

Resentful Voices and the Sorrow of Forgotten History in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987): The Song of Han

الأصوات المستاءة وحسرة التاريخ المنسي في رواية *محبوبة* (1987) لتوني موريسون: أغنية الهان

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Abstract

This paper analyzes African-American women's forgotten histories in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). Through Han, an originally Korean emotion of sorrow and despair, Morrison rewrites their plight and navigates the emotions these women felt before, whilst and after being traumatized by slavery. In doing so, this paper aims to highlight the sorrow in the voices of Sethe, Beloved and Denver ensuring the understanding and recognition of the African-American female community. In light of analyzing Han in these characters, this study found out that Han is reflective of its holders' experiences, and that writers such as Morrison are still trying to reclaim their ancestors' history by calling for the remembering of the forgotten and writing their haunting emotions.

Keywords: Beloved, forgotten history, Han, sorrow, African-American female voices.

المخلص: تحلل هذه الورقة تاريخ النساء الأمريكيات من أصل إفريقي المنسي في رواية *محبوبة* (1987) لتوني موريسون. من خلال الهان، وهو شعور كوري الأصل شبيه بالحزن واليأس، تسترجع توني موريسون معاناتهن كما تستكشف المشاعر التي شعرن بها في فترة ما قبل وأثناء وبعد صدمة العبودية. وفي هذا الصدد، تهدف هذه الورقة إلى تسليط الضوء على شعور الحسرة والحزن من منظور سيث وبيلوفايد ودنفر لضمان فهم المجتمع النسائي الأفريقي الأمريكي والاعتراف به. في ضوء تحليل شعور الهان في هذه الشخصيات، اكتشفت هذه الدراسة أن شعور الهان يعكس تجارب حامله، وأن الكتاب مثل موريسون لا يزالون يحاولون استعادة تاريخ أسلافهم من خلال الدعوة إلى تذكر المنسيين في التاريخ وكتابة مشاعرهم المؤثرة.

كلمات مفتاحية: بيلوفيد، التاريخ المنسي، الهان، الحسرة، أصوات النساء الأمريكيات من أصل إفريقي.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Communities tend to be shaped by their histories. The constant accumulation of historical events appears to dictate one's perception of and emotions towards their life events. Consequently, communities become more and more distinct as their manifested surge of emotions relates closely to their lived overwhelming and troubled historical events.

Indeed, African-Americans descend from a culture and history that is rooted in trauma and violence. Their history is marked by the capturing and shipping of Africans to the newly discovered land of America where they would be enslaved. This is known as the transatlantic slave trade, which, in turn, is estimated to have lasted for approximately four-hundred years. The Africans who were captured were stripped of their human rights, and rendered into objects that the white master can control and instrumentalize in his profits. Certainly, the savagery of such conduct was terrible on both men and women, still the African-American woman, at the time, was brutalized in a plethora of violent ways (the cruelty of slavery, rape...etc.) that profoundly impacted her psyche, motherhood, children...etc.

The above has induced a generational resentment and grief that is, for the most part, considered beyond a mere emotion of sadness. There is a certain amount of bitterness, sorrow, and despair, otherwise called Han, which haunts generations of African-American women, from the times of slavery till nowadays, because of their white man-made history.

Indeed, in the neo-slave narrative *Beloved*, Morrison tells the story of the runaway African-American slave, Sethe, who is haunted by her past. It also tells the stories of her daughters, Beloved and Denver, who struggle with the effects of their mother's past. The author, abiding by the traits of such narratives, recounts the history and cruelty of slavery during the nineteenth century in America. She reassigns the forgotten female African voices whilst humanizing and crediting their wide range of emotions.

This paper, thus, examines the interwoven presence of the emotion of Han in *Beloved*, specifically the Han of Beloved, Sethe and Denver. This study offers a new analyzing lens, intending to add to and extend the body of research and knowledge around Morrison's *Beloved* while focusing on the origin, creation,

presentation and possible resolution of sorrow and pain (Han) in Beloved, Sethe and Denver.

2. Han: A Transcending Dance of Grief and Hope

The emotion of resentment is an emotion widely recognized in formerly colonized or enslaved nations, or simply in nations that have had a history of violence. This emotion is usually felt but never given a specific name. In this case, this emotion is better understood as a deep-seated feeling of grief that mutates into resentment and bitterness resulting in a sorrow so deeply ingrained into individuals that it transcends generations and affects nations' futures, otherwise known as Han.

Han (한) derives from the Sino-Korean character (恨). Lee (1995) explains the symbol Han as one that is, “represented by the conflicting characters (心) which means ‘heart’ and (艮) which means ‘to stand still’, meaning the state of harboring emotional scars within one’s heart” (Hwang, 2017, p. 297 *translation added*). In other words, it entails a stillness where an individual would hold on to their lived unfortunate experiences.

Han is sometimes seen as a harmful and unpleasant emotion that was shaped by the tragic history of Korea, a history of brutality, wars, colonization, poverty and famine. While it is said that Han is felt deeply like a ceaseless aching sensation in one’s body, it can also be a complex emotion that dances on a spectrum of “affection” and “resentment” (Cheon, 1993, p. 171 as cited in Nam, 2019, p. 56; Kim, 2017, p. 256). Some consider it as a uniquely Korean physical ailment; namely, the psychiatrist Min Seong-gil who diagnosed Koreans with having a Hwa-Byung, which translates to a fire-illness or more accurately an Anger-Syndrome (Kaplan and Sadock, 2009, as cited in Kim, 2017, p. 256) that spreads throughout their bodies and affects their behavior and identities (Nam, 2019, p. 57).

Nam (2019) synthesizes that Han especially affects the brutalized, mainly women, and that it is difficult to find a full equivalent for it in English. She holds that Han is definitely felt more than it is identified in any hostile occupations and aggression-ridden nations; thus, she concludes that Han is “both universal and unique” (p. 57). And while Nam dubs Han as “universal”, Kim (2017) sanctions Han to a Korean socio-cultural concept when she declares:

Han is an essentialist Korean sociocultural concept that is popularly understood as a uniquely Korean collective feeling of unresolved resentment, pain, grief, and anger. Han is often described as running in the blood of all Koreans, and the quality of Korean sorrow as being different from anything Westerners have experienced or can understand.” (p. 255)

In this case, Kim stresses the essential quality of Han to a Korean context emphasizing how the West could never fathom or experience such a uniquely Korean despair and sorrow. Moon (2014), however, argues that Han transcends the Korean identity by stating:

So it is not the uniqueness of han, particular to the Korean context, that makes it so difficult to articulate; rather it is the uniqueness of the suffering itself that gives it its untranslatable quality—no matter what language, ethnicity, culture, time, or space. Thus, it is forms of literature and art that are able to “translate” or articulate suffering in a way that gives it meaning. (p. 431 as quoted in Boman, 2020, p. 12)

In other words, Han, therefore, conveys various connotations. It has, thus far, been established as a signifier of brutality and aggression on people's histories, bodies...etc. specifically the Korean one. However, it appears as if it could transcend the Korean socio-cultural space. Aggression is far more consistent and similar than it is known to be. Patterns are easily recognized in several histories, and the emotion this violence fosters is what formulates the uniqueness of Han, a “sensation that have found the right match in words” (Brennan, 2004), felt solely by the oppressed and depraved. The argument of Han being a strictly Korean range of emotion might stem from its untranslatability into some other languages; nevertheless, Moon, here, counter argues that such untranslatability is resolved within Literature and Art.

According to Boman (2020) “han is deemed transcultural rather than national-particular” (p. 12). He mentions Native Americans and African Americans as other examples of nations that are able to feel and carry Han because of their oppressive history. Certainly, Nam (2019) links emotions to history. She sees emotions as the conductor of events, which, in turn, creates a particular sub-history of emotions (pp. 58-59). In the case of African slaves coming to America, they carry a frustration with their situation that is out of

hand. One generation after another, under bondage, start to wander around with a residing resentment and festering mental wounds.

In fact, Hwang (2017) opines that the cycle of Han is bound to seek resolution even if it does not particularly reach it. She explains that the process of the resolution of Han entails tracing its formation, the resentment itself, and the act of attempting to resolve it (Hwang, 2017, p. 298). In addition, she details that Han in the form of anger, resentment, and self-blame must be expressed properly and thoroughly for it to be resolved. Besides, empathetic individuals and social circles should be available throughout this process to reach a larger transcending (Hwang, 2017, p. 297). In our case, these individuals could be the characters, the author, and sometimes even the reader.

3. The Grieving Along with the Resentful and the Hopeful

3.1 The Grieving: Sethe

As the main character in *Beloved*, Sethe is proud and determined. Her love for her children and motherly instincts are her most notable characteristics. While residing in 124, Cincinnati, Ohio, she experiences a double haunting. On the one hand, her mind is haunted by her memories of slavery; while on the other hand, her reality is haunted by the ghost of her dead daughter.

Although Sethe escaped enslavement in Sweet Home, while pregnant with her second daughter, twenty-eight days later, she was tracked by her former master, Schoolteacher, leading to her killing her eldest daughter. As of 1873, she lives idly with her remaining daughter, Denver, and Paul D, who is an old acquaintance from Sweet Home, after her sons fled from 124.

Sethe's journey into the deep wells of resentment, guilt, and despair began long before the death of her child. Even though she was a slave, she tried to live with the utmost dignity. Choosing a husband and sowing a wedding dress were a few of the ways she tried to stay human; however, life as a slave proved to be rarely dignifying.

The accumulation of her Han might have started when she was held down and mercilessly raped by the schoolteacher's nephews. "They took my milk" (p. 20), she says repeatedly, stressing this incident and highlighting her breast milk that was for her daughter and not for them. She, at the moment of recounting

what had happened to her, is still resentful which shows in her choice of words. They took what was never theirs. In retrospect, they took her, her ancestors, and the next generation. Viewed differently, this could also be a foreshadowing of taking her eldest daughter's life as well. This is unsurprising, since generations of black people's lives have been ended by enslavement.

Black motherhood is, to a great extent, wounded by this violation. Seizing one's agency and bodily autonomy alters one's mind, their perspective, and outlook on life. A motherhood that is fiddled with is a fragmented motherhood looking to breed resentment and an anger that is so profound, years won't be able to resolve, for it affects a fundamental part of one's identity (Lee, 2014, pp. 198-199).

Despite everything, Sethe takes action as those sorrowful emotions have not yet taken control of her. She smuggles her sons and oldest daughter, and then escapes, herself, to 124 where her mother-in-law resides. Sethe lived twenty-eight days of supposed freedom before slave hunters, under the permit of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, came looking to reclaim the property they had lost. Those twenty-eight days might represent a delayed emotional reaction of resentment and despair. The white ghost of enslavement continuously loomed around 124 threatening to breed her sons and sexually brutalize her daughters.

When schoolteacher and his company came for Sethe, she relived every horrid instance in Sweet Home once again. She tells Paul D, "Oh, no. I wasn't going back there. I don't care who found who. Any life but not that one. I went to jail instead" (p. 50), firmly establishing that imprisonment was better than going back to Sweet Home. Despair guided Sethe's hands to look for lifelines in order to end them before her hunters did. In a stark scene, Sethe murders her two-year-old daughter and is, then, sent to jail. Once she was released, she visited her daughter's grave, whose headstone engraving she paid for with her body, "ten minutes for seven letters" (p. 5), and accidentally giving the daughter the name Beloved.

The above sequence of events warrants an in-depth examination. First, Sethe, based on her memories and lived experiences, like any other slave, most likely reverted to a time when she was forced to work on plantations and then be ravaged for pleasure and benefit. Indeed, she and many other black women slaves

became reproduction factories against their wills. She explains that when “schoolteacher arrived... [He] punched the glittering iron out of Sethe’s eyes, leaving two open wells that did not reflect firelight” (p. 11). Recalling a time when her iron will and soul were broken. She saw a future drawn out for her children and she decided that she could never allow it to materialize.

In fact, Morrison writes near the end of the novel a chapter echoing many voices from the Middle Passage, as if to emphasize the gruesome beginnings of Han. For, indeed, those travels could be considered as the start of Han. Sethe aimed to unmake that bleak future; to unthread the Han that ties black slaves from the Middle Passage to her children, especially since Han is considered to offer “a path for the movement of the present into the past... [and] the past and present into the future” (Grinker, 1998, p. 78). In her innocent preservation attempt, she rationalized the breaking of a vicious cycle. Sethe declares, “‘I stopped him’, she said, staring at the place where the fence used to be. ‘I took and put my babies where they’d be safe’” (p. 193). The thought that her daughter and her daughter’s daughter might not be forced to carry generational resentment and unresolved grief most likely possessed Sethe justifying her actions.

Furthermore, one might oppose infanticide with motherhood as much as one might see infanticide as a continuation of motherhood. Heller (1994) emphasizes the importance of context when it comes to black female slaves’ motherhood, stating that the “impulse to infanticide... is in its own context a valid act of courage and familial preservation” (p. 116). Because, after all, how does one fully become a mother to slaves? The answer would be that they usually don’t. Many black women slaves lose their connection to their children. Others, like Sethe, kill them as younglings to spare them and spare themselves of the heartache. Sethe, in a twisted outcome, extended her motherhood beyond shackles, whips, and rape. It is that bitterness of what is to come that drove Sethe to act in the only manner available to her.

Second, Morrison shows another dimension of Han with how much Sethe dwells upon giving herself for the engraving of her child’s headstone. This bitterness that comes from debasing oneself one more time, despite being free for a long time, makes her grief stained and desperation not excused. In addition, it paints her sufferings in “shame” (Wang & Chen, 2015, p. 157). What is more baffling is when she wonders whether more minutes might have added “dearly”

to her daughter's grave, further showcasing the lows and traces of extinguished self-worth from years of enslavement. Her emotions funnel into an overpowering Han; one she wears around like scars; one that does not remove her pain.

When it comes to the aftermath of Sethe's actions, she was alienated from her community and almost sequestered in 124, which soon became haunted by the ghost of her daughter, who is now known to the reader as Beloved. Heller (1994) affirms that "Morrison suggests that a family closed off from caring relationships with nonkin is a family doomed to be consumed by the spirits of the unresolved past" (p. 106), essentially, confirming that isolation and alienation are part of what created the supernatural activity happening in 124. This unresolved past sparks an aura around one's existence, which, in turn, starts reeking of Han.

Sethe even suggests moving out to her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs, who herself has been a black female slave and knows what such entails. She attempts to console her by pointing out that "not a house in the country ain't packed to its rafters with some dead negro's grief" (p. 6). Sethe, then, starts enduring the ghost's appearances because she knows that this is her child coming for retribution, her own reckoning. And so, after some time when Denver asks her to move houses, she refuses, plagued by the time she escaped from Sweet Home and paid for it dearly. Sethe's chain of thoughts is constantly constructed and reconstructed but what is for sure is that she felt the resentment hovering over her house and chose to sit around and be fully subjected to Beloved's Han.

Granted that it might appear as if Sethe understands Beloved's resentment and anger, that became a strong Han, it soon becomes obvious to the reader that she is rather too immersed in her perspective. When Paul D asks "what kind of evil you got in here?" she responds that "it is not evil, just sad" (p. 10), while what conjured Beloved is more than just sadness. And when Denver identifies her sister as lonely, Sethe this time says "She is not lonely... mad maybe" (p. 16). Here, Sethe thinks that Beloved is no longer lonely since she is occupying the same house as them, but who is to confirm or understand a two-year-old ghost. This echoes the idea that Sethe is so convinced of the reasoning behind her actions that she shares, "she had to be safe and I put her where she would be" (p. 236), but if Beloved was put into safety, then would be no reason for her to be mad. This nonchalance and inconsistency on Sethe's part ignites a tedious

amount of emotions that validate the emergence of Han.

Just as Beloved's corporeal body entered 124, Sethe was elated to have her daughter back. Before this, she didn't realize that the crime she committed to save and unite her family broke it up further. Her codependency towards and enabling of Beloved is guilt-fueled, but this excessive attention becomes detrimental. The more Sethe gives, the more Beloved demands, adding to Sethe's already overflowing and consuming guilt.

It is worth noting that Sethe recognized Beloved's identity early on. In chapter twenty, Morrison, in Sethe's voice, writes the following sequence:

BELOVED, she my daughter... She come 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 quick...She had to be safe and I put her where she would be...Paul D ran her off so she had no choice but to come back to me in the flesh... I won't never let her go...When I explain it she'll understand... I'll tend her as no mother ever tended a child, a daughter.

Nobody will ever get my milk no more except my own children. (p. 236)

In the quote above, Sethe is certain that Beloved is her daughter and that she came back to be with her; that when Paul D chased the ghost version of her, she decided to materialize and keep her company. The issue is that no one can tell if Beloved was safe or if she felt betrayed, or better yet if she came back for retribution. Sethe is also confident that infanticide was the answer. To her infanticide is protection, it is "safe". Moreover, Sethe shows a degree of instability that disrupts her earlier confidence. She goes from not needing to explain to Beloved to being sure that when she explains to her why she had to end her life she'll understand vowing to repair their relationship and make amends. In the end, she returns to her rape. As a pivotal moment in her life, she goes back to relive that pain every time her motherhood is in question and every time that memory tarnishes her motherhood in her eyes. So, Sethe's guilt appears one more time when she asks Beloved, "do you forgive me? Will you stay?" (p. 254). Thus, this sequence of stream of thoughts mirrors Sethe's disturbed psyche; unreliable and unpredictable; a psyche in near destruction by Han.

The longer Beloved remained at 124, the weaker Sethe became which prompted Denver to seek help from their community. After the black women gather in front of 124, they sing and pray in order to exorcise Beloved. Sethe not

understanding their actions panics believing that they are dismissing her chance at redemption. When Mr. Bodwin, a white man living in town, arrives to check the commotion, Sethe mistakes him for Schoolteacher, so she tries to kill him with an ice pick. Nussbaum (2001) explains that emotions steer "forms of judgment" and that "the real, full recognition of [an] event [...] is the upheaval" (p. 22;45). Indeed, this is seen as her attempt at seeking to right her wrongs; to resolve her Han. This time she was determined to attack the white man and not her children. This could be interpreted as a 'rememory' of and the re-living of Han. When those Black women came together, they were fighting against the bigger more encompassing Han. Rody (1995) encapsulates this event in the following:

For Sethe a "rememory" (an individual experience) hangs around as a "picture" that can enter another's "rememory" (the part of the brain that "rememories") and complicate consciousness and identity. "Rememory" as trope postulates the interconnectedness of minds, past and present, and thus neatly conjoins the novel's supernatural vision with its aspiration to communal epic, realizing the "collective memory" of which Morrison speaks. (p. 101)

In other words, Morrison uses collective memory as a driving motive in this story. Therefore, it could be said that part of identity construction and awareness is the process of having one's individual experiences linger long enough to slip into others' 'rememories'. This is illustrated when the group of black women is trying to resolve the Han that has accumulated for generations, specifically from enslavement and the trauma it spawns (Lee, 2014, pp. 210-211). With their voices, they sing away at this Han in a desperate need to transmute their bodily ache into a cathartic song of resentment, sorrow, anger, and guilt. However, as it turns out, some just cannot release their Han nor resolve it, especially since Sethe goes mad after Beloved disappears.

3.2 The Resentful: Beloved

Beloved is a young girl who one day joined Sethe and Denver in living in 124. Throughout the story, she is revealed to be Sethe's dead oldest daughter. Beloved was murdered at the age of two by her mother in an attempt to spare her from a life of enslavement, a life her mother knew too well. Beloved's characterization is quite simple in presentation. An unseemly being with infant-like behavior, she is at first thought to be a victim of abuse by the inhabitants of 124 until she starts remembering memories only the deceased would know.

Beloved before appearing in flesh, had been haunting 124 resentful of her absence in the house. Morrison, immediately, sets the tone for her character at the very start of the first chapter by writing, "124 was spiteful. Full of baby's venom" (p. 3). Beloved is instantly designated as resentful and vengeful. An entity that is disturbing life in 124 causing the fleeing of Sethe's sons and the household's ousting from the community. Beloved, however, is a manifestation and a testament to tragic history. She represents, both, the aftermath and the beginning of cruelty and dehumanization of the black female community in America.

Beloved could be easily regarded as both the personification of Sethe's Han as well as an entity with her separate resentment. Her resentment is targeted towards her mother whom she thinks abandoned her (Lee, 2014, p. 188). Once Beloved came back in flesh and stood in front of Sethe she evolved from a mere presence to a solid reality leading to the belief that Han can be palpable and physical.

Beloved's Han does not only come from her untimely death but also from her unceremonious burial. Laid down, without a proper funeral, into a grave with a headstone engraved by a costly sum. In addition to that, Sethe's obliviousness towards Beloved offers little to no help. She constantly wonders about Beloved's persistent dwelling in 124, thinking, "who would have thought that a little old baby could harbor so much rage?" (p. 5), when much of what transpired before and after Beloved cultivated the resentment.

Beloved is appeased when being near her mother. Seeking her mother has been Beloved's journey of resolving her Han. That is interrupted when she notices Paul D lingering around her mother. She saw Paul D as a competition for Sethe's affections which is why she strived to break them apart by seducing him.

Through this, *Beloved* shows how “she feeds off... horrible memories” (Barnett, 1997, p. 418), and thus, exhibits her spitefulness, the same one Morrison told us about at the very beginning of the novel.

Beloved's perception of emotions is hectic and disorderly. She operates on impulse, especially if the technicality of her possessing the brain of a two-year-old is considered. It could be said that *Beloved* would do anything to keep her mother near her. This provokes questions about the legitimacy of her Han as an emotionally unstable two-year-old brain in a twenty-year-old body. Moreover, Hwang (2017) holds that “Han is the emotion of resentment devoid of the desire for revenge” (p. 304 *translation added*), which complicates this notion further by rising doubts over *Beloved* carrying Han to begin with.

Hwang (2017), however, later on, adds that Han “is the desire for the acknowledgment and the understanding of one's pain that arises from feeling wronged, and recognizing that such suffering was inevitable” (p. 304 *translation added*), which applies to *Beloved*, meaning that the possibility of her Han being more complex than what is known becomes reasonable. Indeed, Morrison introduces a couple of chapters from *Beloved*'s point of view prompting the belief that *Beloved* is not one person but a multitude of black voices. Rody (1995) contends that “Part of *Beloved*'s strangeness derives, then, from the emotional burden she carries as a symbolic compression of innumerable forgotten people into one miraculously resurrected personality, the remembering of the “sixty million” in one youthful body” (p. 104). Those ‘sixty million’ transported from African to America (because of the Atlantic slave trade) who were brutalized, debased, violated, dead and uncounted for often overlay over *Beloved*'s voice making the resentment she holds overlapping, unfathomable and unique.

By the same token, when *Beloved* chokes Sethe, it is revealed that *Beloved* is the resentment Sethe has against slavery, particularly because this act of choking is likened to the iron circles used on the enslaved. This gives *Beloved* a different dimension as she “gives expression to [Sethe's] own repressed inner conflicts” (Schmudde, 1992, p. 412). She holds Han; she is Han incarnated, but she is also Sethe's Han and that is evident when *Beloved* often repeats that she is not separate from her mother.

Morrison words Beloved's Han in a clever collective and encompassing manner. She asks her mother, "why did you leave me who am you?" (p. 256), as if saying, why did you leave me even though I am a black woman like you? Beloved and Sethe are part of the same traumatized community of black women, past, present, and future, and for Sethe to end Beloved's life before its time might have caused the first break into the community.

According to Rody (1995), "every American house is a haunted house" (p. 100), so when, by the end of the story, a group of black women come to exorcise Beloved, she automatically becomes the others' Han as well (Abelmann, 1996, pp. 36-37). They sing and pray away the collective trauma that accumulated on their shoulders for generations. Still, Beloved interprets her mother trying to attack Mr. Bodwin as Sethe abandoning her once more. And although Beloved is gone, her footsteps remain, raising the question: can Han really be resolved? The answer to that is that its physical manifestation might be dispelled or hidden, but its emotions could still be carried around in the form of resentment, anger, despair, guilt, and sorrow.

3.3 The Hopeful: Denver

As the youngest sibling of 124, Denver has stood witness to the eventful life her mother, Sethe, has lived through over time. Despite her upbringing, Denver exudes independence and an unapologetic straightforwardness. She is shy at times, and solitary most of the time even though she lives with her mother. Her perspective, unlike her exterior, is riddled with a yearning for any scraps of affection and attentiveness her mother could offer. Her storyline often frequents her birth story and how her mother was assisted by a white girl, Amy, who then helped give Denver her name. Contrary to her mother, she is approachable to the community and strives to better her situation.

Denver is a multi-dimensional character. Although she could be reserved and shy but straightforward and candid, she also carries a resentment of her own. This Han of hers is shown sometimes and hidden at other times. She feels as if she participated in her sister's murder when she drank Beloved's blood mixed with her mother's milk. She clearly states this when saying "Beloved is my sister. I swallowed her blood right along with my mother's milk... She was my secret company... I love my mother, but I know she killed one of her own daughters...

I'm scared of her because of it.” (p. 243). In effect, it is shown that Denver is scared that her mother might succumb to her own resentment, lash out, and hurt her too. In fact, Mohamed (2020) opines that Sethe had already hurt Denver by passing down her trauma and resulting Han to her daughter (p. 33).

Denver's emotions are a range of guilt and fright. She was actually not sentient enough to understand or rationalize what had happened to her sister. She gleaned her Han from her environment, from people avoiding her, her mother and their house, from her grandmother telling her stories and from hearing about the incident of her sister's murder from others in the community. What is worth noting here is that she is not deterred from Beloved's materialization into their life, indeed, she had long longed for company, for her mother has been the other ghost haunting 124.

In a similar vein, Morrison characterizes Denver by bluntness; more specifically the ability to be plain-spoken without shunning her vulnerable side. Denver finds herself trying to communicate her thoughts with her mother. She confronts:

I can't no more. I can't no more.

Can't what? What? Can't you?

I can't live here. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I can't live here. Nobody speaks to us, nobody comes by. Boys don't like me. Girls don't either. (p. 17)

In this dialogue Denver feels singled out. She is resentful of this situation and resentful of her mother who brought this situation upon them. She is being subjected to the others' resentment as well. It certainly requires an immense charge of Han to single out a household. Denver was losing opportunities because everyone was mentioning her mother's crimes. (Heller, 1994, p. 113)

Denver is met with opposition. Sethe once again builds a wall between her and her only kin left. As Sethe tries to blame the house or the ghost in the house, Denver promptly apprises, “It is not the house. It's us! and it's you!” (p. 17). She once again clearly articulates how her mother's unresolved grief and transmuted resentment have led to Denver stacking her own walls of Han.

Denver is so aware of her Han that she was one of the first to start seeing Beloved's corporeal body. In hindsight, this symbolizes that Denver was able to

see and confront Han. Her desperation for integration shaped her alertness and perception. Denver is not without any guilt or relative despair; it is just that she intricately experiences her emotions. If one is to carefully analyze her emotions, then one would find that she feels guilty for an event that preceded her consciousness, and yet she does not display any wisp of fright of Beloved. On the contrary, she passionately welcomes her into 124, happy to be able to care for the same being whose blood she nursed on as a baby (Synn, 2009, p. 283). This is also an opportunity presented to her to recover and discover their lost sisterhood and appease her loneliness (Sumathi, 2022, p. 6001). This leads to the final belief that Denver does not hold any resentment towards her sister. Her emotions cautiously pad the spectrum of guilt when it comes to Beloved.

On another note, Morrison demonstrates, time and again, Denver's ability to come back from her despair. Heller (1994) observes that Denver "emerges as the unlikely hero of the novel" (p. 115). Denver was always the one to step outside of 124 and attempt to integrate. When she, her mother and Paul D went to the carnival she was often greeted. Moreover, she is frequently linked to her grandmother, Baby Suggs, who used to tell her stories of her father and of their ancestors. Verily, Denver absorbing all these tales, Sethe's and Beloved's included, is not a surprise nor is it an oddity for her character. Morrison aimed for her to understand seeing as understanding the choking sentiments of grief, resentment and endless sorrow would eventually set her free. It is understood here that encountering these sentiments does not always mean crumbling down and surrendering to Han, but, here, it shows that such confrontation can kick start a liberation.

Denver never allowed herself to be swallowed by Han, slowed by Han, or burned from the inside out by Han. On top of that, Denver found herself questioning her mother's actions. She wondered how Sethe was able to fix an injured dog and not give up on it and yet leave what was left of her family in shambles. Denver wondered but never dwelled on such long enough to hold her from resolving her Han.

From the moment Denver's fear was directed at her mother's actions and not at the ghost of Beloved, she became free. Her compassion for her sister is unmatched. She expresses that Beloved is "not evil. But not sad either" (p. 16), she is rather "Rebuked. Lonely and rebuked" (p. 16). This understanding, Denver

extends toward her sister, helped “break the spell Beloved has woven inside 124” (Schmudde p.413).

The final stop in Denver’s journey of resolving or releasing Han is her setting out to help and feed her mother and sister by trying to find work and ultimately telling her community about what happened to them in 124 (Heller, 1994, p. 115). She told their tale, and sought another black woman because she understood what was needed to bring her mother back. Hwang (2017) affirms, “Denver listens and understands her mother’s story” (p. 306 *translation added*), and argues that Denver “changes it into her own story and recounts it to the black female community...” (p. 306 *translation added*). Morrison, here, utilizes Denver as a strengthening agent between the black women who have long drifted apart, each one lost in her Han and frightened that the others’ Han would infringe on hers.

In fact, Heller (1994) expresses that “Denver not only saves her mother’s life but also engages the powerful presence of the ‘thirty women’... Denver represents hope for the future” (p. 115), solidifying once again Denver’s crescendo-like existence. Denver attempted to resolve her mother’s Han which manifested in the form of Sethe’s “enslavement to Beloved’s ravenous appetite for the mothering she never had” (Heller, 1994, p. 115). At a point in time, Beloved needed to be gone, for her existence aggravated the resentment into the bodily ache some know it to be.

After Beloved disappears, Denver resumes her life, attempting to learn the “book stuff” under a white teacher and seeking a future that is less harrowing and damaged than her past and present (Baynar, 2007, p. 4). From a different perspective, however, this change might instigate the question of whether Morrison is yet done with the theme of slavery or not and whether there ever is going to be hope, or is Han an endless cycle.

4. Toni Morrison Joining the Chorus

Inspired by the real-life story of Margaret Garner, who expressed, “I will not let those children live how I have lived” (Morrison, *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, 1994, p. 207), Morrison presents the authentic black female experience in *Beloved* ensuring the amplification of their herstories¹ and the emotional resonance of their Han. She undertakes a mission of collecting the lost pieces of black history on American soil. She writes Sethe, *Beloved*, Denver along with the others’ voices spanning from the Middle Passage to current times in order to prove that resentment surpasses the individual black woman. Han in this narrative becomes a collective song sung for freedom; for the need to transcend sorrow. She candidly tells Naylor that:

There’s a lot of danger for me in writing it, which is what I am very excited about. The effort... The responsibility that I feel for the woman I’m calling Sethe, and for all of these people; these...unceremoniously buried, people made literate in art...[The] artistic inner tension those people create in me; the fear of not properly, artistically, burying them, is extraordinary. (Morrison, 1994, p. 209)

Morrison admits the risk of and the obligation that comes from writing such tales and characters, like Sethe, who are excluded from art. She invokes an intriguing idea of unburying those who have been unceremoniously buried in order to properly lay them down to rest again which could be seen as Morrison, herself, practicing the resolving of the black experience of Han.

Although Jung (2014) believes that Morrison writing this story “suggests that black people can now express their internalized Han [Resentment] and find ways to escape from these scars of the past” (p. 235 *translation added*), it is difficult to find the such in this narrative as *Beloved*’s footprints come and go. Even though people forgot her name, *Beloved* persists and Morrison ensures that she persists by emphasizing the ‘rememory’ of this story. Morrison tells us to not forget or ‘pass on’ this story as the community did. She keeps extending these stories as a way of soothing the grief of those unjustly harmed and forgotten alluding to the fact that forgetting creates more unresolved resentment (Synn, 2009, p. 285).

¹ History from a female standpoint emphasizing the otherwise forgotten women’s roles in the making and unfolding of key historical events.

5. CONCLUSION

While analyzing the formation, manifestation and possible resolution of Han in *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, Han, an untranslatable emotion, serving as the accumulation of resentment, anger, guilt, sorrow, despair...etc., transcends its Korean origin to aid other oppressed communities in identifying and understanding their emotions, specifically the ones that shape their past, present, and future. Throughout this paper, Sethe, Beloved, and Denver were examined in terms of their feelings/Han. We investigated how each character displayed their Han, along with their journey battling, accepting or resolving it. It was, notably, found out that Han is, ultimately, specific to its holder, and yet carries an additional quality of being collective.

As stated above, different Hans were recognized through this analysis. As much as Sethe tried to justify her actions, she constantly found herself drowning in Han and, thus, drowning in pain. This resulted in Sethe being dubbed as unstable, self-destructive, and unable to resolve her resentment, guilt, and pain despite the latter being revealed as a shared experience. For that, Han is uncovered to be as collective as the 'rememories' and trauma it stems from. Likewise, Beloved possessed a complexity in her Han. She felt it whilst being it. Consequently, Han can disappear or be hidden, if shown physically, but emotionally it lingers. In contrast, when it came to Denver, who struggled with the emotion of guilt above all, she succeeded in dispelling it by employing her ability to observe, understand, and integrate into her community. She was the only one able to resolve her Han. By and large, this analysis helped with gaining a deeper understanding of the main characters of *Beloved*. A tortured history often breeds tortured generations and that is evident in the author, Morrison herself, writing *Beloved* in order to repel the Han of her ancestors all whilst prompting the world to not forget but to understand.

Though the application of Han as a concept of examination might be difficult to grasp, it undeniably offered a new angle of exploration, especially given the abundance of research existing. In the end, this reading of *Beloved* challenges forgotten history and exposes the pained and resentful voices of black female slaves. The necessity for confronting one's Han is a sharp but necessary

edge to step over so as to retrieve one's history. No matter how strong the Han, and no matter how painful the history.

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