of shame, alienation, self-hatred, and inevitable deconstruction" (Hudson-Weems 11). For Macon Dead, "memory is freedom...the only real freedom there is" (Song 163). To be a really self-made man, Macon predicates his behaviour in a linear conception of time. To his mind, future success determines identity and justifies one's actions in past and present. Macon's futuristic, linear vision of time and of identity is evidenced by his failure to consider his past as part of himself. He denies the importance of his relationship with his sister and of their shared history. In fact, he has no time whatsoever for any connection that would cause him to exercise his capacity for horizontal or peripheral vision. He advises his only son saying

"own things. And let the things you own own other things. Then you'll own yourself and other people too" (Song 55). He has married 'Ruth' just because she is the daughter of the only coloured doctor in the country i.e. he does not love her. This results in Ruth's living completely in her memories of her father.

So, Milkman "is indeed infantile and spiritually dead. His family home is a house of ghosts where life is artificial stifled by concerns with status, by personal rancour, and by emotional mal nourishment" (Lee 349). As a physical manifestation of his inherent spiritual bondage, Milkman is born with a limp that he works all the time to overcome. Though he wants to have his own separate identity, he could do nothing but view the world from the same lens his father uses. At this point comes the image of the peacock that parallels Milkman's social status. When Milkman and Guitar spot a white peacock that has escaped from a zoo, Guitar answers, when asked by Milkman why a peacock is unable to fly, that the reason is "too much tail. All that jewellery weight it down. Like vanity. Can't nobody fly with all that shit. Wanna fly, you got to give up the shit that weighs you down" (Song 180). It is vanity that keeps the Blacks down. Vanity, that they are proud of, is

what humiliates them. It prevents them from coming together. It is this vanity that keeps some of the Blacks away sitting at a higher place imagining that now they are white-like masters. They despise their fellow poor Blacks or their darker brothers the same as the white man despises them. According to Keith E. Byerman in "Beyond Realism", Milkman "is born and reared in a family that is life-denying. As a sign of this, his birth is simultaneous with the suicide of a man who leaps from the roof of the hospital" (113). Consequently, as he grows, he automatically acquires these attitudes of selfishness and narcissism.

Another example of dead spiritually in Song of Solomon is Hagar, Pilate's granddaughter, who falls in love with Milkman. For Hagar, this passion fills a deep emotional vacuum, providing a substitute for the stability that her mother and grandmother have never been able to provide. Because society rejects Reba's carefree libertinism and Pilate's general 'Otherness', as she was born without a navel, something which made people go away from her, Hagar is deprived of the ordinary communal love that she needs to be truly happy. Because she can only love herself in the reflected light of Milkman's false love, Hagar's world is

suddenly turned upside down, and her love mutates into an impotent rage that rules her body and soul. After Milkman leaves in search of fabled gold, Hagar focuses her love-turned-hatred upon herself, and soon it leads to her suicide.

Throughout *Song of Solomon*, the vital importance of naming in African American culture is clearly illustrated. The extreme attention displayed by the novel's community to the appropriateness of particular names implies a deep cultural requirement that names must have meaning. A name for each new member of the Dead family is randomly chosen from the Bible: Pilate, Hagar, First Corinthians, and Magdalene are a few of unusual maybe found in such actions: the ability to choose names verifies the power of individualistic creation that underpins freedom. This general human truth is rendered more significant for those ancestors are nameless slaves. Because African Americans have traditionally been denied their own names, unchosen names constitute a part of the humiliating legacy Blacks have received from their ancestors. In turn, the deliberate refusal of the black community in *Song of Solomon* to accept arbitrariness imposed names constitutes an act of defiance toward an oppressive white power structure and act of collective self. In

fact, throughout Morrison's novel, the "constant censorship of and intrusion on black life from the consistent pattern of misnaming" (Davis 323). As a result of this misnaming, "a whole group of people have been denied the right to create a recognizable public self...as individuals or as community" (Davis 327)

As it is Milkman's linear view of life that has isolated him from his community, the community itself acquires a very important role in magnifying the sense of shame and trauma in both *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon*. In *Beloved*, and as Bousoon suggests, "incursions into the yard and house by the past whether brought by Paul D. or the Schoolteacher, cause breakdowns. Some of these breakdowns result in a hardening of the line between the yard and the world" (9). It was a part of the white project to separate Sethe from her surrounding community. The evil created by slavery invades even the most carefully attended barriers: the "fence with a gate that somebody was always latching and unlatching in the time when 124 was busy as a way station" is "pulled down" by white boys who "yanked up the posts and smashed the gate leaving 124 desolate and exposed and isolated from the community" (Song 163).

In *Song of Solomon*, as well as in *Beloved*, the community has itself represented this spiritual failure that kept it both bounded and separate. It is the community that casts Pilate away alienating her not only because she was born nerveless, but also because is clinging to her past and historical origins, something that they could not do. It is the same community that betrays Sethe in *Beloved* and envies Baby Suggs for being a blessed person who has a kind 'big' heart that cures their own and that is about to have all the members of her family together. Deep inside themselves they asked the question "why is she and hers always the center of things? How come she always [know] exactly what to do and when? Giving advice, passing messages, healing the sick" (*Beloved* 137). Consequently, they decided not to warn Sethe when they saw the Schoolteacher approaching 124.

In short, Toni Morrison is keen on reflecting the various traumatic and shameful experiences that the Blacks have passed through. She investigated these experiences within the contextual narrative of former slaves who were directly under pressure and who were converted unwillingly from subjects to objects in the process of oppression. She has also delved deep in her characters' psyche depicting the sense of failure

that the Blacks experienced as a result of adopting their own legacy of racial prejudice. Consequently, in Morrison's works, whether externally or internally, the characters are marked with a sense of incompleteness that develops in them a sense of self-objectification.

تشبيء الذات فى

روايتى تونى موريسون المحبوبة و اغنية سليمان

ملخص:

يهدف البحث الى تقديم قراءة ما بعد الحداثية لروايتى الكاتبة الامريكية تونى موريسون المحبوبة (١٩٨٧) و اغنية سليمان (١٩٧٧) عن طريق تتبع مفهوم تشبيء الذات و الذى يرتبط بنظرية ما بعد الحداثة، تلك النظرية التى تتضمن التاكيد على الشخصية اللا مركزية و على اعطاء الفرصة للمهمشين للتعبير عن انفسهم. يتناول البحث الاثر النفسى الذى تركته تجربة العبودية على الاشخاص الافرو امريكين قبل و بعد تحريرهم. يركز البحث على الطرق التى اتبعها السادة البيض لبعث الشعور بالدونية فى نفوس عبيدهم و الحرص على زرعها فى نفوسهم لدرجة انهم اصبحوا يروا انفسهم تماما كما يراهم سادتهم، مجرد اشياء.

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