



Universidad de Valladolid

FACULTAD de FILOSOFÍA Y LETRAS

DEPARTAMENTO de FILOLOGÍA INGLESA

Grado en Estudios Ingleses

TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

Black Struggle and The Black Lives Matter movement

An Analysis of *Beloved* by Toni Morrison

Manal Kasbi Saiddat

Tutor: Parisa Delshad

2020-2021

Abstract

Beloved (1987) is Morrison's fifth novel and the work that led her to win the Literature Nobel Prize. In it, Morrison digs into the events of systematized slavery in the United States and reveals the effects and the psychological damage that this produced in the black community. The novel addresses the tragic story of a former slave, Sethe whose decision to escape the plantation did not save her from the trauma of slavery. The aim of this essay is to analyze the main themes of the novel, such as slavery and motherhood, and correlate them with the present days' racial issue in The USA. To do this, I will give a brief introduction to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, what it is, and its aims in the fight against racism. Thus, proving that Morrison's Beloved is not a mere work of art, but it has a deep psychological component that turns it into a novel for protest.

Keywords: Beloved, Toni Morrison, Motherhood, Slavery, Racism, BLM.

Beloved (1987) es la quinta novela de Morrison y la obra que la llevó a ganar el Premio Nobel de Literatura. En ella, Morrison indaga en los acontecimientos de la esclavitud sistematizada en Estados Unidos y revela los efectos y el daño psicológico que ésta produjo en la comunidad negra. La novela aborda la trágica historia de una antigua esclava, Sethe, cuya decisión de escapar de la plantación no la salvó del trauma de la esclavitud. El objetivo de este ensayo es analizar los temas principales de la novela, como la esclavitud y la maternidad, y correlacionarlos con la problemática racial actual en Estados Unidos. Para ello, haré una breve introducción al movimiento Black Lives Matter (BLM), qué es y sus objetivos en la lucha contra el racismo. Así, se demuestra que Beloved de Morrison no es una mera obra de arte, sino que tiene un profundo componente psicológico que la convierte en una novela de protesta.

Palabras clave: Beloved, Toni Morrison, Maternidad, Esclavitud, Racismo, BLM.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction..... | 4 |
| 1. Nineteenth-Century Social and Historical American Context: Reconstruction era and Slavery..... | 6 |
| Historical Context in <i>Beloved</i> | 9 |
| 2. Toni Morrison and <i>Beloved</i> (1987) | 11 |
| 3. Slavery and Race/Racism in <i>Beloved</i> | 14 |
| 4. Motherhood and Trauma..... | 23 |
| Motherhood and Trauma in <i>Beloved</i> | 24 |
| 5. Black Matter Lives (BLM) and The Black Identity nowadays..... | 34 |
| Conclusion..... | 37 |
| Bibliography | 38 |

Introduction

Beloved (1987) is a complex work of literature that revolves around the acts and consequences of slavery. It is the fifth novel of Toni Morrison and the most controversial and explicit out of all. The story is a mix between reality, history, and fiction. The history of a single-family represents the history of a whole collective, in this case the African American community. Morrison achieves a powerful message on the psychological and historical legacy of slavery.

The thesis will firstly analyze the socio-historical context in which the plot of the novel was developed to fully understand the circumstances in which the characters lived. The novel has a historical essence; therefore, history plays a big role in it. Secondly, there will be a section on the author's biography, factors of influence when writing *Beloved*, aims, as well as a small summary of the plot of the novel. Thirdly, an analysis of the main themes will be provided, these being: slavery and race/racism, and motherhood and trauma. Finally, there will be a last section before the conclusion in which I interconnect the novel with nowadays issues on racism and black identity giving special attention to the Black Lives Matter movement.

This thesis will be divided into six main chapters. The first one, "Nineteenth-Century Social and Historical American Context: Reconstruction era and slavery," will deal with the socio-historical context of what we know nowadays as America (US). The second chapter, "Toni Morrison and *Beloved* (1987)" will give a brief overview of Morrison's career giving focus on the novel *Beloved*. The third and fourth, chapters, "Slavery and Race/Racism in *Beloved*," and "Motherhood and Trauma," will focus on the analysis of these same themes in the novel. The fifth chapter, "Black Lives Matter (BLM) and the Black Identity Nowadays," will deal with the present days' issues on racism and black identity in America paying special attention to the worldwide-known Black Lives Matter movement and its impact on the black community in the USA. To finish with, there will be the last section for the conclusion as well as a section for the documents and works used as references for this study.

Nineteenth-Century Social and Historical American Context: Reconstruction era and Slavery

Throughout the nineteenth century, what we now know as the United States underwent many changes so important that they would be decisive for the country's future as a united nation. Changes that altered the meaning of the concept of citizenship and brought about a dramatic change in all aspects of American society; social, historical, cultural, economic and political. But those whose lives were really changed completely were the black community of the country.

Until then and for several centuries, slavery was one of the main sources of the southern economy. Slaves were brought in under inhumane conditions, sold to slavers as merchandise and forced into labor. They were stripped of their identities and culture. Their names were changed, they were treated like animals who only could obey and not speak or else they would face the most horrific tortures. Entire families were broken up and sold separately to different farms. Female slaves were seen as birthing machines and objects of pleasure for the white man. They were repeatedly raped by slaveholders. There were no regards to motherhood or family.

When the North abolished slavery, many Southern slaves saw this as an opportunity to escape and start a new life, in freedom in the North. Few succeeded and many were caught and suffered the consequences of their ambition to freedom. Many Northerners were strongly opposed to slavery and saw that helping and protecting runaway slaves could be a way to combat slavery. Slavery was the key factor to wound the southern economy and therefore win the war and gain power over the South. The Southern economy was deeply rooted in slavery. Cotton and tobacco comprised the bulk of the southern economy. Thousands of black slaves worked on these plantations under appalling conditions and for no profit. If slavery were abolished, the South would find itself in a terrible financial crisis as it would lose the slave labor force and production would decline and with it their economy, thus making the victory of the Northern states inevitable.

However, *The Fugitive Slave Laws* of 1850 hindered the help that this fugitive slaves received from the Northerners and again put their freedom at stake. These laws

were a continuation of a prior one made in 1793 which assisted the same issue but failed to solve the runaway slave issue. As the number of runaway slaves increased, the Southerners' anger and grievance grew into a demand for laws that would allow them to regain what they considered theirs. According to John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, the estimated number of fugitive slaves surpassed 50,000 annually (1999, p.282). However, they explain that not all these attempts to run away are successful. Many fugitive slaves stayed out just for a few weeks or months while others were unsuccessful.

What these laws announced was that slaveholders were free to enter the northern states in search of the runaway slave and had the right to return him or hire someone, a policeman or a marshal, to do the job:

And be it further enacted, That when a person held to service or labor in any State or Territory of the United States has heretofore or shall hereafter escape into another State or Territory of the United States, the person or persons to whom such service or labor may be due, or his, her or their agent or attorney, duly authorised, by power of attorney, in writing, acknowledged and certified under the seal of some legal office or court of the State or Territory in which the same may be executed, may pursue and reclaim such fugitive person, either by procuring a warrant from some one of the courts, judges, or commissioners aforesaid, of the proper circuit, district or county, for the apprehension of such fugitive from service or labor, or by seizing and arresting such fugitive,[...].

(The Fugitive Slave Acts, sect.6,1850)

Furthermore, it would be considered illegal in either a slave or free state to aid a runaway slave by providing food, shelter or money to facilitate his or her escape:

And be it further enacted, That any person who shall knowingly and willingly obstruct, hinder, or prevent such claimant, his agent or attorney, or any person or persons lawfully assisting him, her, or them, from arresting such a fugitive from service or labor, either with or aforesaid;[...] or shall harbor or conceal such fugitive, so as to prevent the discovery and arrest of such person, after notice or knowledge of the fact that such person was a fugitive from service or labor as aforesaid, shall, for either of said offences, be subject to a fine not

exceeding one thousand dollars, and imprisonment not exceeding six months[...]. (The Fugitive Slave Acts, sect.7, 1850)

Many radical abolitionists in the North challenged these laws and continued assisting fugitive slaves. However, to ensure the entrenchment of the statute, the 1850 laws left federal commissioners in charge of specific, individual cases. These individuals were promised more money if they returned runaway slaves rather than freeing and assisting them.

In the shadow of this law, assistance to fugitive slaves continued to occur. The more extreme abolitionists created networks that would allow them to assist and help those who wanted to taste freedom. One of the best-known fugitive slave assistance and abolitionist organizations is *The Underground Railroad* which operated initially out of the northern states and after *The Fugitive Slave Acts* they moved their headquarters to Canada.

In the nineteenth century at the end of the Civil War, in which the free northern States known as the Union won victory against the slave States of the south, a series of social, economic and political reforms began. This era is known as the Reconstruction Era. During this era, which lasted from 1865 to 1877, a wave of people emerged, who claimed the equality of races and their opposition to slavery in the South. They were already present before, but it was at this point where they came in stronger to fight for their ideals. This collective was made up of both freed black men and women as well as whites determined to abolish slavery and give full citizenship rights to blacks. These people existed before but it was after the war when they became formally known as abolitionists

Slavery was abolished in 1865, at the beginning of The Reconstruction Era. However, there was still a long way for black people to be fully accepted in the society as equals to whites and slavery for many freed slaves was still a nightmare hard to overcome. The psychological and physical damage of the legacy of slavery will live for many years after the abolition on the hearts of African Americans.

Historical context of *Beloved*

Beloved was inspired by a real-life event that happened in Kentucky. A woman whose name was Margaret Garner, a slave who was born and raised into slavery who decided to escape with her husband, her family, and her children and go to Cincinnati (Ohio). After a long, difficult and dangerous journey they made it to a safe home. Their slavers and federal marshals found them after a few mere hours and captured them. But Garner was determined not to return with her children to captivity, so she took them to the back rooms. By the time the authorities and her owners found them, she had already slit the throat of her two-year-old daughter and badly wounded the rest of her children. Her intention was to execute all her children and then herself rather than put her life and her kids back to slavery. When the slavers and the authorities saw this scene, they were perplexed and decided to imprison her and try her for the crime. The alarming thing was that the crime for which she was imprisoned was not the crime of murder, but of property damage. Margaret's defense attorney decided that in order for her to be tried for murder it would be best to have a trial in a free state, thus also defying the Fugitive Slave laws.

Garner was and is considered a symbol of revolution and protest against slavery and The Fugitive Slave Acts as Morrison says in the Foreword section of her novel *Beloved*.

She became a cause célèbre in the fight against the Fugitive Slave laws, which mandated the return of escapees to their owners. Her sanity and lack of repentance caught the attention of Abolitionists as well as newspapers. She was certainly single-minded, the ferocity, and the willingness to risk everything for what was to her the necessity of freedom.

Her figure is of great importance in African American history. Garner's acts, which for many are inexcusable and horrifying, for many others are an eye-opener to how cruel slavery could be, and they began to raise many debates among whites as to whether slavery is so terrible that death is considered a way of salvation from it as the journalist Rebecca Carroll explains in her article on Margaret Garner for the New York Times newspaper:

Garner's story has been preserved in history as both sensational and singular. It writ large a question that had been unanswered in the homes and

hearts of whites in pre-Civil War America: Was slavery a fate worse than death? Garner, with knife in hand, gave an answer that was impossible to ignore.

Beloved by Toni Morrison was deeply inspired by Margaret Garner's story. The novel is set in Ohio 1873. Sethe and her daughter were former slaves. They lived in a post-slavery society, during the Reconstruction Era. However, the characters keep referring to past events in a form of flashbacks from when they were slaves in a plantation in the South named Sweet Home, in a time prior to the Civil War in which slavery was still the order of the southern States.

Toni Morrison and *Beloved* (1987)

Toni Morrison was born on February 18, 1931, in Lorain, Ohio. Her original name is Chloe Anthony Wofford. She belonged to a middle-class working-class family. Since she was a child, her greatest passion was reading. Her father always read her stories drawn from African and African American tradition, which had a great impact on her later career as a writer. Growing up in a multicultural and diverse neighborhood, Morrison did not become aware of the racial divisions that existed in her nation until much later in her teenage years as she mentioned an interview in *The New York Times*:

“When I was in first grade, nobody thought I was inferior. I was the only Black in the class and the only child who could read”

Morrison became completely involved in her studies. She studied Latin and the great European and world literary works. She graduated in 1949 from Lorain High School with honors. After many years in the teaching field Morrison decided to leave her teaching career and work for a book publisher called Random House in New York. There she had the opportunity to edit a large number of novels and literary works that were the culmination of her inspiration to follow her dream of becoming a writer. Authors like Toni Cade Bambara, Gayl Jones or important celebrity figures like Mohammed Ali or Angela Davis were a fount of inspiration for Morrison.

It was in Random House, where Toni worked as an editor, when the idea of *Beloved* came into Morrison's mind. In one of her *Newshour* interviews on the publication of the novel, Morrison claims that *Beloved*'s idea arose while at Random House when she read in the 19th Century Newspaper a story about a woman who killed her own children to free them from the slavery destiny that awaited for them. Morrison says that she was impacted by this sense of brutal motherhood that the story reveals.:

“...extraordinary idea worth of a novel, which is this compulsion to nurture, this ferocity that a woman has to be responsible for her children [...]”

She explains that what impacted her the most was how what Margaret did was so horrific but at the same time so symbolic and necessary. Slave women when they had a child, they were not considered parents because they could not decide on their children's future. They just give birth, but they were not allowed to play the role of a

mother. They were mere birth machines. They were denied humanity. When Margaret killed her child, she had no right to do it, but she had to do it, she was claiming her role as a mother and her humanity back. By killing her daughter, she had the power to decide her future, the power to play the role of a mother and own her child in a society that viewed her as a mere object (Morrison in NewsHour)

Beloved is the first part of a trilogy formed by two more novels; *Jazz* (1992) and *Paradise* (1997). In this trilogy Morrison covers 150 years of African American history. However, unlike the conventional historical saga, Morrison's trilogy is composed of three completely different novels, each set in a key period of black history. *Beloved* is claimed to be her most powerful novel, based on an exploration of nineteenth-century slavery in America from the perspective of a black woman. It is a historical novel that follows the guidelines of a slave narrative. It is a story of damage and devastation but at the same time hope and memory. The novel portrays the deconstruction of identity that slavery caused in blacks and the horrors of this tragic event in the USA history. *Beloved* focuses on the power of memory and history, on the legacy of slavery, this negative impact that caused so much emotional, physical and spiritual damage in the African American history.

Slave narratives are not a common genre in the Postmodernism literary era, and this is what made *Beloved* an exceptional slave narrative. The author's emotional distance from the characters of the novel made possible the creation of a story more explicit than any other earlier slave narrative. This is because early black writers who wrote slave narratives were close to the events of slavery and they either had an emotional connection to this event that they could not fully reveal the horrors of the slave experience or because they were afraid to offend the white audience who would not be able to bear with the truth about the horrors of slavery.

Toni Morrison's distance from the events in the novel provided her with the ability to create grotesque stories without showing extreme emotionalism in the lecture.

In the NewsHour interview Morrison expresses her discontent with other slave narratives. She says that authors focused more on the institution of slavery rather than the individual, the slave, their feelings, their thoughts, etc. She believes that if the author focuses on the characters' development and their interior life rather than the institution, it is like putting authority back into the hands of the slave. She also criticizes the need

of many black writers to show off their characters as the victims rather than survivors. Morrison says that black work should not be based on self-flagellation to entertain the society but rather it should be wide and diverse as she explains in the interview with Newshour;

“I want to participate in developing a canon of black work beyond black self-flagellation, the kind of entertainment that you felt was being encouraged among black writers, by white editors or the white society.”

And this is what she achieves in *Beloved*. Although the story is rooted in slavery, what Morrison accomplishes is to create among her characters a healing process and growth rather than embracing a resentment of victimhood and self-destruction.

Morrison won the Pulitzer Prize in 1988 thanks to her bestseller novel *Beloved*, and in 1993 she won The Nobel Prize in Literature becoming the first African American to receive it. Some of her other most notorious works are the novels: *The Bluest Eyes*, *Song of Solomon*, *Sula*, among others. All her works revolve around the history, tradition and situation of Black Americans in the past and in the present times.

Slavery and Race/Racism in Beloved

It should be noted that Toni Morrison has always had a very strong bond with her community, and this can be detected in her novels in which she reflects not only on the African mysticism that her father instilled in her but also portrays the problems present in the African American community. It is clear that one of the most notorious problems suffered by the black community in the United States is discrimination and racism. This problem is not contemporary, as its roots are as old as the country itself.

The beginning of racial discrimination in the United States against the black community has its origins in slavery, not to say that the effects of slavery are still present in a very subliminal way in American society. This topic will be discussed in detail in the section on “Black Lives Matter movement (BLM) and the black identity today”.

Toni Morrison grew up well aware of the discrimination that plagues her people, and this is reflected very well in her novels. For her, both this discrimination and the attitude of the African American community in certain matters, are all tied to slavery. One of the most tragic and notorious events in American history, yet one of the least talked about and represented, slavery continues to this day to be a largely avoided topic, especially by the country's non-black community, but there are also members of the African American community who know little about this historical event and how it continues to have its effects on them in today's society.

One of the most glaring examples of the lack of recognition of this event is the amount, or rather, the scarcity of monuments, temples or museums that commemorate it. In America there are over 35,000 museums that memorialize and honor the country's national history, yet of these museums, only 150 are dedicated to African American history (Project Gutenberg, World Library Heritage), that is, 0.4% of the total. And if we focus on how many of these address the history of slavery in particular, the percentage drops even lower.

The abolition of slavery did not mean the end of slavery, nor the end of racism. After the Civil War and having lost, the southern states were plunged into a terrible crisis as the newly freed slave labor force was the mainstay of the region's

predominantly agrarian economy. As a result, unfair trials began to be created, in which blacks began to be massively imprisoned for the most banal of inconveniences. Later, in the prisons, black men would be assigned to different entities and forced to work. Thus, the cycle of slavery continued, without being called by name. Slavery and discrimination took different names over the following years: from slavery to racial terrorism to segregation to mass incarceration.

157 years after the abolition of slavery with The Emancipation Proclamation Act of 1863, and still, to this day, one can perceive the existing racial inequality in many areas of American society. Today, a black person is more prone to receiving police violence and being imprisoned than a white person for the same crimes. A black person receives a 20 percent longer sentence than a white person and a black man is 75 percent more likely to receive a sentence than a white man, having committed the same crime (Racial Disparity in Federal Criminal Sentencing, U-M, 2014).

The need to remember and commemorate the suffering of the African American community, in the early 20th century, a new literary subgenre called neo-slavery narratives was born, whose objective is to retrace the history of slavery using fictional elements. Among these authors stands Toni Morrison, whose book *Beloved* made a huge impact on readers for its dark tone and became the best-selling book in her collection that would later grant her the Nobel Prize for Literature. What made *Beloved* very popular among the narratives of this genre was its original focus and the dark ambience and tone in which it was written, creating a mixture of sensations in the reader that leave him/her with an overwhelming feeling.

Henderson points out how Toni Morrison is one of the writers, if not the contemporary writer, who has tried the most to address the suffering of blacks in the past, and to protest that which has been forgotten or ignored by society

Yet, in many respects, these writers were limited in their efforts to fully depict the physical and psychological suffering of African American people... Toni Morrison seeks to signify on those silences imposed by publishers and editors of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In particular, Williams and Morrison extend the efforts

of their predecessors by developing creative responses to those calls centered on the wounds of the African American body (12).

Toni Morrison remarked in an interview about *Beloved* in 1987 that slavery is often discussed in novels, stories, histories using the institution that is slavery as the center of focus rather than focusing on the victims of this institution (Morrison in Newshour). As a consequence of this, Toni Morrison decided to create this novel with a focus on the oppressed. She relates the horrors of slavery through the experiences and thoughts of the characters, both those who experienced slavery firsthand and those who are indirectly affected by it:

Her goal when creating this work is to remind the reader about the past, to commemorate the oppressed in a system of institutional racism such as slavery and finally her main goal is to make the readers not forget what happened in the history of African Americans.

“Morrison’s critically acclaimed novel *Beloved* probes the most painful part of the African American heritage, slavery, by way of what she has called “rememory” -- deliberately reconstructing what has been forgotten. (Kubitschek, 1998 p.115)”

She believes that American history, and specifically the history of slavery and the oppression in which the country was founded, is highly romanticized and muddled. And that the only way to come to peace terms and exclude that shadow of the past to create a better future and move forward is through honesty and the acknowledgment of the past.

Morrison makes slavery and racism the main themes of the novel. Slavery becomes the main factor that shapes the life of Sethe, the protagonist, and all those around her. Morrison expressed brilliantly how destructive slavery can be to the individuals and how it affected everyone differently. At the beginning of the novel, in the very first page there is an inscription stating: Six million and more. This indicates the number of slaves killed since the time of the Middle Passage. The word “more” in that inscription refers to the ever-increasing number of African American victims killed at the hands of racial violence to this day. This topic will be discussed in more detail in

the section on “Black Matter Lives (BLM) and The Black Identity nowadays”. Toni Morrison decided to place this inscription at the beginning of the story to emphasize the tragic tone of the plot. This is the first hint that the novel will deal with slavery, and the intention is to present it in the form of a protest, as the author's main objective is to condemn this tragic event as well as to voice the damage it has done to African American community.

When analyzing the theme of slavery in this novel we draw two divisions, the first is to analyze the experience of the characters while they were under slavery, and the second is to analyze the effects that slavery had on them, even after their liberation.

Beginning with the first section, it is worth noting that Toni Morrison has not merely focused on expressing these slave stories as something present, but as the novel progresses, the characters, now free, speak of their past and tell their stories in the form of experiences, testimonies, and anecdotes. This is partly a way of representing that slavery is still present in their memories and they have not yet overcome it, especially this can be applied to Sethe.

It amazed Sethe (as much as it pleased Beloved) because every mention of her past life hurt. Everything in it was painful or lost. (*Beloved*, p.69)

Sethe to Denver in *Beloved*: Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world [...] (43)

When talking about the experiences and testimonies lived by characters who have been in slavery, such as Sethe or Paul D we can notice a common factor, how slavery dehumanized the slaves, reducing them to the status of animals or simple objects of property. This dehumanization of the slaves is made very visible by the presence of the schoolteacher and his nephews. But even before that, the Garners, who were considered by the slaves to be moderately good to them, showed that no matter how much kindness they offered to the slaves, they still had a superiority complex and considered them to be their own property. In other words, their status was downgraded to that of mere objects that could be owned and traded. This objectification can be seen when Mr. Garner demanded a price for Baby Huggs' freedom. His decision to set

Halle's mother free was not pure sympathy, but simply because he knew that due to her advanced age she would no longer be of much use to him for manual labor and that through her freedom he would receive the labor of younger, stronger and more capable slaves. Whereas with the schoolteacher it was clear that he had a degrading and dehumanizing view of slaves. Not only did he treat them as property, but he lowered their status to that of an animal. He saw it in his right to torture and mistreat them. He showed no respect or mercy towards them. Morrison portrayed this inhumane attitude of the schoolteacher towards the slaves in several situations related by Sethe and Paul D. One of the most obvious situations is when the schoolteacher expressed his displeasure with the way the Garners were running their farm:

[...] the spoiling these particular slaves have had at Garner's hands.

There's laws against what he done: letting niggers hire out their own time to buy themselves. He even let em have guns! And you think he mated them niggers to get him some more? [...] He planned for them to marry! (267)

For the schoolteacher, the slaves at Sweet Home were too spoiled and he believed that it was his duty to restore order on the farm and treat them how slaves should be treated which was through violence and humiliation. This idea that whites had of the need to dominate slaves through submission, violence and humiliation can be seen in several passages of the book. Torture and humiliation could take various forms, from sexual abuse such as that suffered by Sethe, which was the reason for her first pregnancy, to physical harm such as whipping, or the use of torture tools. This can be seen in the memory of almost all the former slaves who appear in the novel, each one tortured and humiliated in some different ways. Such as in the case of Paul D, who after trying to escape had an iron bit put in his face. But the one who has suffered the most from the effects of slavery both directly and the subsequent trauma is undoubtedly Sethe, who was mistreated, humiliated, abused and despised.

She was the most extreme case of someone who suffered from slavery whose damages are so great that she is capable of doing anything to avoid enslavement to herself or her loved ones. Several events in her enslavement marked Sethe forever, even after her release they continue to haunt her, some left their visible marks like the whipping wounds on her back when she was caught escaping, and some internal ones like the humiliation and degradation she felt when the nephews of the schoolteacher squeezed milk from her breast as if she were an animal to be milked. However, her

wounds in slavery became her weapon, as she used the fire that consumed her out of helplessness as a feeling of rebellion against the oppressor. And it is precisely this feeling of impotence and lack of control over her own existence that led her to rebel against the system and decide to kill her children to free them from their tragic destiny. The decision she made had a powerful resonance on the reader. This act opened the eyes of many to see what the slaves would be willing to do for their freedom, the horrors they would have had to suffer to think that there is more comfort and freedom in death than in life in slavery.

Toni Morrison uses many symbolic elements in the novel. The figure of the ghost Beloved is clearly one of these elements. However, there is some ambiguity as to what Beloved's spirit really represents. On the one hand, it might represent Sethe's murdered daughter who returned to reclaim from her mother what she had deprived her of, a life and a motherly love. On the other hand, it might symbolize the shadow of slavery that still haunts the characters' memories. In any case, one thing is undeniable, Beloved represents the past tormenting the present.

As mentioned above, a particularity of the novel is that Morrison alternates between stories from the past and the present. Beloved is the key that connects the past with the present of the characters. The introduction of Beloved's spirit is a crucial device that Morrison uses to explain the experiences and traits of the three main characters (Beloved, Sethe and Paul D), but also of secondary characters such as Denver. Beloved appeared as a torment in the lives of the characters, making them more and more complicated, especially that of Sethe. The impact Beloved had on Sethe's life was enormous. With each passing day Beloved became more dependent on her and her demands grew. Sethe's life began to change, and her freedom became more and more scarce, as Beloved's demands grew, and she had to please her in everything she asked for. Metaphorically speaking, we can say that Beloved and her demands represent slavery whose demands become with time more and more difficult to bear. Sethe began to feel like a slave again, this time to Beloved and all that she represented, that is, to the past. Beloved represented that past that Sethe was trying to escape from rather than confront. However, this seemed to be Beloved's goal, to make Sethe remember and confront that past. As Toni Morrison explained in an interview with PBS NewsHour in 1992 when asked by interviewer Charlayne Hunter-Gault about the reason behind Beloved's ghost:

“I wanted her past, her memories, her haunted memories not to be abstract. I wanted her to actually sit down at the table with the things she's been trying to avoid and explain away, which is the past, this terrible thing that happened to confront it as a way of saying that's what the past is, it's a living thing, has this relationship between ourselves and our personal history and our racial history and our national history, that sometimes it's made, you know, sort of distant. But if you make it into a person, then it's inescapable to confrontation”

Beloved spends her childhood as a formless essence, a spirit that was engaged in disturbing the daily lives of those who lived in the house with small actions like moving the furniture or altering the lighting. When Paul D arrives at the house, he drives the ghost essence out, but fails to drive it out of their lives. Beloved returns, this time in the flesh, in the body of a young black woman. When she arrives in the characters' lives, no one knows anything about her identity, but over time they begin to realize that she knows too much about their lives and that her presence is no mere coincidence. Eventually Sethe begins to understand that Beloved could be her murdered daughter. She was the same age she would be if she were still alive, she had a scar on her neck, and mind that Sethe killed her daughter by slitting her throat, she had milk breath, even her name, Beloved, is the name Sethe had inscribed on her grave. Then Sethe realizes that Beloved is the reincarnation of her past, both the murder of her daughter and the enslavement that comes back to haunt her. As Sethe and Beloved become closer, a kind of destructive, possessive, parasitic relationship begins to emerge in which Sethe is increasingly consumed by the ghost. Beloved inspires Sethe to tell her stories about her past, about her guilt at killing her, the reasons she did it, about the harsh reality she experienced at Sweet Home, in short, Beloved made Sethe connect with her past. In doing so, Sethe began to understand her own self and thus in coming to terms with her past she finally began to grow in her ability to live in the present.

Beloved's presence also directly or indirectly aids the growth of the other characters. For example, Paul D, whose hatred of Beloved never ceased from the day he met her, his sexual encounters in dreams with Beloved made him remember his past and learn to love again without fear. Denver, on the other hand, was influenced by Beloved in an indirect way. At first the girl considered Beloved essential in her life, she was very dependent on her, she had no entity of her own. But as she watched the ghost's character

become more hostile, more malevolent, she began to understand the dangers of the past that Beloved represented. And finally, seeing the torment it produced in Sethe, Denver decided to reach out to the community for help, marking the beginning of her social integration and the search for her independent self.

Beloved was a reminder that no past could be overcome unless it was confronted, no matter how hard it was. And no present or future can be built without acknowledging the past. When the characters confronted their conflictive past with slavery and its implications, Beloved disappears without a trace, and eventually the family and the entire community forget about her as if they had never met before allowing the characters to finally be able to integrate in the social structure as free people from slavery and from their tragic pasts. What Toni Morrison finally wants to emphasize with this is that slavery as any painful fact of the past of an individual or collective has to be remembered and confronted in order to move forward, because according to Morrison, forgetfulness and rejection are never the solution to the conflicts or traumas of the past.

There is a necessity for remembering the horror, but of course there's a necessity for remembering it in a manner in which it can be digested, in a manner in which the memory is not destructive. The act of writing the book, in a way, is a way of confronting it and making it possible to remember (Darling 247- 248)

Sethe, like all the other characters in *Beloved*, goes through a healing process, a process of learning to live with her memories of the past in the present. Morrison depicts the characters as individuals struggling to reach this healing process, each fighting their own battle. But if we look at the bigger picture, this applies to the entire collective that shares the same past, in this case the African American community. They have to explore and confront the realities of slavery, as painful as it may be, because the result is to have a better understanding of themselves and their history, the collective and the national.

Morrison creates a kind of parallel line between the individual healing process and the historical or national understanding. Sethe explains the link between a person's consciousness and his or her history:

“If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place-the picture of it- stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world.”(36).

Motherhood and Trauma

Morrison is one of the most prominent feminist figures in American literature. One of her primary aims in literature is to center the feminist movement from the perspective of a colored person. The feminism with which the Western world is familiar is the white feminism, that is, the struggle of white women for their rights in a society. But the struggle of women of color is rarely discussed. In American history in particular, black women have not only had to suffer the oppression of white men in a patriarchal society but also racism and discrimination because of their background and skin complexion.

In her literary career, Morrison has focused the vast majority of her works on black women. Her protagonists are black women who struggle against patriarchy and racial discrimination, black mothers who, because of the consequences and circumstances of life, have suffered to possess their individuality and find their personal value.

When talking about black women and their struggle, it is inevitable to talk about motherhood. Black women have been experiencing the phenomenon of motherhood differently from the dominant culture because their experiences involve racial as well as gender traumas, and this has affected their idea and role as mothers and caregivers. This is not only reflected in Morrison's novels in a symbolic way through a story, but she explicitly expresses her ideals about motherhood for African American women on several occasions in her speeches and interviews. Author and critic Andrea O'Reilly has made a comprehensive study of the feminist element and the theme of motherhood in Morrison's works, interviews, speeches and articles and has brought it together in a book entitled *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart*.

In her reflections on motherhood, both inside and outside her fiction, Morrison articulates a fully developed theory of African American mothering that is central to her larger political and philosophical stance on black womanhood. Building upon black women's experiences of, and perspectives on, motherhood, Morrison develops a view of black motherhood that is, in terms of

both maternal identity and role, radically different than the motherhood practiced and prescribed in the dominant culture (1)

The feeling of motherhood, or rather its absence, has served as a central plot point in several of Morrison's novels, such as *Sula* or *Beloved*. In *Beloved*, as in many of her novels, Morrison places women, the black woman, at the center of the story. How she faces both racial and gender dilemmas. The black woman in Toni Morrison's novels is a woman whose sense of identity is disrupted by the society in which she is poor, humiliated or enslaved, or all of them, and in which she eventually achieves a sense of freedom and self-recognition.

Motherhood and Trauma in *Beloved*

In the novel *Beloved*, Morrison recounts the effects of the legacy of slavery through her characters,. One of the greatest wounds left by this tragic event is the experience of motherhood. Among the characteristics of slavery mentioned above there is the dehumanization of the slave. The family and especially the bond that a mother has with her children is one of the strongest relationships that a human being can have. The institution of slavery did not allow slaves to have any family ties in order to inculcate the idea of objectification and reinforce their duty to work. Thus, entire families were separated from their relatives. This affected especially the slave woman on whom the role of conceiving was imposed and who was deprived of the innate right that a mother has to breastfeed and care for her children.

Before going into detail on the problem of motherhood in slavery, it is worth mentioning how slave women were treated, since all this experience and trauma is ultimately reflected in the treatment they have with their children. As women, slave women not only had to suffer humiliation and mistreatment but also had to deal with sexual abuse and constant vilification. Slaveholders even encouraged their sons to abuse slave women, believing that this would be profitable for their economy since mulatto slaves were very valuable (Rich 35).

As a clarification, it should be noted that in the slavery system, the child undoubtedly inherited his mother's rank and not that of his father (Kolchin 12-13). Because of this, the slave mother lived in fear that her children would follow her same tragic fate, something that is expressed very well in the character of Sethe and that

constitutes the center of the novel, the murder of the girl by her mother to prevent her from suffering the same experiences.

The mother-child relationship is disrupted by the slave institution, and this disruption is continuous following a circular system. The slave mother who was once also a child alienated and taken away from maternal love is unable to conceive of an idea of motherhood that is not disrupted. Often the slave mother enters into the experience of motherhood with fear and with a very distorted idea of her capacity to be a mother and to give maternal love since she has never experienced it from her own mother. As Chodorow argues,

“mothering...involves a double identification for women, both as mother and as child....Women have capacities for primary identification with their child through regression to primary love and empathy” (204).

In Sethe's case, she never got to experience this maternal love as she grew up without a mother. In the novel, it is expressed how Sethe has been breastfed by another woman as a baby and this may ultimately reflect the fear Sethe felt that her milk would be stolen, and she would not be able to use it for its intended purpose of feeding her children.

“After I left you, those boys came in there and took my milk. [...]. I told Mrs. Garner on them. [...] The boys found out I told on them. Schoolteacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree. It grows there still.

They used cowhide on you?.

And they took my milk.

They beat you and you was pregnant?

And they took my milk! (21)

In this particular dialogue you can see that fear. Paul D is asking her about the whipping, but she keeps emphasizing that they stole her milk, as if the pain of losing her milk has affected her more than the physical pain of the whipping.

Sethe's experience of being abandoned by her own mother has always been present in her shadow. As a child, she never understood this abandonment and its trauma persisted with her.

“Running, you think? No. Not that. Because she was my ma’am and nobody’s ma’am would run off and leave her daughter, would she? Would she, now?” (116).

Sethe later realized that this abandonment was not a choice but an imposition of the slave system to which they belonged. The only way for Sethe to recognize her mother after they were separated was a mark.

One thing she did do. She picked me up and carried me behind the smokehouse. Back there she opened up her dress front and lifted her breast and pointed under it. Right on her rib was a circle and a cross burnt right in the skin. She said, 'This is your ma'am. This,' and she pointed. 'I am the only one got this mark now. The rest dead. If something happens to me and you can't tell me by my face, you can know me by this mark.' (26-28)

That same mark is what would make Sethe recognize her mother shortly before she is hanged and burned with a group of slaves. This event tormented Sethe for the rest of her life, so much so that it could be the reason why Sethe associated being a mother with death itself. Later this relationship she had in mind was further strengthened when another slave who knew Sethe's mother told her how her mother threw all her children overboard leaving only Sethe.

She threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away. Without names, she threw them. You she gave the name of the black man... Telling you. I am telling you, small girl Sethe. (62)

This act, which Sethe did not understand at the time, could represent her mother's maternal love for her, because although she had several children before Sethe, she decided that she would be the only daughter she would keep. This is because all her other children are the product of white rape. This again expresses the slave woman's lack of will over her body, which Sethe's mother takes to the extreme. It also represents the torment of the past, the mother decides to commit infanticide and get rid of her other

children as a way to get rid of that past abuse, since her children were the product of it. Sethe was the only child she has had of her own free will.

What the action of Sethe's mother represent is that motherhood is linked to slavery, suffering and the past and the only way to achieve liberation is to get rid of that motherhood, which is also very present in Sethe's character when she is tormented by the spirit of her deceased daughter Beloved.

“Freeing yourself was one thing, claiming ownership of that freed self was another (95)”.

Ultimately what this phrase indicates is that although Sethe has been freed from slavery, she will not be able to free herself from its burden until she can feel a sense of self-ownership. With the arrival of Beloved, Sethe loses control over her own self. The guilt that corrupts her for the infanticide she committed makes her feel the duty to give all the love and care that was denied to her daughter when she was murdered. This and Beloved's constant demands ultimately lead Sethe to become a slave again, and this time to the spirit of her own daughter. Therefore, in order for Sethe to feel completely in control of herself, she has to be free from her submissiveness to motherhood, that is, she has to free herself from the feeling of guilt and thus be free of her daughter's spirit. And as Beloved represents all that past that Sethe does not want to confront, the liberation from her also implies the liberation from her past in slavery and all that it entails.

What Morrison represents in the novel is a persistent cycle, a series of patterns that are repeated in a symbolic way. Sethe herself has not been able to live out the maternal love she intends to give her children and that lack of love and motherhood that Sethe experienced provoked a great feeling and duty of motherhood. Presumably as an attempt to provide for her children what she did not get in her childhood, Sethe sees herself capable of giving anything for the love she feels for her children. One of the clearest examples in the novel is how Sethe decides to give her body in exchange for putting the word “Beloved” on the grave of her deceased daughter. On the one hand, this reflects the immense love that a woman feels for her children, and what she is capable of giving for them, for example in this case her pride in exchange for a few letters. But on the other hand, this event reflects something deeper, and that is the sense of value that Sethe has towards her body. Her experience with slavery and constant humiliation and degradation makes Sethe unable to see its worth.

“Sethe trades ten minutes of sex for a single inscription, ‘the one word that mattered’, on her daughter’s tombstone, thus almost literally translating her body into the written word” (Hill Rigney 26)

And it is this love and sense of protection that Sethe feels for her children that leads her to commit infanticide. However, this love could not be understood by her community who isolates her. Nor is it understood by characters such as Paul D who, after learning of the murder, feels repudiated by Sethe. He himself lived through the atrocities of slavery, yet is unable to understand her actions, for as we have mentioned above, the notion of maternal love is something unusual in life in slavery. He accused her that her love for her children is too thick. To which she replies:

“Too thick, he said. My love was too thick. What he know about it?...I have felt what it felt like, and nobody walking or stretched out is going to make you feel it too. Not you, not none of mine, and when I tell you, you mine, I also mean I’m yours. I wouldn’t draw breath without my children.” (203)

Infanticide is a brutal act, but to understand why Sethe committed it, one must examine not only her reasoning for the decision but the circumstances under which it was committed. Although Sethe considers her actions to be justified, one can see how the rest of society criticizes her, but no one comes to understand her reasons. No one in Sethe’s community nor Paul D or any of those who criticize her has lived her experience as a mother, a woman and a slave. This shows how society is limited to having a very closed idea about the concept of motherhood. For them anything that falls outside of social conventions is considered bad mothering. However, no one has stopped to think about what motherhood implies when it is mixed with the experience of slavery and the institution of patriarchy as Rich points out:

“...instead of recognizing the institutional violence of patriarchal motherhood, society labels those women who finally erupt in violence as psychosomatic. who finally erupt in violence as psychopathological” (263).

For Sethe the death of her daughter would mean the end of her suffering but at the same time it symbolizes power. When Sethe kills her daughter, she regains that power that was depraved by slavery, the power to be a mother to her children. Slave mothers had no say in the lives of their kids. At birth, their children became the property of the slaveholder who determined their destinies as he pleased. When Sethe ended her

daughter's life, she ultimately decided for herself what her daughter's destiny would be, thus completing her role as a mother. This event raises a very important question in O'Reilly's book mentioned above; *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart*:

“If your children literally do not belong to you, what does it mean to be a mother?” (86)

Another mother figure who is corrupted by the experience of slavery is Baby Suggs. Baby Suggs is Sethe's only remaining mother figure, however, she too has been a victim of slavery and her view of motherhood has been distorted by that experience. She had to witness each of her children being sold to plantations across the country leaving only one of them with her, Halle, who eventually buys his mother's freedom in exchange for labor. She never had the hope of witnessing her children grow up before her eyes. However, Baby Suggs, after so much suffering, unconsciously developed a technique of emotional blocking in order not to suffer the detachment of her children and thus preserve her being. She did not get to know her children, so she could not feel the pain that a mother feels when they were no longer with her.

The last of [Baby Suggs'] children, whom she barely glanced at when he was born because it wasn't worth the trouble to try to learn features you would never see change into adulthood anyway. Seven times she had done that [...]
(163-5)

As a result of this emotional block, Baby Suggs was able to cope with the atrocities of slavery. Her presence denotes two symbolic things, on the one hand she symbolizes the Great Mother and on the other hand, she is the hope that the family needed. The Great Mother is because Suggs in her last years of life has dedicated herself to being a preacher for her black community; everyone saw her as a mother figure to turn to. This may be because even though Suggs shows her indifference to the loss of her children, that wound still lingers in her so that being a mother to her community fills that void she feels.

Who decided that, because slave life had “busted her legs, back, head, eyes, hands, kidneys, womb and tongue,” she had nothing left to make a living with but her heart--- [...] she became an unchurched preacher, one who visited pulpits and opened her great heart to those who could use it. [...]. (102)

On the other hand, Baby Suggs represents the hope the family needs. She was a happy and lively person who radiated joy. She was the one who made 124 a welcoming home for the family. However, since learning of Beloved's death, she became a sad and depressed person. She admired Sethe for keeping all her children with her since she did not have the opportunity to do the same. However, upon learning that Sethe murdered Beloved, Suggs began to question the real value of life.

Baby Suggs noticed who breathed and who did not and when straight to the boys lying in the dirt.... Baby Suggs had got the boys inside and was bathing their heads, rubbing their hands, lifting their lids [...] Baby Suggs shook her head. "One at a time," she said and traded the living for the dead, which she carried into the keeping room.... Baby Suggs meant to run, skipped down the porch steps after the cart, screaming, no. No." (178-179)

At that moment, she felt that sense of loss again when she saw that the boys were unconscious and Beloved dead. She had lost her own children and did not accept losing Sethe's children as well, and it was this that caused her happy and radiant personality to fade until her death.

Although many years have passed since the loss of her children, the wound was still alive no matter how much she wanted to hide it, and ultimately, the loss of Beloved is what ended with her. Sethe describes Suggs' death as soft as cream (9) which symbolizes how her life brought her more suffering than her death.

Another characteristic that unites Sethe, Baby Suggs and the other slave mothers is the absence of a father figure. Baby Suggs has no contact with any of her children's fathers while Sethe after escaping from the plantation receives no sign of life from her husband Halle and when she was with him she says she did not see him as a husband but rather as a brother (4) since they only saw each other on a few occasions and Sethe felt that their relationship was more of a family rather than a loving one.

It was very common for slave women to be single mothers. In slavery, the slaveholders' main objective was to have the slaves reproduce in order to produce more slaves. Treated like animals, slave women had to sleep repeatedly with several men in order to produce as many children as possible. Thus, the emotional bond between fathers and their children was broken by the institution, so the slave mothers had to deal with their children on their own. Although Sethe had the opportunity to choose the

father of her children, ultimately the institution managed to separate them, making her children fatherless. Morrison therefore shows the mother as the center of everything in her novels. She draws the black woman as a woman with strength and determination to take care of her children on her own. However, this mother is challenged by different problems that harass her integrity as a mother and caregiver.

The black mother has been charged by both white and black males with the “castration” of her sons through her so-called matriarchal domination of the family, as breadwinner, decision-maker, and carer of children in one. Needless to say, her “power” as “matriarch” is drastically limited by the bonds of racism, sexism, and poverty. What is misread as power here is really survival-strength, guts, the determination that her children’s lives shall come to something even if it means driving them or sacrificing her own pride in order to feed and clothe them. (Rich 204)

And finally, the ultimate element that symbolizes this traumatic motherhood is the reappearance of Beloved as a young woman of flesh and blood. Beloved came to represent all that Sethe wanted to bury in oblivion. Her slave-owning past and the heinous deed she committed. The ghost comes demanding that which she was deprived of: maternal love. At first when she recognizes Beloved as her deceased daughter, Sethe feels excitement and joy; but when their relationship becomes obsessive and destructive due to Beloved's unstable character and her increasing demands. Even when Beloved becomes unstable and poses a danger to the family, Sethe still feels the need to continue defending her. This is because guilt consumes her, and she tries to make up for lost time and maternal love with her daughter in an attempt to get rid of that guilt that continuously tormented her. This is why she keeps excusing her behavior.

"Then why don't it come?"

"You forgetting how little it is," [...] "She wasn't even two years old when she died. Too little to understand. Too little to talk much even."

"Maybe she don't want to understand," said Denver.

"Maybe. But if she'd only come, I could make it clear to her."(4-5)

In this conversation with Denver, we see not only how Sethe defends Beloved for her problematic actions, but at the end, the last line shows the feeling of guilt that

Sethe experiences towards her daughter and her desire to be able to give her explanations of the reasons that have led her to commit such an act.

The mutual obsession that Sethe and Beloved experience makes Sethe ultimately consumed and again giving up herself for the pleasure of others. This conflict will only be resolved when Sethe confronts Beloved with the truth. And indeed, when Sethe explains the truth of her actions to Beloved she feels a sense of relief, it was like she just needed to connect with her past to heal her present traumas, and Beloved was just a mean in that healing process.

Sethe learned the profound satisfaction Beloved got from storytelling. It amazed Sethe... because every mention of her past life hurt.... But, as she began telling about the earrings, she found herself wanting to, liking it. Perhaps it was Beloved's distance from the events itself, or her thirst for hearing it—in any case it was an unexpected pleasure. (34)

However, Morrison reveals that the ultimate way to overcome the wounds of Sethe's past is through love and community. This can be seen when ultimately the community that denied Sethe rallied to her aid in performing an exorcism on the ghost to get him out of the house. And so it was, Beloved disappeared and with her that tormented past.

The relationship between Sethe and Beloved can be understood as a metaphor for African American society coping with and trying to overcome the legacy of slavery. As Marianne Hirsch explains:

"When Sethe tries to explain to Beloved why she cut her throat, she is explaining an anger handed down through generations of mothers who could have no control over their children's lives, no voice in their upbringing" (196)

What Hirsch explains is that Morrison is not just talking about Sethe, but Sethe is the means by which Morrison gives voice to all the slave mothers who were unable to exercise that motherhood. Slavery has left a wound still open in the history of America, and with more intensity in the mindset of black mothers.

Black Lives Matter (BLM) and The Black Identity nowadays

Although the United States has made great progress in terms of racism and racial issues between the black and white community, we continue to see confrontations and signs of racial tension to this day. In contrast to the radical groups and organizations that proclaim white racial superiority such as the KKK or some political parties in which the racial and discriminatory discourse is very notorious towards the black community, as well as other racial minorities in the country, a movement has emerged that revindicates the Afro-American culture and legacy and whose main objective is to fight for the equality of blacks in American society.

A 2019 survey of American society by the Pew Research Center on racial issues indicates that 63% of American society believes that slavery to this day affects the position of the black population in society. More than eight in ten black adults indicate that slavery continues to have an impact on the status of African Americans, while 59% indicate that the impact is great. While 26% of whites, 29% of Hispanics and 33% of Asians indicate that slavery affects the position of the black community in the U.S. to a great extent. It also indicates that 43% of the society considers that the country has not made much progress in terms of equality for African Americans, while 15% indicate that it has made a lot of progress and 39% say it has made moderate progress. In contrast, 78% of black adults believe the country has not made enough progress on equal rights, compared to 37% of whites and 48% of Hispanics who say the same (Pew Research Center, 2019).

As a consequence of the constant discrimination of the black community in the United States, a movement was born that began in social networks as a hashtag but ended up taking to the streets not only in America but in many other countries as a form of protest that vindicates the rights of black people and emphasizes the injustice they suffer. This movement is known as Black Lives Matter. It was born in 2013 after the acquittal of the murderer of an African American teenager Trayvon Martin by a gunshot. Since that incident, participants of the movement have rallied against numerous deaths of African Americans killed by the police force, names like Freddie Gray, Tamir Rice, Jonathan Ferrell, Eric Harris, Samuel DuBose, Sandra Bland, Walter Scott or the recent murder of George Floyd.

Black Lives Matter is not only a movement against police brutality but includes all aspects in which black people may be discriminated against, abused or tormented. It is a movement whose goal is to bring black suffering to light and ultimately to support black people in demonstrating not only for their rights but also to reclaim their identity. The latter is because the legacy of slavery has left a mark on how the black person is perceived. This affects both men and women, although the effects that these white standards have had on women are more shocking. Therefore, the movement apart from fighting for the dignity of black people also seeks to "decolonize" the minds of black people from white standards. And with this movement, other movements have been born that are centered merely on self-love towards black beauty and the vindication of aspects of African culture. Things that seem as simple as the vindication of afro hair or African braids have a great significance for the black community. It means the possibility to reclaim what was denied to their ancestors, to reconstruct the identity that was taken away from them and to rewrite the past that was intended to be erased.

As discussed above in the Struggle of Identity in *Beloved*, Morrison has brilliantly demonstrated this destruction of identity that being a slave entails, not only the identity as a human and an individual, but the identity that comes with culture, family or origins. It also shows how the will of the oppressor is what rules, and that to demonstrate his superiority he is capable of resorting to elements such as humiliation or violence, and the oppressed had no chance to protest or claim their humanity, because their will and life are at the hands of the white man. For this reason, I have decided to talk about the Black Lives Matter movement, a movement that despite being new, fights against everything that represented slavery and the effects it has left in today's society.

It is a movement that gives a voice to those who lived without a voice for many years, not only in the United States but has become popular also in Western Europe, in all those countries that actively participated in the transatlantic slave trade, as in some regions of Latin America and the Caribbean, especially Brazil, where the black community still suffers relevant discrimination by the government and the white community and where colorism is notorious.

That is precisely what Morrison intended when she wrote *Beloved*, to give voice to the oppressed and to denounce, through a story, the silence that persists in American society about discrimination and ultimately about the event of slavery. She believed that discrimination, confusion and repetitiveness will continue to be a part of African

American society until the past is acknowledged and overcome. That is, until slavery is recognized as a real fact, that it existed, and an attempt is made to understand the effects it has had on today's society, no solution will be found to the present problem of racial discrimination in the United States. Moreover, a connection can be established between the ghost of Beloved in the BLM movement. Both serve as the voice of the past, and just as Beloved returns to keep Sethe from forgetting, the BLM repeats the names of victims of racial violence to keep them from being forgotten.

This confrontation of the past of slavery as a starting point to vindicate the equality of African Americans is slowly being achieved thanks to the BLM movement. One of the examples is in the last protests during which, statues of former settlers and slave owners were thrown down in several states of the country; statues which were displayed in the great squares as heroes of the country. Acts such as getting officers arrested who shot and killed unarmed African Americans, changes in police departments, or the removal of symbols related to the extreme right and white supremacy from official buildings such as the Confederate flag.

These are important and meaningful acts that help to take a step forward in the fight against racial discrimination and the erasure of the legacy of slavery. However, there is still a long way to go to achieve complete racial equality.

Conclusion

Beloved, Toni Morrison's fifth and most important novel, deals with a very vivid but at the same time neglected event in American history: slavery. In the novel, the author depicts the suffering of the black community but more specifically that of black women as a consequence of this tragic event. This suffering is reflected in detail using symbolic and sentimental elements that lead the reader to experience the emotions of the characters. The novel covers several important themes in African American history such as motherhood or the loss of identity due to slavery. In this work, we have covered the most salient themes, but the novel has an immense complexity and overloaded symbolism that requires more detailed analysis in order to understand the full picture of what Morrison wants to convey. The final purpose of the novel is remembrance, to highlight the importance of knowing the national history in order to leave the limits of the past and start a new future. In this struggle to overcome the limitations of the past, we find movements like the BLM whose goal, like Morrison in *Beloved*, is to give voice to the voiceless who suffer from racial injustices in a society where the burden of slavery is still very evident.

Bibliography

079.Pdf. <https://www.the-criterion.com/V8/n1/079.pdf>. Accessed 27 June 2021.

“Beloved Essay Sample | Blog.” Blog |, 23 Apr. 2018, <https://writemyessayonline.com/blog/beloved-essay-sample/>.

“Beloved Study Guide.” Course Hero, <https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Beloved/>. Accessed 2 June 2021.

DAVIS, Christina. “« Beloved » : A Question Of Identity.” *Présence Africaine*, no. 145, Présence Africaine Editions, 1988, pp. 151–56.

Davis, Kimberly Chabot. “‘Postmodern Blackness’: Toni Morrison’s Beloved and the End of History.” *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 44, no. 2, [Duke University Press, Hofstra University], 1998, pp. 242–60. JSTOR, doi:10.2307/441873.

“Historical Context - Beloved.” Padlet, <https://padlet.com/chatenglishprof/lqhsfl8nx18f>. Accessed 2 June 2021.

“---.” Padlet, <https://padlet.com/chatenglishprof/lqhsfl8nx18f>. Accessed 2 June 2021.

“Home.” Black Lives Matter, <https://blacklivesmatter.com/>. Accessed 2 June 2021.

Lebron, Christopher J. *The Making of Black Lives Matter: A Brief History of an Idea*. Oxford University Press, 2017.

List of Museums Focused on African Americans | Project Gutenberg Self-Publishing - EBooks | Read EBooks Online. http://self.gutenberg.org/articles/eng/List_of_museums_focused_on_African_Americans?View=embedded%27%27. Accessed 18 June 2021.

---. http://self.gutenberg.org/articles/eng/List_of_museums_focused_on_African_Americans?View=embedded%27%27#cite_note-Dickerson169-1. Accessed 18 June 2021.

Manel Abboub.Pdf. <http://e-biblio.univ-mosta.dz/bitstream/handle/123456789/17232/Manel%20Abboub.pdf?sequence=1>. Accessed 27 June 2021.

Margaret Garner | African American Resources | Cincinnati History Library and Archives. <http://library.cincymuseum.org/aag/bio/garner.html>. Accessed 2 June 2021.

Mayfield, Sandra. *Motherhood in Toni Morrison's Beloved: A Psychological Reading*. 2012, p. 11.

Mindemann, Michael C. "Stamp Paid and the Power of Self-Actualization in 'Beloved.'" *Inquiries Journal*, vol. 1, no. 11, 2009. www.inquiriesjournal.com, <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/46/stamp-paid-and-the-power-of-self-actualization-in-beloved>.

NW, 1615 L. St, et al. "Most Americans Say the Legacy of Slavery Still Affects Black People in the U.S. Today." Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/17/most-americans-say-the-legacy-of-slavery-still-affects-black-people-in-the-u-s-today/>. Accessed 16 June 2021.

"Otherness and the Black Body in 'Beloved.'" *New Narratives*, 14 Oct. 2011, <https://newnarratives.wordpress.com/issue-2-the-other/essays/otherness-and-the-black-body-in-toni-morrison%e2%80%99s-beloved/>.

"Our Movement Is #SoMuchMore." *Black Lives Matter*, 1 Feb. 2021, <https://blacklivesmatter.com/our-movement-is-so-much-more/>.

PBS NewsHour. *WATCH: Toni Morrison on Capturing a Mother's "compulsion" to Nurture in "Beloved."* YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLQ6ipVRfrE>. Accessed 8 July 2021.

"Reconstruction and the Turbulent Post-Civil War Era Explained." *History*, 2 Aug. 2021, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/reconstruction-turbulent-post-civil-war-period-explained>.

"The Nobel Prize in Literature 1993." *NobelPrize.Org*, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1993/morrison/facts/>. Accessed 2 June 2021.