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***ASPECTS OF SLAVERY IN TONI
MORRISON'S "BELOVED (1987)"***

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dedication

- ✓ To our parents and all our families
- ✓ To all our friends and colleagues
- ✓ Especially, to our fathers who provided us with both ; moral and financial support
- ✓ To all the students of the promotion
2014/2015
- ✓ To everyone who helped us, even with a single word, during our weakness moments, and gave us the power to continue and to never give up on our studies

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Thank you all !

Abstract

Slavery has been one of the most ugliest tragedies in human history, a tragedy where Africans were obliged to lose one of the most important things that humans seek in life ; freedom. This tragedy ended exactly in 1870, according to Distribution of Slaves in US History which declared (a survey in May 13,2010) that by 1870, all blacks of the US at that time were freed (4,880,009 individuals). Even though it ended, it left a big amount of negative effects that are still affecting the world till nowadays, which causes several racial conflicts in most of the world's countries. Even though most of the alive African Americans of our time did not suffer from slavery, but they are truly connected to it. Most of them got this connection from African stories and folktales, which was passed from one generation to another. Toni Morrison ; An African American novelist, professor and winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, wrote a great novel named "Beloved", which is both ; A sad story and a wonderful way to take the reader in a journey at the time of slavery, to take a sip from the poison that was, obligatorily, fed to them.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In this work, the talk will be about the slavery's impacts and effects on slave narratives', as in this case ; Toni Morrison through her novel "Beloved".

Toni Morrison as an African American writer or as a slave narrative, she has been a part of American life participating and contributing to the American history of slavery. Toni Morrison, one of the most major voices of her race and age, observes that: "We were seldom invited to participate in the discourse, even when we were its topic." (Morrison, *Beloved*, 1987, p. 111)

Toni Morrison has constantly felt the necessitate for a sense of knowing her history in order to find a practical connection with the present and future. Morrison understands her literary career to be recuperating and illuminating the slavery experiences, of these inhabitants "Because if we do not know. ... What our past is ... if we Third-World women in American do not know it, then, it is not known by anybody at all. And somebody has to tell somebody something." (Morrison, *Beloved*, 1987, p. 59)

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is described to wrap many of the themes addressed in the slave narratives together with the troubles of motherhood, sexual abuse, learning self-worth, the desperate flee to liberty and free will....

Slavery, this theme of commemoration and of a story about "trying to forget" is ingrained deeply in her novel "Beloved", in which she shows us some of the sincere and the most troubling basics of slavery and its probable effects, especially on black women.

In this work, one must also focus on the personality of "Sethe" as an scheme of family and motherhood under slavery years, and her sacrifices and her part as a "loving" mother and a constituent of the community to save her infant from the slavery itself and pretty much all of its aspects.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

A major theme that one is going to analyse in this novel is the risk and danger of sexual abuse, which was maybe the major form of domination and threat for black women both in and out of the borders of slavery.

So to solve on the problematic "Slavery in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*", one is going to adopt an analytical method as well as some approaches ;

This work will be shared in two chapters:

- The first chapter is titled : "What hellish life means", in which we will vise to raise the many aspects of slavery used by Toni Morrison, and to do a little historic recall of this concept "Slavery".
- The second chapter is titled:"Breaking The Chains", in which we are going to take a tour on Toni Morrison's life an works, another tour on slavery and some of its sides, and concluding it with an explanation of the strong relation between Morrison's thoughts and slavery major aspects through her master piece "*Beloved*".

Chapter One : What Hellish Life Means

1.1.Introduction

So in this chapter, we focus especially on the relation between Morrison's life and slavery, and which are the reasons that made her producing "Beloved" under the many concepts of "Slavery". Toni Morrison, as a slave narrative, wrote "Beloved" with the purpose of revealing that the black is a human capable of reasoning and judgment.

"Beloved" explains the threat of repressing on her life, specially, her past and identity above all through the personality "Sethe", who is not capable to go forward because of her grief, blame, and inability to face the truth of her past.

Toni Morrison's Beloved covers the most major aspects of slavery, a piece of her life, free of the cuffs of slavery, but she still affected by some realistic nightmares attached to slavery and as a result from that, to black women in general. She wants to reveal to the world, that Black women are still considered as poor-life beings, and often treated as such in "Beloved" ; "Sethe" is ostracized for her beastly act of infanticide and isolated like a caged animal in her own suffering and guilt. She lives the life of a slave woman ; she gradually becomes aware of how easy it can be to become acclimated to slavery when its immense force is constantly pushed down upon you.

1.2.Slavery

Slavery is what slavery has always been ; It is about one person controlling another person through violence. It is occurred when a person cannot walk away from someone's control of their free will and also using that situation to make money off them. It is also a system of forced labor that has existed throughout the world for hundreds of years. In America, slavery started in the 17th century while people in Africa were overwhelmed and enforced to depart their native lands, their culture and their families behind.

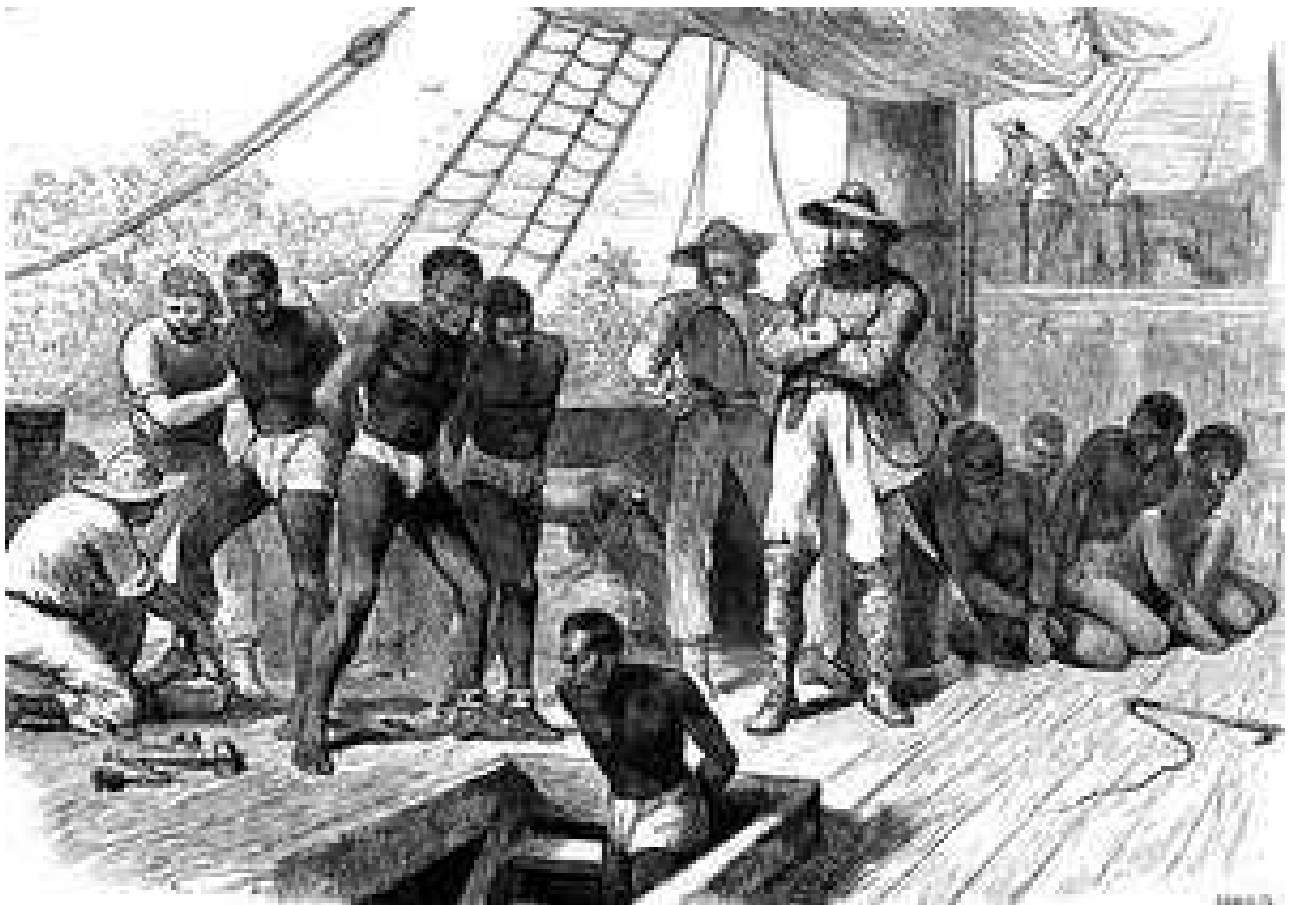


Figure 1 : Slaves Ships

1.2.a.Savery Through Slave Narratives

Slave narratives are important not only for the fact they enrich and diversify African American literature, but also because they reveal the complexities of the dialogue between

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Whites and Blacks. Slavery is nonetheless a subject that has been on the minds of countless people an undeniable wrongdoing. Although enslavement has not been completely wiped from the earth, it is no longer widely justified on the surface level of our society; such as it was in early America.

The most functional and thought-provoking aspect that rose from slavery in America was the slave narrative, which has been deemed “the genre that began the African-American literary tradition in prose” (Mobley M. S., 1993) .

Since the abolition of slavery and the thinning of the final generation of ex-slaves, slave narratives eventually stopped being produced, but the end of the slaves did not mean the end of their place in literature. There are several modern black female writers who carry on the tradition of analyzing slavery and making sure that it is not forgotten. Among these women are Toni Morrison, who has revived the slave tradition in their quest to reveal its dark underbelly and its continued effects on people.

Toni Morrison wanted to describe the cruelties of life under slavery, as well as the persistent humanity of the slaves as persons. At the time, the controversy over slavery led to impassioned literature on both sides of the issue, with novels. Whereas the narratives and novels earlier discussed focus on a progression from some form of slavery to freedom—sometimes with a detour in between, such as the case of *Beloved* – no other narrator or character has been quite as truthful and eye-opening to the pressures of slavery.

1.3.Toni Morrison's Life And Works

Toni Morrison is the first African American woman to receive the Nobel prize in literature and is one of the most celebrated authors of the twentieth century. Toni Morrison is the voice and consciousness of African-American Literature, she is a symbol that provokes us

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to become better and to look at the horrors of our past so that we may have something better in the future.

On February 18, 1931, Chloe Ardelia Wofford was born in Lorraine Ohio she attended Howard university to receiving her master at cornel and then began teaching and writing. Morrison has worked in a wide range of teaching and colleges but her teaching transcends the academic world. She has been an editor and has taught other writers through editorial support in 1967. Morrison, a single mother of 2 children, got a job as a senior editor at random house. Three years later she published her first novel "the bluest eye". The main character in the bluest eye always looks to white standards to beauty that has been an issue throughout human history. Even today, "The Bluest Eye" makes people think about what the standards of beauty really are in American society. In 1975, Morrison was nominated for the national book award for "Sula". "Sula", Toni Morrison's second novel is of great literary work ; a great work of fiction which consists of humor and emotional power of the black community when it confronts the rebelliousness of an extremely unconventional ,creative and confrontational black woman. 2 years later, Morrison's novel "Song of Solomon", which was infused with magical realism won the national book critic circle award.

Morrison is an extremely imaginative writer she comes up with ideas and images that boggle the mind ; Characters that attempt to fly, women who were born without navels ... These are all extremely charged symbolic representations and yet Morrison presents them as if they are part of everyday's life. In 1988 Morrison wrote the Pulitzer prize winning historical fiction "Beloved", and in 2006 the New York times called "Beloved" the best work in American fiction in the past 25 years. Beloved is an extraordinary piece of literary art because it does explore the history of slavery, it contorts and distorts the African American psyche like never before American literature.

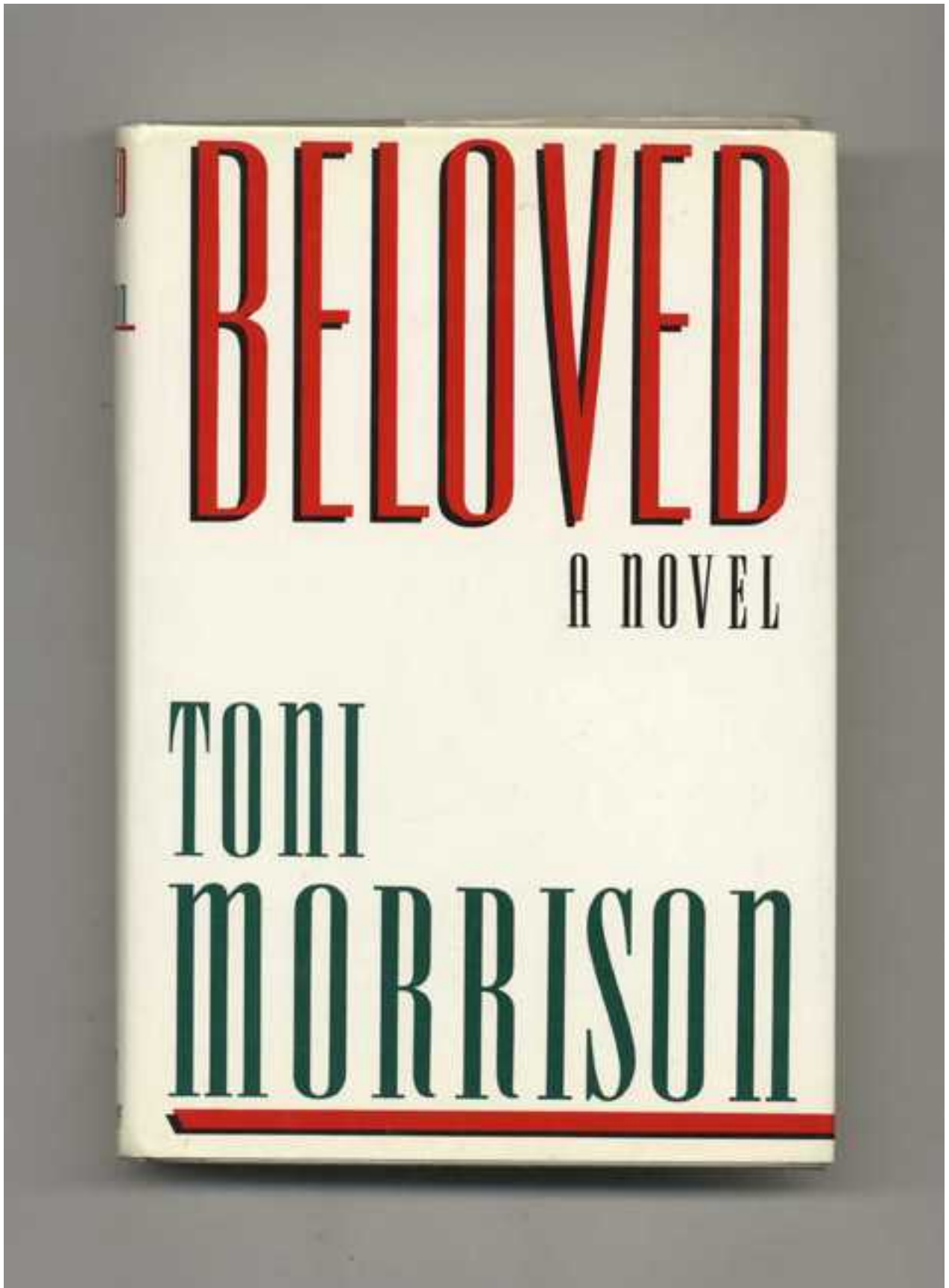


Figure 2 : One of Many Covers

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In 1989, Morrison became a professor in Princeton university, but retired in 2006. She continues to write expanding to opera, nonfiction, children's books and a spoken word album. She earned a Grammy award in 2008. Toni Morrison paved the way for an entire generation of African American female novelists, perhaps mostly by placing black female subjectivity at the center of her work. Black women's lives were sufficient, they were important and worthy of attention, and she, explicitly, gave a voice to that. She is an incredible national treasure because of her extraordinary accomplishments in literature as a female and as a public intellectual. She occupies a supreme role in the panoply of female writers.

1.4. An Overview of The Book (Beloved 1987)

The summary of this novel is not going to be linear, but would like to give an overview to really talk about the characters in this novel, it also gives a general feel of what this novel is about. Now the most important character within Toni Morrison's novel "beloved" is Sethe, the mother of many children within the novel. She has escaped from slavery and she has found a way to build a life for herself and her family. Sethe had to save her children, she really hated slavery, especially captivity, so during one instance in the novel she ends up killing her baby girl. The same baby girl comes back to Sethe's life, within the novel, as a ghost and starts haunting her mother. She lived a very sad life as all of her children, one after the another, left her and all she got left is her daughter Denver .

Then a man called "Paul Dee" came to town. He had a hard life too, a life of oppression, a life of being cast down. Sethe and Paul build-up a relationship between each other. For one instance, Sethe and Paul Dee and Denver ,at the beginning of the novel ,they were trying to be happy, trying to reestablish a family but that did not last for long, as one day, they went to a carnival and this new character shows up in the town by the name "Beloved". Beloved is this character who is really strange and nobody knows who she really is or where she comes from.

Later, in the novel, we find out that she is Sethe's daughter that came back to life. The novel becomes even more interesting, it goes on to where Sethe and beloved build this relationship between each other, and everybody else is pushed out of this relationship. Denver and Paul Dee end up leaving the house. What is really sad is that everyone in the town do not like Sethe, because of what she did to her own baby girl, she cut her own baby's head off and that's why everyone didn't want to be around her, but her actions were actually justified because the real reason why she killed her baby girl, was not because she was malicious or she was evil, but thoughtful as she just wanted to protect her kids because she did not want them to become some kind of a property ! She, simply, did not want her kids to

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become slaves. She came up with this plan to keep her kids away from her slave master she was going to kill all of them, but only to end up killing only one of her children and all the people of the town hated her for taking her Beloved's life and thinking of doing the same to her other children.

Now that Beloved and Sethe are with each other and everybody has left the house, Sethe starts to shrink and beloved starts to get stronger and better .By now, it is clear that Beloved is not a real person, it is only a ghost. Beloved ends up leaving Sethe alone. The community in which they lived end up by forgiving Sethe and that was the real reason why beloved finally left Sethe alone. And then Paul Dee came back in to her life and the couple tried to live together again.

One of the things that gets the reader's attention and really needs to be taken into consideration in this novel ,is that Denver is an interesting child, she is the only person within this novel that stays with Sethe no matter what, even though she ends up leaving the house, by the end of the novel, she still has a connection with her mother because of the time she was next to her when everybody left her.

One of the main major themes in this novel, is obviously Slavery and the bad and negative impact that it leaves in the human's life and soul even after they are free.

1.4.a. Toni Morrison's description of slavery

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is portrayed as a “modern day rendition of the nineteenth-century genre of the slave narrative which covers many of the themes addressed in slave narratives such as *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, including the pains of motherhood, sexual exploitation, learning self-respect, the desperate escape to freedom, and the struggles faced even after “freedom” has been reached” (Elbert 38).⁴²

As Morrison makes clear, forgetting does not erase the scars and wrongdoings of the past, but can become a new, darker form of oppression. She shows us the dangers of repressing our pasts and our identities, primarily through Sethe, who is unable to move forward because of her sorrow, guilt, and inability to face the truth of her past. She also makes it clear that the effects of slavery did not die with the Civil War (Elbert, 2003).

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Slavery is a clause of extreme physical, academic, emotional, and spiritual deficiency, a kind of hellish life.

This paper aims at exploring how the culture of white racism sanctioned not only official systems of discrimination but a complex code of speech, behavior, and social practices designed to make white supremacy not only legitimate but natural and inevitable.

In her masterwork, *Beloved* (1987), Toni Morrison shows the dehumanizing effects of slavery on the past and memory of her heroine. Morrison has dedicated her literary career to ensuring that black experience under, and as a result of, slavery would not be left to interpretations solely at the dictates of whites (Morrison, *The Site of Memory* (taken from : *Inventing the Truth*), 1995).

This study shows how Toni Morrison has succeeded in revealing the physical and psychological damage inflicted on African American people by the brutal inhumanity that constituted American slavery. The paper, in this context, investigates how the memory and the past of the heroine act as destroyers of her motherly existence.

1.4.b. Major Aspects Of Slavery In Toni Morrison's "Beloved"

Beloved is based on a real life events of the slave Margaret Garner. On Jan. 28, 1856, Garner murdered her two-year old daughter and attempted to kill her other two kids just because she didn't want her kids to be send to the farm where they worked. Morrison thinks that the horrifying concerns related to slavery are avoided and forgotten in the traditional slave narratives; therefore, Morrison wants to emphasize the painful and forgotten aspects of slavery.

Morrison's novels force its reader to recognize the existence and conditions of slavery in a nation that would prefer to forget that such a crime was ever committed. This paper intents

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to show that Morrison focuses on the cruel and dehumanizing aspects of slavery in order to effect the reader and the society in such a way that slave history should not be forgotten.

Henderson comments by insisting that Morrison is one of the amazing writers who tried to reveal what happened to African Americans in the ancient times and attempts to explain what has been forgotten or is being silenced:

“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” (Henderson, 2002, p. 12).

In her novel *Beloved*, Morrison planned to explain to the reader what happened to slaves working in an institutionalized slave method. In *Beloved* the slaves working on Sweet Home skill cruelty, brutality, and are treated like animals. In the novel, the character who is mostly affected of slavery’s severe situations is Sethe. Sethe gets tormented, raped and physically abused. As a result, Sethe tries to run away from Sweet Home and later she is driven to murder her two-year-old kid.

Morrison show us what it means to live as a slave and what destructions have been brought to lives of slaves in this work. In *Beloved*, Morrison drops light the painful past of African Americans and reveals the hidden experiences for a better understanding of African American history (Henderson, 2002, p. 12).

Beloved is a real life story, an event from African American history where special importance has been given to the horrors and tortures of slavery has been given in order to remind the reader about the past :

“Morrison’s critically commended novel *Beloved* probes the most painful part of the African American legacy, slavery, by way of what she has called “rememory” – intentionally reconstructing what has been forgotten” (Fuston-White, 2002, p. 461).

Morrison thinks that African American history is unclear and romanticized. Spargo cites Morrison's ideas about African American history :

“We live in a land where the past is always erased and America is the innocent future in which immigrants can come and start over, where the slate is clean. The past is absent or it's romanticized.

This culture doesn't encourage dwelling on, let alone coming to terms with, the truth about the past. ” (Morrison, *Beloved* , 2004, p. 14) .

1.5. The Relation Between Morrison's Life And Slavery Through "Beloved (1987)"

In this section, attention is converged ahead discussion of the pressure of slavery on the communal past of the community and the memory of the individual during the experience of motherhood. Toni Morrison has competently delved into how the shocking collective past of the Blacks and the heroine's own memory leads to distorted experience of motherhood. Though, the heroine succeeds in overcoming these haunting experiences through rising consciousness and patience. Toni Morrison, in *Beloved*, points out the need of new beginnings and trust that the Blacks should keep in order to live as free people. Thus, Morrison has succeeded in showing African American how to work out the ghosts of slavery and the terrible communal past.

Through Sethe's sense of hope towards the end of the novel, Morrison has given African American hope for the future. In doing so, Morrison has brought the individuals and the community together; she has exposed that Blacks and Whites have effectively attained a sense of collaboration.

Though, *Beloved's* return and mere existence deepens Sethe's sense of blame, her fragmented memory, and her loss of motherhood. Even though *Beloved's* attendance in the novel is a negative one, she helps in releasing Sethe's fault; this point helps Sethe who

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needs punishment in order to gain rescue. In most parts of the novel, Sethe faces a multifaceted battle whose psychological and emotional impacts have left her advantage, with enduring heartbreak. Sethe, unconsciously, accepts the punishment inflicted by Beloved; Morrison finds that this becomes aptly essential in a life of misery and pain.

According to Sethe “Love is or it ain’t. Thin love ain’t love at all,” (Morrison, *Beloved*, 1987, p. 191) and according to Morrison, “we have to try. Not trying is so poor for the self. It’s so poor for the mind, it’s so uninteresting to live without love.” (Bonnie, 1994, p. 268) So, Sethe legitimized her act by saying that bondage itself would have been more severe than death.

“Beloved, she’s my daughter. She’s mine. She comes back to me of her own free will and I don’t have to explain a thing. I didn’t have time to explain before because it had to be done quickly. She had to be safe and I put her where she would be. [...] I’ll explain her, even though I don’t have to. Why I did it. How if I hadn’t killed her she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her. When I explain it she’ll understand, because she understands everything already.” (Morrison, *Beloved*, 1987, p. 231)

1.6. Conclusion

Such a wonderful a story, wonderful characters, wonderful scenes that one can build up upon his head to literally live the experience of so many characters lives in this master piece created by Morrison. Even though the trauma and sadness that covers almost each piece of *Beloved's* puzzle, it is still a special journey to the past, while people had more essential things to care about, things so different to the ones people care about nowadays !

Morrison's love to her own race and nature, made her give all she had to her work "*Beloved*" in order to make people feel what her owns felt ! To make them see what her owns saw ! To make them think twice before saying that they had suffered enough in life !

Slavery is considered to be, If not , the most awful tragedy in human history. It is clear now what people had to do in order to survive at that time. It is clear what mothers had to go through to save their children from slavery and slave-masters at that time. It is clear what children had to feel and see , and at the same time, stay stronger even though they were powerless against the people who overpowered them.

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"Beloved" delivered the message !

“nothing ever dies, and that the pictures and images of things remain” (Morrison, *Beloved*, 1987, p. 36) .



Figure 3 : Toni Morrison

Chapter Two : Breaking The Chains

II.1. Introduction

The writing of this novel provokes the unpleasant life as a slave human, especially as a slave woman. In this part, we handle some of the most sincere inhuman basics of slavery life and its probable effects on black women.

We also show how Toni Morrison, in *Beloved*, portrays the contact, the negatives things and the brutal life of slavery experiences in the memory of her society and how her work "Beloved" is described as a traumatic and unpleasant life of a slave woman and a slave mother. Therefore, we show how she moves between the past and the present, the memories and facts of reality ... ect.

We converged upon conversation of the control of slavery on the mutual past of the community and the reminiscence of the character of black women throughout the experience of motherhood and how to train and confront the terrifying ghosts of slavery, the horrifying time and public past.

II.2.Toni Morrison and slavery

When we talk about slavery we talk about Black literature. Black literature in the United States shows, in specific details, the occurrence and the past of African Americans. In *Beloved*, Morrison insists on the physical, mental and psychological special effects that slavery could impose on an African American women.

In *Beloved*, Morrison takes a real life experience from African American history account and gives particular importance to the awfulness, pain and agony of slavery to ring a bell for the reader about the past.

Black literature gained force in the nineteenth century, and the most printed black literature consisted of slave narratives. These narratives demonstrated and illustrated the true stories of slaves' break outs to free states or countries. These tales were, primarily, published by

Breaking The Chains

white abolitionists to inform, teach and educate whites about the evils of slavery. Toni Morrison is a black African American writer and novelist of 20th century, whose novels demonstrate and record the account of African American history, going in reverse to the early time of 19th century. Morrison's novels have been a main key of contribution to black literature in the chronological development.

Henderson comments that Morrison is amongst the writers who attempted to explain what happened to African Americans in the earlier period and aimed to demonstrate what has been gone or is being pushed towards silence :

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. (Henderson, 2002, p. 12)

Morrison explains to us what it means to exist as a slave and what destructions have been carried to lives of slaves in this work. In *Beloved*, Morrison highlight the sore past of African Americans and exposes the obscured experiences for a superior understanding of African American history. *Beloved* is a real life story, an event from African American history where particular value has been given to the repulsion and suffering of slavery in order to remind the reader about the past. In *Beloved*, Morrison reinvents the history and desires the reader not to put out of his mind what happened in African American history.

II.3.Toni Morrison's "Beloved (1987)"

Toni Morrison has provided us with a remarkable historical trilogy *Beloved*, *Jazz* and *Paradise*.

Beloved deals with the evils and harms of slavery, *Jazz* continues this examination into the 1920s, and *Paradise* expands the assessment of history into the 1970s. In this order, Morrison's novels have been a key contribution to black literature in the past historical process.

Breaking The Chains

In her novel *Beloved*, Morrison planned to give you an idea about what happened to slaves functioning in an slave system that is covered, and takes most of its powers and laws from the institution. In *Beloved*, the slaves working on Sweet Home had to go through sudden incidents of violence, cruelty, and are treated like animals. In the novel, the personality who is mostly affected by slavery's severe circumstances is Sethe. Sethe gets tortured, raped and mistreated. As a result, Sethe tries to flee and escape from Sweet Home and later she is determined to kill her two-year-old baby.

Morrison confirms and insist on the readers to understand what it means to live as a slave and what destructions have been carried to lives of slaves in this work. In *Beloved*, Morrison sheds the lights on the throbbing past of African Americans and exposes the hidden experiences for a better accepting of African American history. Morrison's significantly acclaimed the novel *Beloved* investigates the most raw part of the African American legacy, slavery, by way of what she has identified "rememory" – purposely recreating what has been gone.

II.3.a. An examination to subjectivity in "Beloved (1987)"

Beloved stands for an operational out of subjectivity through the depiction of history, a history so brutal and dehumanizing that it is unrepresentable, a portrayal of society, which is frequently ragged apart by the conditions of slavery, and a structure of identity. Morrison believes that African American history is unclear and romanticized.

Spargo cites Morrison's ideas about African American history :

"We live in a land where the past is always erased and America is the innocent future in which immigrants can come and start over, where the slate is clean. The past is absent or it's romanticized. This culture doesn't encourage dwelling on, let alone coming to terms with, the truth about the past". (Spargo, 2002, pp. 113-119)

II.3.b. The impact of slavery in Toni Morrison's "Beloved (1987)"

Beloved portrays the impact of slavery experiences on the memory of society and that of the individual, who is denied in the process any sense of practicable and significant past.

Breaking The Chains

The individual, in such a struggle, is caught at the middle of a war imposed by a past that refuses to depart this life. To make relationships in such a miserable, tantalizing, and thwarting existence would seem useless.

Toni Morrison succeeds in embodying these concepts in the character of Sethe. The narrative voice of *Beloved* is mostly here as she relives and 'memories' the distress of her slavery life. Eighteen years have passed since Sethe escaped from Slavery. After her escape to Cincinnati with her four children, Sethe was finally chase by her old master. Rather than having children return slavery, she attempted to kill all of them, succeeding only in killing her baby girl. She lived with her remaining kids and her mother-in-law. The ghost of the dead baby began to chase their home, causing to commit Sethe's suffering. She was still haunted by the pain of the past. A girl named Beloved came to visit the family, and it slowly became clear that she was the ghost of the dead baby.

Beloved lives with Sethe, proving to be commanding and cruel. On discovering Beloved's identity, Sethe understood that she had been given a second chance. Sethe tried to make amends for the past, but the girl's needs were devouring. The spirit did not forgive Sethe for the actions. A group of women approached to oblige the ghost to leave, but Sethe is almost shattered.

As a slave narrative, *Beloved* is written with the marked reason of enlightening that the black is a human capable of reasoning and judgment. Slave narratives generally talk for the majority who cannot narrate their own stories, due to the fact blacks have not been given the chance to be given education. As one ex- slave woman wrote: "We were no more than dogs. If they caught us with a piece of paper in our pockets, they'd beat us. They were afraid we'd learn to read and write, but I never got the chance (Ward & Burn, 1991, p. 9).

II.4.Reconstruction of Black identity and community in Toni Morrison's "Beloved (1987)"

Since the publication of Morrison's novel in 1987, the identity of Beloved has confused some readers, bothered others, and intrigued the majority. Most readers and critics share Thomas R. Edwards's point of view that Beloved "is indisputably the dead daughter's spirit in human form". On the other hand, Walter Clemons disputes that, since the murdered child could not have memorized passage on a slave boat, "Beloved is also a ghost from the slave ships of Sethe's origin". Deborah Horvitz develops upon Clemons's statement, concluding that Beloved "is not only Sethe's two-year-old daughter, whom she killed eighteen years ago ; she is also Sethe's African mother". House contradicts all prior critics by opposing that Beloved "is not a paranormal being of any kind but basically a adolescent woman who has herself experienced the horrors of slavery". The many interpretations of Beloved's identity expose the difficulty of Morrison's character. Not only is she read differently by diverse characters in the novel but also by different readers of the novel. Each new explanation of Beloved inserts another layer to her already solid identity (Jennifer L. H.-K., 1998).

In this essay, the issue is to discover the question of Beloved's identity and how her identity involves her own subjectivity, as well as that of Denver and Sethe. First, one explain how Beloved's continuous references to a slave ship experience function as her original scene. After interpreting the original scene, one should argue the complication of Beloved's identity. As Margaret Atwood states, "*There is a lot more to Beloved than any one character can see, and she manages to be many things to several people*" (Kubitschek, 1998, pp. 115-251).

In her piece of writing "Toni Morrison's Ghost: The Beloved Who Is Not Beloved," Elizabeth B. House tells us that "unraveling the mystery of . . . [Beloved's] identity depends to a great amount upon first deciphering stages four and five of Part II" in Beloved. House gives a detailed clarification of the unclear references in the narrative, pointing out "how white slave dealers . . . captured the girl and her mother" and "put them on the ship an

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abysmally crowded slave ship". Her observation lies in contrast to that of Carol Rubens, who sees this narrative series as Beloved's "escape from the grave," explaining that "the hold of a slave ship seems [only] fleetingly invoked". To readers unfamiliar with slave ship descriptions and the actions that emerged on board these vessels, Morrison's eight-page account might seem "fleetingly invoked" and much "too vague." Jean Wyatt argues that the unexpected emergence of the slave ship monologue is intended to throw readers off balance: "Since Morrison does not identify these scattered perceptions as explanations of life on a slave ship or tell how Beloved appeared to be there or give any coordinates of time and place, readers are perplexed : they have no idea where they are." Wyatt goes on to explain how the mystification that the reader experiences in this part of the text "imitates the disorientation of the Africans who were thrown into slave ships without explanation" (Elizabeth, 1990).

II.4.a. Slavery and identity reconstruction of female characters in Toni Morrison's "Beloved (1987)"

A growing concern in African American studies and black writing, in general, came from the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s and the 1970s. Toni Morrison's major pre-occupation in literature has always been to what Morrison's narratives personal lives that form the knowledge of a community. What Morrison's narratives, in particular, try to express is the idea that there is more than one kind of comprehension, and that it is essential to acknowledge different manners is not based on the factual but on the aural and the visual. Thus, she has embarked ahead showing how an African American writer deals with the institution of slavery.

Slavery is horrifying for men, but it is more awful for women, it inflicted harm upon families, where men and women had suffered. The idea of family, in the traditional logic, was not even professed before 1865 among black societies. "Slavery not only inhibited family creation but made established, safe family life difficult if not impossible" (Heather, 2017, p. 1) .In the awareness of many African-American women, under slavery and after, there implanted an picture of a terrible part, reminding them of degrading compliance. Sexual abuse was one of the cruelest hardships lasted by enslaved African-Americans,

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practices by their slaveholders. Enslaved women were enforced to submit to their bosses' sexual advances, perhaps bearing kids from whom they might be separated forever as a consequence.

In fact, these experiences eliminate any chance for a black woman to have a clear memory and a viable history. Operating independently of the conscious will, memory is exposed to be an active, constitutive strength that has the power to build and restrict identity, both individual and collective ..." (Lawrence, 1991, pp. 189-201)

She did not wish for her children to experience slavery, the way she did. She figured that death was better than living throughout slavery. The mother-in-law, who was there when Margaret Garner tried to murder her children, said: "I watched her and neither encouraged her nor discouraged her." (Bonnie, 1994, p. 207) Morrison's response to this was :

"A woman appreciated something other than herself so much. She had placed all of the importance of her life in something outside herself. That the woman who killed her children loved her children so much; they were the best part of her and she would not see them sullied. She would not see them upset. She would rather murder them, have them die." (Bonnie, 1994, p. 207)

Morrison thought that this book was going to be less attractive to people than all her other books, since it concerns things that "nobody wants to remember. It's national amnesia." (Bonnie, 1994, p. 257) But in writing *Beloved*, Morrison did try to make people memorize slavery. She tried to do this by telling its horrors and legacy in detail. Morrison is very clear about every happening, mainly the specific traumas that black women and mothers were enforced to last at the hands of slaveholders.

II.5. Slave Narratives

A type of African-American literature that increased in the middle of the 19th century is the slave narrative, reports written by fugitive slaves about their lives in the South and, often, after evading to freedom. They wanted to express the cruelties of life beneath slavery, as well as the constant humanity of the slaves as persons. At the time, the debate over slavery led to impassioned literature on both faces of the problem, with novels such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved*.

Women argued their right to preach and write spiritual narratives which had a clear understanding of literary types and biblical narratives. This contributed to progressing their point about African-American women's agency and countered the dominant racist and sexist discussion of early American civilization.

II.5.a. Slave narratives from the communal to the individual

Slave narratives are essential not just for the fact they enrich and spread African American literature, although because they expose the difficulties of the discourse between Whites and Blacks. The African-American incident started when settlers bought twenty black people from "a Dutch Man of Warre" (Trotter & Williams, 2001, p. 58) in Virginia, 1619. White discrimination started to appear as the beginning of racial regulations became practical. In 1664, officials of Maryland ordered: "that all Negroes or other Slaves... shall serve Durante Vita and all kids born of any Negro or other slaves shall be slaves as their fathers were for the term of their lives". (Holt, Thomas, & Elisa, 2000, p. 89). The state of Virginia, given the fact that they had brought people who had every cause to be disobedient, endorsed in the late 1600s and early 1700s laws castigating the Blacks to be penalized more harshly than others for "being a brutish sort of people and considered as goods and assets" (Morgan, 2000, p. 106). With these cruel laws Virginians did not spare any possibility to dominate the black slaves by denying them even essential rights and inflicting ahead them harsh punishment.

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While African Americans have been a piece of American life, participating in, and contributing to, American culture, the American history of slavery had been deliberately consigned to forgetfulness. Toni Morrison, one of the most important voices of her race and time, examines that “We were seldom invited to contribute in the discussion, even when we were its subject matter.” (Morrison, *Beloved*, 1987, p. 111) . As people who did not mark their history, African Americans have forever felt the need for a sense of knowing their past to discover a viable connection with the present and future. Morrison realizes her job to be getting better and reconstructing the familiarities of these people “Because if we do not know. .. what our past is ... if we Third-World women in American do not know it, then, it is not recognized by anyone at all. And someone has to tell someone something.” (Morrison, *Beloved*, 1987, p. 59) .

The narrative voice of *Beloved* is typically here as she relives the pain of her slavery life. Eighteen years have gone since Sethe runaway from Slavery. After her run away to Cincinnati with her four kids, Sethe was finally chased by her old master. Rather than having kids go back to slavery, she attempted to murder all of them, succeeding just in murdering her baby child. She lived with her left behind kids and her mother-in-law. The spirit of the dead baby started to chase their home, causing to perpetrate Sethe’s pain. She was still chased by the soreness of the past. A girl called Beloved came to see the family, and it slowly became clear that she was the spirit of the deceased baby. Beloved lives with Sethe, showing to be influential and hateful. On finding out Beloved’s identity, Sethe thought that she had been given a second opportunity. Sethe tried to make amends for the past, but the girl’s needs were devouring. The spirit did not pardon Sethe for the actions. A group of women came to oblige the ghost to go away, but Sethe is nearly shattered.

Slaves in general, through slavery. According to slavery historian Peter Kolchin, coercive objectivity of families was the most awful interruption in the lives of slaves (Kolchin, 2003, p. 125). Detachment of families was common in the South.

“Good intentions alone proved insufficient to defend slaves next to the dictates of financial attention, annoyance, or plain selfishness; there were just too many instances when it made

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sense or was essential for masters with the best of intentions to divide their slaves. the majority of slave holders may have hated the idea of unraveling their people – and some did not want to do so under usual situations – but when push came to toss, hardly any slave masters put their slaves' *happiness above own self-interest.*" (Bonnie, 1994, p. 31)

As a slave narrative, *Beloved* is written with the obvious reason of enlightening that the black can do reasoning and judgment. Slave narratives typically talk for the majority who cannot tell their stories, due to the fact blacks have not been given the chance to be given education. As one previous slave woman said: "We were no more than dogs. If they trapped us with a piece of paper in our hands, they'd beat us. They were afraid we'd learn to read and write, but I never got the opportunity (Ward & Burn, 1991, p. 9). Sethe, in Morrison's *Beloved*, is not only deprived of the chance to be given education but the right to be a human being, playing her natural job of mothering. Sethe's complex life beneath slavery makes her think that kids are better off dead ; better forced to come to the belief that, it is better to die in the cradle than to live a humiliating life of submission.

II.5.b. Sethe the sexual abuse

The theme of sexual abuse rings in pretty much all female slave literature, as slave women were repeatedly viewed and treated as sexual items by white masters and their family members. In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (from now on stated as "*Incidents*"), Harriet Jacobs also suffered sexual abuse from her white master, Dr. Flint. According to American social historian, Jacqueline Jones, "sexual maturity marked a crucial turning point in most young slave women's lives." (Bonnie, 1994, p. 31) .This situation took place in Jacobs life when she was a teenager of fifteen years old.

"My master began to whisper foul words in my ear. Young as I was, I could not remain ignorant of their import. I tried to treat them with indifference of contempt. The master's age, my extreme youth, and the fear that his conduct would be reported to my grandmother, made him bear this treatment for many months. He tried his utmost to corrupt `` the pure

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principles my grandmother had instilled. He peopled my young mind with unclean images, such as only a vile monster could think of. I turned away from him with disgust and hatred. But he was my master.” (Jacobs, 1862, p. 44)

“ Thus, abuse of women slaves was not uncommon. Only a small number of parents could keep their daughters from being sexually abused by white men” (Blassingame, 1972, p. 82). “The female slaves usually got a small ornament for offering themselves to the white men, and if they were not willing to present themselves, they were whipped” (Blassingame, 1972, p. 83).

“Though, not only white men abused their female slaves, there are also accounts of white mistresses who abused black women, especially female slaves who worked in the household experienced violence. These slaves were unprotected to the mistresses after a ‘bad’ day, and since they were the closest of the slaves to the master’s family, they were an easy target” (Camp, 2004). It, generally, had to do with suspicion and the envy of the mistresses. When former slave Moses Roper was born, for example, “his mistress tried to kill him when she discovered that her husband was Roper’s father. To prevent this, the man sold Roper and his mother.” (Blassingame, 1972, p. 84). An illustration of how together the master and mistress let a slave woman experience the cruelty of that life is in the autobiography of Julia A. J. Foot. Foot has never been a slave; however she remembers how it was for her parents (Jennifer F. , 1996, p. 153) :

“She was not thinking of the atrocity the men committed on her, or the reason for her scared back, but by this negation, the reader has been made aware of the horrible sexual act that she has been physically abused. Then... Her boy lapping in the puddle near her feet, and suddenly there was Sweet Home rolling. Out before her eyes... it made her wonder if hell was a pretty place too... the most innocent occurrence or image has connotations that bring back the horror of what happened at the picturesque Sweet Home” (Morrison, *Beloved*, 1987, pp. 6-107).

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Sexual abuse often happened to women living in slavery, told in the female slave narratives. Though, it could also happen while living in freedom, such as Sethe encountered in the novel. Masters justified the act of sexual abuse, because they considered their slaves as their own property that is why some masters branded their slaves.

In the case of branding such as Sethe's mother encountered, it reminded the slaves that they were being owned by somebody else, such as the whippings that made brands on their bodies. But overall, being sexually abused will never be forgotten in a slave woman's mind.

II.5.c. Sethe the motherhood sacrifice

“ Many slave mothers tried to sacrifice their lives for their kids, even though they knew it was probably ineffective. There are accounts of women who did anything for their children. Though, the ultimate sacrifice a women can make for her child is to free them from bondage. In *Beloved*, Sethe killed her baby girl out of love. But to what extent can this be justified? According to Toni Morrison it is accepted under the circumstances, however it is extreme” (Bonnie, 1994, p. 252). “ It's an excess of maternal feeling, a total surrender to that commitment, and, you know, such excesses are not good. She has stepped across the line, so to speak. ” (Bonnie, 1994, p. 252).

Sethe realized that she is in great danger with no way to freedom from that situation. She knew that the only way to struggle with, and fight, him was to kill her own children, to “ put her babies where they'd be safe ” (Mitchell, 2002, p. 98) because she was not willing to give up her freedom and the freedom of her children, to a life in bondage. She could not allow ; “ that anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore ” (Mitchell, 2002, p. 98). So, Sethe killed her baby daughter with a handsaw and tried to harm the other ones too, but they were grabbed by their neighbor, Stamp Paid (Mitchell, 2002, p. 98).

The ultimate sacrifice Sethe made was not uncommon for slave women. Sethe's killing of

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her baby happened while she was free, but in *Beloved* there are other examples of mothers 'killing' their children, however this occurred during slavery. One example is Ella, the women in the novel who contributed to the Underground Railroad in cooperation with Stamp Paid. She became pregnant after being sexually assaulted. When her child was born she did not want to look after him, so the consequence was that the baby died (Kim, 2003, p. 22). Also, Sethe's mother left all her children behind who were conceived by whites after being sexually abused, except for Sethe, since she was contrived by a black man (Kim, 2003, p. 23). Sethe, the slave woman who is mentioned in an earlier chapter about the loss of her children, became pregnant again; however this time she killed her baby.

II.6. Conclusion

From slavery to freedom is the major theme in "*Beloved*". Toni Morrison points out the necessity of new beginnings and faith that the Blacks (Black women) should maintain in order to live as free people.

"In Toni Morrison's "*Beloved*", we can obviously see and feel slavery in the life of al-most all her characters because of their cruel, consuming and devouring past, but, most importantly, this is how she makes slavery "real" for the readers who do not view slavery as a memory of their own, but as a historical fact that can be much easier to repress and forget" (Mobley, 1993) .

Novels such as "*Beloved*" make use of fiction to provide us with a deeper and possibly truer look into slavery. The novel is shaped in a significant context of a modern and, at the same time, a past view of slavery and how it affected America, and especially the African-American woman, and the most clear way to give the modern world a sense of slavery's effects on the perspective of the black woman, both ; in the past and the present.

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Toni Morrison lay a hand on some of the deepest and most worrying basics of slavery and its possible effects on black women. Slavery is an institution that take care of human beings as goods, not letting the strong logic of family and community those humans so badly need. As affirmed by Ann Snitow in her essay, "Beloved (1987)," "when strong, loving women would rather kill their babies than see them hauled back to slavery, the damage to every black that inherits that moment is a literal damage and not a metaphor" (Snitow, 1993, p. 29) .

A major theme that influences Sethe is the danger of sexual use, which was maybe the primary form of cruelty and danger for black women both in and out of the limits of slavery.

As African Americans have been part of American life, joining in, and contributing to, American civilization, the American history of slavery had been intentionally consigned to forgetfulness. Toni Morrison, one of the most important voices of her race and age, sees that "We were seldom invited to participate in the discourse, even when we were its topic." (Morrison, *Beloved*, 1987, p. 111) .

As people who did not write their history, African Americans have always felt the need for a sense of knowing their past in order to discover a practical association with the present and future. Morrison knows her job to be recovering and rebuilding the experiences of these people "Because if we do not know. What our past is ... if we Third-World women in American do not know it, then, it is not known by anybody at all. And somebody has to tell somebody something." (Morrison, *Beloved*, 1987, p. 59) .

As one previous slave woman wrote: "We were no more than dogs. If they caught us with a piece of paper in our pockets, they'd whip us. They were afraid we'd learn to read and write, but I never got the chance. (Ward & Burn, 1991, p. 9) . Sethe, in Morrison's *Beloved*, is not only deprived of the occasion to get education but also the right to be a human being, playing her natural position of mothering. Sethe's multipart life beneath

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slavery makes her think that kids are better off dead; better forced to come to the belief that, it is better to die in the cradle than to live a degrading life of compliance.

As one may see, in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the slavery experience in the life of almost all her characters acts as a devouring past: Baby Suggs, Sethe's mother-in-law, is a practical instance of the cruelty of the past, the slave system, suffering from sexual abuse and lack of normal maternal affection. Commenting on Baby Suggs' tragic stance in slavery life, Stamp Paid, one of the minor characters of *Beloved*.

While the narratives and novels earlier discussed focus on a development from some form of slavery to freedom—sometimes with a detour in between, such as the case of *Beloved* – no other narrator or protagonist has been quite as truthful and eye-opening to the pressures of slavery in the way that Sethe is. It is so very easy for the modern reader to say that they would never allow themselves to live under slavery—they would run away, start a revolution, kill themselves—but Butler helps the reader realize that slavery was not just on the southern plantations in a distant time, but was a way of life and a national stigma that was not completely erased, even into the twentieth-century.

These novels were also shaped in an era in which a person, more particularly a black person, and most of all a black *woman*, did not have to be proven trustworthy by a third, *white* party. These writers were also clever to see from a modern and past sight of slavery, which may have given their work more deepness, and gave them an approaching into what is believed about slavery now compared to what actually was.

Toni Morrison has all given modern readers a look into the lives of black women in the context of slave-driven America. They have done this in fiction as those like Jacobs did with their own life stories. These novels and narratives work together to give the modern world a sense of slavery's effects on the standpoint of the black woman, both past and present.

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Literature has been one of the most helpful tools in social change for most of mankind's history.

Slave narratives were critical to the black understanding in America's slave era and were often used as tools of the elimination movement. These true accounts were written for a white abolitionist spectators and had to meet certain guidelines to be available. Although the weight of these true accounts of slavery is not to be unnoticed, slavery has become a subject matter also addressed in fiction, sometimes to a deeper result.

The themes used in this paper, are reoccurring themes in many female slave narratives. One can say that all these themes are connected to one another. Of course there are exceptions; though , many female slaves have encountered whippings or other sorts of cruelty, such as sexual abuse. Also, at one point in their lives female slaves became mothers, wanted or unwanted. Moreover, these female slaves are confronted with many other suffering, such as the loss of family members through death, or through the master's choice of selling them.

In *Beloved*, through the discussions of Sethe with Paul D., we find out more about Sethe's past, and in return, Sethe will remember her own past by retelling it to someone. All other female slave narratives are written to make us know that female slaves suffered a lot. These slave narratives and the novel *Beloved* together can be seen as a memory tool for every single person. To bring to a close, the fictional description of *Beloved* gives a good renovation of the lives of female slaves, compared to female slave narratives and what historians have written about it (Ward & Burn, 1991) .

An unavoidable strength in Sethe's life, the past has exerted a marvelous impact upon her present to the extent that has cannot envision any sense of the future. Sethe's shocking memory thus controls her whole survival. She tells her daughter, Denver, that "nothing ever dies, and that the pictures and images of things remain" (Morrison, *Beloved*, 1987, p. 36) .

A significant present, in the case of Sethe, is to be a woman living in a society and maintaining healthy relationships with others, and to be a good mother in particular. The

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unforgettable of the communal past and the tyranny of the memories turn Sethe into a crippled character, communally and morally. It becomes obvious that “In portraying the ability of the past to chase individual and society life in the present, *Beloved* brings into daylight” the ghosts that one harbored by remembrance and that hold their ‘hosts’ in thrall, meanly dictating idea, feeling, and action” (Lawrence D. , 2007, p. 45) .

Slavery is horrifying for men, but it is more awful for women, it inflicted harm upon families, where men and women had suffer. The idea of family, in the traditional sense, was not even professed before 1865 among black communities. “*Slavery not only inhibited family formation but made stable, secure family life difficult if not impossible*” (Williams, 2017, p. 1) . In the awareness of many African-American women, under slavery and after, there implanted an image of a horrific part, reminding them of degrading obedience.

Sexual abuse was one of the cruelest hardships endured by enslaved African-Americans, practices by their slaveholders. Enslaved women were enforced to submit to their masters’ sexual advances, possibly bearing kids from whom they might be separated eternally as a consequence. In fact, these experiences destroy any chance for a black woman to have a clear memory and a viable past. Toni Morrison, in her *Beloved*, engage in this point in particular. It is a novel of “Useless forgetting and constant remembrance. Working independently of the conscious will, memory is shown to be an active, constitutive force that has the authority to build and limit identity, both individual and collective...” (Lawrence D. , 2007, p. 45) .

In order to shun herself from these shocking memories and thoughts, Sethe has not only to forget them, but also to cope with her reasonable life and individual traumas, Sethe’s trip from slavery to freedom starts with her understanding of the need to rid her children in the first place from slavery life. As Sethe is reunited with her other three kids in freedom, she radiates with her new-found freedom.

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Toni Morrison has competently delved into how the hurtful collective past of the Blacks and the heroine's own memory leads to distorted experience of motherhood. Though, the heroine succeeds in overcoming these unforgettable experiences through growing awareness and mercy.

Toni Morrison, in *Beloved*, points out the requirement of new beginnings and faith that the Blacks should uphold in order to live as free people. Thus, Morrison has succeeded in showing African American how to exercise the ghosts of slavery and the terrible shared past. Through Sethe's sense of hope towards the end of the novel, Morrison has given African American hope for the future. In doing so, Morrison has brought the individuals and the community together; she has revealed that Blacks and Whites have successfully accomplished a sense of cooperation.

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Figure 4 : The End

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