دراسات فنية
مخبر الفنون والدراسات الثقافية
جامعة أبو بكر بلقايد تلمسان
Algerian Scientific Journal Platform

Volume 12 N°: 01 (2025) p 396/408

Past in the Flesh: Destabilizing Slavery Memories in Tony Morrison's Beloved (1987)

Belmerabet Fatiha

[1] Department of English, Faculty of Letters and Languages, Ibn Khaldun University -Tiaret - fatiha.belmerabet@univ-tiaret.dz

Received: 21/07/2025 Accepted: 10/11/2025

Abstract ;(not more than 10 Lines)

In a series of flashbacks, Beloved*'s narration sways between present life and past memories of its characters, who continuously invoke their shocking experiences with slavery, loss, motherhood, and sacrifice. Toni Morrison's non-linearity in depicting their stories challenges their attempts to identify themselves as free slaves. The recalled memories are supported by the apparition of Beloved, Sethe's deceased young daughter, who worsens her feelings of guilt. The present paper aims to discuss Sethe's abrupt memories that impede her psychological emancipation from the past and cause her self-damage. It also seeks to uncover some of slavery's physical and psychological effects on Black people, which history often leaves untold. Through careful textual analysis, this research investigates the major impacts of the traumatic past on the present. It scrutinises the omnipresent and disturbing nature of the past by addressing the constituents of this painful haunting. It also aims to explore the implications of this haunting on the protagonists' lives and how they engage with, reject, or repress their past experiences. Ultimately, to comprehend the novel's broad perspective on the past, it is important to discover the extent to which the characters can evade or confront the haunting and whether such evasion is still possible.*

Article info

Received 21/07/2025

Accepted 10/11/2025

Keyword:

- ✓ *Beloved*
- ✓ *Slavery*
- ✓ Traumatic past
- ✓ Psychological emancipation
- ✓ Haunting

1. *Introduction*

Beloved is Toni Morrison's outstanding novel discussing through a personal perspective a set of themes that strike at the individual and collective memory of African American former slaves. It is based on a true story told by a former slave, Margaret Garner, who ran away from her slaveholder, and when captured, she was obliged to kill her young daughter to protect her from the infernal conditions of slavery. The novel reviews Garner's narratives and puts forward a comprehensive depiction of the

Correspondingauthor: Fatiha BELMERABET

actual situation of the slaves after the war of emancipation known as the Civil War. It tells a collection of narrative accounts never written before from former slaves' perspectives and experiences. All vehicled by her characters, partial and highly emotional, Beloved encompasses the fragmented memories of Sethe, Paul D, Denver, Baby Suggs, Beloved, and other characters.

In Beloved, the past and present are mixed together to form a cohesive story that tells about emotionally and physically tormented Black people. The protagonist, Sethe, committed a crime while fleeing her masters; she killed her daughter to spare her the misery and suffering of slavery. The daughter killed never really dies; she returns in the form of a ghost in the flesh to constantly remind Sethe of her crime. In this line, the novel deals with slavery, memory, motherhood, and mainly the trauma's consequences on the former slaves. It depicts a period of a brutal history that has long resisted to be captured in historical accounts. Morrison's novel moves back and forth in a non-linear storytelling technique to provide an encompassing vision of slavery and its effects on individuals and on the Black community as a whole. It depicts the present as haunted by the past and the freed slaves as deeply entrapped by their terrible experience with slavery, which seems as if it never ends. Moreover, their memories often resurface to disorient and arouse fear in the present life.

Beloved power lies in its exploration of the profound psychological and physical scars left by slavery; it highlights its influence on its survivors. Sethe struggles with a haunting past that refuses to vanish. This past symbolises the complex interplay between the tormenting memories and her attempts to create a new life. Morrison intentionally set into pieces her narrative structure to mirror the disordered and painful memories that hinder the characters' efforts to construct a solid sense of self.

In *Beloved*, memories are not just emotional souvenirs; they are omnipresent. Moreover, they interfere with and distort the identities of those who bear them. The present paper analyses Morrison's use of the past and the memories of her characters through flashbacks to mirror the broken identities and the present suffering shaped by the trauma of slavery. By a close examination of pivotal excerpts and character dynamics, this study aims to describe the powerful reflections that *Beloved* delivers on the enduring effects of slavery on the free slaves. It also emphasises their struggle to find peace between their traumatic history and their hopes for the future.

2. Slavery, the Past and survival in *Beloved*

Slavery is a state of severe dispossession of people's rights; total ownership of human beings. It deprived the enslaved of living and owned their bodies, minds, emotions, and even their spirits. What is hellish about slavery is that it was lawful, structured, forced, and inheritable; a newborn of slave parents is a slave by heritage (Holt & Brown, 2000). Slavery began in the USA at the beginning of the 17th century in Virginia when the companies launched their greedy search for wealth. Slaveholders saw their slaves as objects-inhumane, immoral, and backward. Even their original African names were altered to new European names. In their passage to the New World, "Sixty million and more" (Morrison, 1987, cover) of enslaved people were stripped of their families, motherland, identity, culture, and many of them died.

This dehumanizing process was sustained by a set of laws and regulations that satisfied the whites. In slavery, sexual abuse was one of the most practiced acts, not driven by desire alone but by the reproductive capacity of those Black women who gave birth to a considerable number of babies whose future was inevitably slavery (White, 1999). Though slavery was shared between men and women, the

latter doubly endured the horrors of slavery through physical, psychological, and emotional pain. The following excerpt is from Paul D's conversation with Sethe, where he explains the dehumanization and domination caused by the rules of slavery:

> 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. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up (Morrison, 1987, p. 475).

Being dirtied here is not physical but moral; slavery creates in Black people a sense of rejection, worthlessness, self-hatred, and mainly self-alienation.

After their emancipation in the 19th century, Black people still endured the effects of slavery that the whites wanted to forget. Paul D recounts the everlasting psychological scars slavery left in his soul. He attests, "But I wasn't allowed to be and stay what I was... But there was no way I'd ever be Paul D again, living or dead... I was something else, and that something was less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub" (Morrison, 1987, p. 141). Slavery and its holders distorted the very manhood of Black men, making them vulnerable and animal-like. What Paul D tells about Sweet Home men's status is awful and painful, a dehumanization that was unveiled by Morrison's narration of all the atrocities Black people endured under slavery.

The upcoming expressions display the reduction of those men into useless pets when they left Sweet Home: "they were trespassers among the human race. Watchdogs without teeth; steer bulls without horns; gelded workhorses whose neigh and whinny could not be translated into a language responsible humans spoke" (Morrison, 1987, p. 139). Morrison succeeds in portraying the slaves as they saw themselves, showing their loss of a sense of self and their identity. They think they belong to nowhere and to nobody, unwelcome among other races, and their pain is unintelligible to normal people.

Among the most important speakers for the Blacks, particularly women’s cause is Toni Morrison, whose works address slavery and its devastating effects on the slaves and the upcoming generations. She carefully bridges the gap between what is written in other slave narratives and historical records through adding the missing subjectivities to her narratives.

Oblivion is unacceptable to Morrison, who continuously voices the voiceless Black people (Tanritanir & Akşak, 2008). She also attempts to rewrite literature from the historical retrieved from the mouths and perspectives of Black individuals to leave a rich heritage for their communities. In her book *The Site of Memory* (1987), Morrison claims: “somebody has to tell somebody something” (Qtd. in Mohammed, 2018, p. 49), she takes this responsibility to tell about the slaves past; for she knows that their past reinforces their present and future. In this regard, Morrison conveys the importance of remembrance through Sethe’s speech to Denver, though which she is introducing the everlasting impact of slavery on the people and the places where is happened:

> It's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else. Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It's never going away. Even if the whole farm-every tree and blade of grass dies. The picture is still there, and what's more, if you go there-you who were never there-if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you (Morrison, 1987, p. 71).

This excerpt demonstrates Morrison's desire to showcase the transmitted legacy of slavery and its memory that transcends the individual to the collective and the psychological to the physical, extending even to environmental memory. Even their house "124 WAS SPITEFUL. Full of a baby's venom" (Morrison, 1987, p. 2), which symbolizes the rage and trauma inherited from slavery, invades even the spaces occupied by former slaves. Consequently, they and their children are obligated to find a way to cope with this spite. Morrison emphasizes the importance of recounting the past to people who did not live it to avoid rememory. Rememory, as Kubitschek (1998) notes, is the concept coined by Morrison to link memory to remembering, intentionally retrieving the overlooked past, which sometimes collides with and affects people across time.

Beloved's characters consider being white a source of horror, revealing slavery as a lingering, bleak form of survival for Black individuals and stressing the monstrosity of the experience through the perspective of African American female slaves. "Those white things have taken all I had or dreamed," she said, "and broke my heartstrings too. There is no bad luck in the world but whitefolks" (Morrison, 1987, pp. 171-172). Everything related to whites was rejected and despised by Black women; even their own babies became symbols of white people's rape and abuse. Ella, a young girl, gave birth to a white baby, the inevitable result of rape; she refused to feed him because he reminded her of her doom. She decided to "not nurse a hairy white thing, fathered by 'the lowest yet'" (Morrison, 1987, p. 492). She called his father 'the lowest yet' and referred to him as 'a hairy white thing.' In Beloved's stories, even parenthood is distorted by slavery.

Moreover, Black people refuse to believe that a white person would help or do something good in their favor. Here, Ella expresses her opinion about whites when Stamp Paid told her about the white woman who helped Sethe deliver her baby in the woods: "Anything white floating around in the woods—if it ain't got a shotgun, it's something I don't want no part of!" (Morrison, 1987, p. 365).
Morrison plays the roles of historian and reporter to collect the stories of Black people; she mentions both the bad and good aspects related to white slave owners. She recounts her characters' narratives about the Garners, the owners of Sweet Home, who respectfully dealt with their slaves. We read: "a boss who showed them how to shoot and listened to what they had to say. A mistress who made their soap and never raised her voice. For twenty years, they had all lived in that cradle" (Morrison, 1987, p. 417). She also mentions their narratives about the schoolteacher, the pitiless new owner whose atrocities troubled all the enslaved individuals and degraded them to animality, which led them to run away. She expresses his troubling presence as devastating since, after he arrived, "the cradle already split" (Morrison, 1987, p. 417).

While giving birth to her baby, Denver, the fleeing Sethe was so damaged that she almost surrendered to death. The burden of conception in slavery is not blessed or secure; it is a terrifying act of survival, "She remembered thinking: 'Well, at least I don't have to take another step.' A dying thought if ever there was one" (Morrison, 1987, p. 58). Amy, the poor white girl who met Sethe in the woods, offered physical and spiritual assistance to the lost Sethe. She urged her to crawl. Crawling is a true act of survival and resistance. It also represents rebirth and the beginning of Sethe's motherhood. Morrison depicts Amy, an outsider, as an unlikely midwife to guide and help Sethe be free from her burdensome pregnancy. "You stay the night here, snake get you." "Well, he may as well come on. I can't stand up let alone walk and God help me, Miss , I can't crawl." "Sure you can, Lu. Come on," said Amy" (Morrison, 1987, p. 66).

Two types of white supremacy are deliberately conveyed in *Beloved*; the Garners and Amy symbolize the softer type, while the schoolteacher, who “broke into children what Garner had raised into men” (Morrison, 1987, p. 419), and his nephews symbolize the extremist and more militant type (Keizer, 1999). Even Beloved speaks about the white men, referring to them as “the men without skin” (Morrison, 1987, p. 409). As she speaks with the language of a child, she does not mention the word white; to her, they are without skin. This alludes to them as people without hearts and feelings, because she remembers: “One of them was in the house I was in. He hurt me” Beloved tells her mother (Morrison, 1987, p. 409).

Sethe and Paul D try to tell Denver things about her father Halle, a father she does not know, and about Sweet Home, a place she ignores. Their narration bewilderes her and makes her think that "both belonged to them and not to her. That her own father's absence was not hers" (Morrison, 1987, p. 24). Morrison displays Sethe and Paul D's desire to transmit their shared memory of the past to Denver, who only knows her home on 124 Bluestone Road and her family members: Sethe, the mother; Baby Suggs, the grandmother; and her two brothers, who escaped because they were frightened by the strange occurrences inside their house. The novel's focal point is that "anything dead coming back to life hurts"; it hurts Sethe and Paul D and they unintentionally transmit this pain to Denver who tries to shield herself.

Gallego Durán (2019) notes that, isolation tints Denver’s life; she neither belongs to Sethe and Paul D nor shares their memories. Consequently, she is estranged in her own family circle, a mother, who is not a good companion for her and Paul D, the stranger from Sethe past. This isolation is imposed on her and thus, her alienation is due to the absence of past memories that possibly will make her belong to the other characters, and share their feelings.

By the end of the novel, after Beloved has disappeared, her departure causes pain and sadness to Sethe; yet it signifies the final phase of healing. As Amy once said to her: “Can't nothing heal without pain” (Morrison, 1987, p. 152). Morrison confirms several times through Paul D's words that Sethe's story “is not a story to pass on,” and that “he wants to put his story next to hers.” They are finally together with the conviction that some memories must be neglected to carry on an unburdened life, free from the past, and to offer themselves and Denver the happiness they deserve. As he says: “We can make a life, girl. A life” (Morrison, 1987, p. 90).

To construct a promising new story and leave the past behind, Paul D says to Sethe, "me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow" (Morrison, 1987, p. 521). Here, "yesterday" represents past memories, which need to be altered by future hopes. In doing so, Paul D answers Sethe’s internal question at the very beginning of their encounter when she fearfully wondered, “Would it be all right to go ahead and feel? Go ahead and count on something?” (Morrison, 1987, p. 75). At that time, Sethe’s thoughts were possessed by the trauma of losing someone, which prevents her from moving forward, feeling, and leaving the past behind.

Beloved reveals a critical period in American history by portraying both personal and collective traumas. The past in the novel symbolizes the tormenting legacy of slavery as a whole, as well as Sethe's specific traumatic infanticide. The narrative's central point is the dialectic between the reciprocal remembrance and the connection of the personal past with the broader shared experience. Thus, the novel traces Sethe's journey from loneliness and deep emotional pain toward a process of healing and reconnection with a community that has also been traumatised. Morrison unveils the

characters' multifaceted and often agonizing connection with their past, which is certainly linked to the violent stories of slavery: "If it's still there, waiting, that must mean that nothing ever dies… Nothing ever does," she said (Morrison, 1987, pp. 71-72). This sentence illustrates Morrison's fundamental notion of time and memory. Sethe does not consider time or memory the way others do; the past is as real and alive as the present in her view. Slavery never dies; its suffering persists to haunt people and places. It highlights the durability of pain and re-memory as a living force that never dies.

Morrison alludes to the potent existence of the past and its influence on Sethe's present and future: "But her brain was not interested in the future. Loaded with the past and hungry for more, it left her no room to imagine, let alone plan for, the next day" (Morrison, 1987, p. 137). Sethe's contradictory thoughts, swaying between moving on and staying in her past, are also conveyed through her refusal to think about her husband Halle, the man who left her unprotected with her children. She replies to Paul D's news about Halle: "I don't want to know or have to remember that. I have other things to do: worry, for example, about tomorrow, about Denver, about Beloved, about age and sickness, not to speak of love" (Morrison, 1987, p. 137).

Morrison follows the characters' efforts, sometimes to face, and other times to escape the pain that history has caused. Although there are clear attempts by *Beloved*'s characters to separate themselves from their direct past and endeavor to avoid recalling its events, it is only by facing it that they can engage with their current reality and understand their connection with their community and the external world. The past is the central focus of the novel, as it exerts a powerful influence over the protagonists' present and future.

Although the story takes place in 1873 after the Civil War, it maintains a consistently smooth connection between past and present. In her article "A Blessing and Burden: The Relation to the Past in *Sula, Song of Solomon*, and *Beloved*" (1993), Guth D. illustrates this dynamic as a deeply solid relationship, describing the present as an eerie mother and the past as her killed and resurrected baby. Similarly, Krumholz L. (1999) notes that Morrison does more than evoke a historical sense; she brings the past into the present through the mysterious and unsettling figure of Beloved, who symbolizes the return of repressed trauma. Beloved thus becomes a personification of the traumatic past, which steadily intrudes upon and shapes the present in a broader dimension that can be acknowledged as an expression of collective societal trauma or as a symbol of a whole country's unresolved and shocking history.

In this vein, Morrison allusion to the resurfacing past in the novel through the ghost Beloved is not a conscious act but rather a spontaneous resurrection of buried pain. "None could appreciate the safety of ghost company... Even Sethe didn't love it. She just took it for granted--like a sudden change in the weather" (Morrison, 1987, p. 74). The ghost of Beloved is not a mere apparition; it symbolizes Sethe's past and her painful experience with slavery which comes back in the flesh to look natural. In *Beloved*, the past is not something that hides behind time; it appears to possess the present and shape the future. It seems natural, like weather which no resistance can stop or change; it is taken for granted. The same thing happens with unresolved trauma that is no longer questioned or resisted; Sethe involuntarily lives with it.

When analyzing the social bonds depicted in the story, the notion of family among the slaves, in its common meaning, was not even apparent before the mid-19th century. Williams (2017) notes that slavery deprived Black people of family creation and made peace and security among families

impossible. This fragmentation and instability are conveyed in Baby Suggs' life; this old woman was raped by several white men who fathered her children: “So Baby's eight children had six fathers” (Morrison, 1987, p. 44). Baby Suggs’ family is shattered in different ways, including separation from her children and death. As an enslaved woman, her consent and emotions were ignored; to conceive was forced and involuntary. Therefore, motherhood is fragile and distorted by slavery.

Morrison continues telling about Baby Suggs' tragedy of losing her children who:

> were sold and gone and she had not been able to wave goodbye. To make up for coupling with a straw boss for four months in exchange for keeping her third child, a boy, with her--only to have him traded for lumber in the spring of the next year and to find herself pregnant by the man who promised not to and did (Morrison, 1987, p. 45).

Baby Suggs did neither have the force nor the will to say goodbye to her abducted and traded children by her slaveholder, since she knew that her losses would not stop, and sooner another child would be taken from her. Her ability to form and sustain human bonds is struck by the constant loss of her beloved. "In all of Baby's life, as well as Sethe's own, men and women were moved around like checkers" (Morrison, 1987, p. 44). This statement illustrates how slavery treated people as possessions, mere objects. Their fellows, families, and even their identities are all at the mercy of their masters.

The following illustration compiles three perpetuated costs of slavery: robbed motherhood, physical mistreatment, and family annihilation. Sethe's suffering is both bodily and emotional . Morrison narrates: "That after her husband had disappeared; that after her milk had been stolen, her back pulped, her children orphaned, she was not to have an easeful death. No" (Morrison, 1987, p. 60). Slavery has stolen her freedom, her dignity, and her instinctive ability to be a mother and a woman.

Morrison describes slavery's continual severing of maternal ties through Sethe, whose single remembrance of her mother is her back. To her, her mother is just anonymous, remote, and silent. "She remembered only song and dance. Not even her own mother, who was pointed out to her by the eight-year-old child who watched over the young ones—pointed out as the one among many backs turned away from her, stooping in a watery field" (Morrison, 1987, p. 58). Her mother was hanged, and she does not know the reason why; all she knows is that there were other women with her when she was hanged. In one of the numerous incidents in Sethe's life as a slave when she was captured, raped, and tortured by the schoolteacher and his nephews, Sethe became mentally disordered, which constantly frustrates her perspective on her identity as a woman, a mother, and a former slave. A personality that, according to Suero and Mary (2000), is transformed into a mere animal stripped of its humanity.

Sethe narrates the rest of the horrible acts she endured with the slaveholders. After they savagely raped her, she says, "After I left you, those boys came in there and took my milk" (Morrison, 1978, p. 32). The act that profoundly hurts and dehumanizes Sethe is the fact that the rapists forcibly sucked the milk out of her breasts, which would have been the natural food for her baby. Details about her pain from the whipping are not mentioned, but her grief over her lost milk is constantly revealed. She articulates her profound sorrow:"There was no nursing milk to call my own. I know what it is to be without the milk that belongs to you; to have to fight and holler for it, and to have so little left" (Morrison, 1978, p. 384). Sethe repeatedly recounts this incident with agony. Through this emphasis, Morrison illustrates how the abuse by white masters deprives enslaved women of their natural connection with their babies.

After Paul D tells Sethe that her husband Halle saw the whole scene of her milk robbery from the barn attic and did not act to stop them, she was angry, and her heart was shattered to pieces. She keeps asking Paul D, "He saw them boys do that to me and let them keep on breathing air? He saw? He saw? He saw?" (Morrison, 1978, p. 131). Every aspect of family bonds is affected by this incident. To Sethe, Halle left her to the atrocities of the rapists, and to Halle, this act devastated him as a man, a husband, and a father, just as it did to Sethe. Paul D witnessed his sudden change and deep sorrow after the incident and tells her that: "It broke him… He had butter all over his face" (Morrison, 1978, p. 134). This metaphor signifies Halle's feelings of humiliation and disgrace caused by the violation of his wife.

Paul D's story also reflects his strong will to survive, as after he ran away from Sweet Home, he continuously sought refuge by running and hiding. He roamed the countryside, as he had no one to turn to; the only thing that mattered to him was survival, far from the plantation he had escaped., "After Alfred, he had shut down a generous portion of his head, operating on the part that helped him walk, eat, sleep, sing" (Morrison, 1978, p. 80). Morrison conveys his sense of survival through his detachment from feelings, focusing on living solely by walking, eating, sleeping, and singing. He behaves "as if has seen and felt it all" (Morrison, 1978, p. 28). And declares to Sethe: "I'm a grown man with nothing new left to see or do and I'm telling you it ain't easy" (Morrison, 1978, p. 28). Paul D "takes the sense of survival a step farther, as if he had exhausted life's possibilities in his continuous wandering from place to place. This wandering marks him as a character with no roots, no sense of family, or community" (Gallego Durán, 2019, p. 12).

When Paul D finds Sethe and Denver, he clings to them as strongly as he can. As a lost man, he finally finds a family—someone he knew in the past and someone with whom he shared life as enslaved people. Though she is not a family member, he feels he belongs to her and wants to help her and Denver as much as he can. Moreover, he wants to reassure Sethe that his presence with them is for their benefit, not his. He says:

> Sethe, if I'm here with you, with Denver, you can go anywhere you want. Jump, if you want to, 'cause I'll catch you, girl. I'll catch you "fore you fall. Go as far inside as you need to, I'll hold your ankles. Make sure you get back out. I'm not saying this because I need a place to stay. That's the last thing I need. I told you, I'm a walking man, but I been heading in this direction for seven years (Morrison, 1987, p. 90)

Slavery's effects are transmitted through generations, even to Denver; Sethe's newborn who was fed with "her mother's milk right along with the blood of her sister" (Morrison, 1978, p. 293). This occurred when her sister was murdered by her mother in a desperate act to save her from returning to slavery. Morrison blends milk and blood as symbols of the interplay between life and death. The child is experiencing the pain, trauma, and death that slavery has infiltrated into her mother's present. This image of distorted motherhood, which became a killer, along with the milk mixed with blood, suggests the continuity of slavery's effects.

One of the pivotal scenes in the novel is when Sethe escapes from the plantation and is tracked by the schoolteacher, the new slaveholder of Sweet Home. After he catches up to her, Sethe tries to kill her children to prevent their return to the plantation. Ultimately, she kills one of her two daughters by

cutting her throat with a saw and deeply wounds her two sons. Morrison portrays the scene of infanticide as such:

> She simply swung the baby toward the wall planks, missed and tried to connect a second time, when out of nowheremin the ticking time the men spent staring at what there was to stare the old nigger boy, still mewing, ran through the door behind them and snatched the baby from the arch of its mother's swing (Morrison, 1978, p. 287).

The action is depicted in its full brutality; she purposefully wants to confront the reader with the terror of the act a mother is committing, and by extension, the awfulness of slavery that leads her to such an option. This moment reveals how far a mother would go to protect her children, even in the most bitter and tragic ways. Fuston-White (2002) comments on this scene and posits that it was not an act of insanity, but the truth of slavery that led this woman to commit infanticide, remaining conscious of her action and its terror. Ultimately, Sethe's crime did not go unpunished; she was imprisoned with her newborn baby, Denver. While her remaining sons were left under the custody of their grandmother, Baby Suggs, an abolitionist helped Sethe to avoid a death sentence.

Survival is the main theme that pervades all the characters, particularly Sethe, whose flight from the plantation with her children heightened her will to survive. A will that dehumanizes her at several points: "God do what He would, I'm gonna eat his feet off... I was hungry to do it. Like a snake. All jaws and hungry" (Morrison, 1987, p. 61). This expression illustrates the intensity of her psychological and physical need to survive; she likens herself to a wild animal. It also emphasizes how slavery dehumanizes and demoralizes even a mother when survival is at risk.

In another passage, Sethe recalls the scar on her body, a sign of the torture she endured as a slave, and the other scar in her soul, embodied in the ghost of her lost child, a result of her desperate action to spare her from the horrific realities of slavery. Nothing for Sethe was free; she paid too much to survive. She expresses her refusal to flee or to change, revealing her exhaustion and the brutal determination stemming from trauma. This quote illustrates how Sethe is trapped between her past suffering and her present with her daughter, Denver, whose protection seems a priority for her. She narrates to Paul D:

> I got a tree on my back and a haint in my house, and nothing in between but the daughter I am holding in my arms. No more running—from nothing. I will never run from another thing on this earth. I took one journey and I paid for the ticket, but let me tell you something, Paul D Garner: it cost too much! Do you hear me? something, Paul Garner: it cost too much! Do you hear me? **(**Morrison, 1987, p. 29).

Morrison’s depiction of her characters’ experiences as enslaved Black females is extensively revealed through the scars on their bodies. Her accounts often revisit the marks left by the past. Vickroy (2002) observes that the bond to the agonizing past is shown and repeated through the bodies of Sethe and Beloved as well. Scars in *Beloved* are symbols of the tormenting past of its characters. Beloved’s neck scar is clearly shown to Sethe to indicate that the ghost is her own child, whom she once killed. Therefore, both characters have scars which need healing. This is another recollection of the past through Beloved's ghost, who returns in the flesh and symbolizes Sethe's past that persists in her life. When Beloved returned to her, Sethe regained all her affection and attention.

Denver, the surviving daughter in Sethe's life, was pushed away: “the two of them cut Denver out of the games” (Morrison, 1987, p. 451). The past invades Sethe's life; she lost her job and Paul D, who

was frightened by Beloved, and almost lost her daughter, Denver. Sethe takes on the painful duty of piecing together the memories of her past through recounting fragmented memories and incomplete narratives, a process that is crucial for Beloved's existence and gradually drives Sethe into insanity, social alienation, loss, and loneliness.

3. Slavery and Love's Repression in Beloved

Loving, or the feeling of cherishing someone, seems to be hazardous in the stories told by characters in Beloved. Being a slave means being owned, a property, having no rights, and no room for love. Loving in *Beloved* is deeply connected with pain, loss, and death. The few memories of love the characters, men and women, exhibit are overshadowed by painful traumatic events. Norms of love are broken; Sethe tried to kill her children because she loved them and wanted to protect them from slavery, and eventually, she killed Beloved, her baby girl, and injured her two sons. "Mother love was a killer" (Morrison, 1987, p. 252). This statement highlights how dangerous a mother under slavery can be when loving her children.

Slaves could not feel love for their children properly because they did not own them; they belonged to the institution. They were afraid they might be taken, killed, or sold whenever the master wanted. Here, Sethe is explaining to Paul D:

> Look like I loved 'em more after I got here. Or maybe I couldn't love 'em proper in Kentucky because they wasn't mine to love. But when I got here, when I jumped down off that wagon-there wasn't nobody in the world I couldn't love if I wanted to (Morrison, 1987, p. 309).

Her words show that love is associated with freedom; they demonstrate that she carries love for her children and the world in her heart, but it remains unexpressed until she leaves the plantation.

Paul D, as a man, has also experienced this type of deprivation of love because "the men who had the guns... And these 'men' who made even vixen laugh could, if you let them, stop you from hearing doves or loving moonlight. So you protected yourself and loved small" (Morrison, 1987, p. 310). He describes the cruelties that whites inflicted on the slaves and how they bleak everything beautiful and transformed love into something dangerous; therefore, they kept themselves protected from harm. He continues describing the terrors of loving and being loved under slavery, saying: "A woman, a child, a brother-a big love like that would split you wide open in Alfred, Georgia" (Morrison, 1987, p. 310). Love for slaves was unsafe, and whenever it is felt, it had to be practiced in secrecy: "Loving small and in secret" (Morrison, 1987, p. 420).

Paul D also criticized the type of love Sethe felt for her children and her attempts to kill them, saying it was wrong: "Your love is too thick. Love is or it ain't." She replies, "Thin love ain't love at all" (Morrison, 1987, pp. 314-315). For him, she could leave them with the schoolteacher to take them back to the plantation or find other ways to save them instead of killing them. For her, these were not her options at all; saving them was quite impossible, so she resorted to a solution she deemed relevant to this dilemma. She continues, "It ain't my job to know what's worse. It's my job to know what is and to keep them away from what I know is terrible. I did that" (Morrison, 1987, p. 315). She believes that being dead is less terrible than being alive as slaves.

For the enslaved, love was the most important thing they could have after their freedom. In the following passage, Baby Suggs expresses her eager dream of love and stability in her community after sixty years of loss and suffering from the atrocities of slavery:

> to belong to a community of other free Negroes-to love and be loved by them, to counsel and be counseled, protect and be protected, feed and be fed-and then to have that community step back and hold itself at a distance (Morrison, 1987, p. 334).

Furthermore, Sethe considers the return of her baby girl Beloved, even as a ghost, is a blessing, reconciliation with her past, and compensation for her losses: "She had to be safe and I put her where she would be. But my love was tough and she's back now. I knew she would be" (Morrison, 1987, p. 383).

In *Beloved*, love is often associated with fear. Denver, Sethe's living daughter, explains her fear of her mother. Though tender and loving as she seems, her love is thick and tough. She states: "I love my mother , but I know she killed one of her own daughters, and tender as she is with me, I'm scared of her because of it" (Morrison, 1987, p. 392). Instead of being ensuring and protective, Sethe's love to Denver is rather terrifying and dangerous.

Voluntary love and intimacy were forbidden for the black women whose bodies, babies, and souls belonged to their owners: "Slaves not supposed to have pleasurable feelings on their own; their bodies not supposed to be like that, but they have to have as many children as they can to please whoever owned them" (Morrison, 1987, p. 400). Here, Denver recounts her grandmother's story about the total subjugation and helplessness of black women.

Sethe's love for her children is thick and tough, but generous; she feels love even for the ghost, which is supposed to be creepy and despised. She believes that Beloved is back for love, and only her mother's love, and Sethe is ready to give it to her voluntarily: "I just had to watch out for it because it was a greedy ghost and needed a lot of love, which was only natural, considering. And I do. Love her. I do" (Morrison, 1987, pp. 401-402). However, Beloved has never enough of her mother's love and tenderness, she asks for more and more until she drives Sethe crazy. The ghost is an embodiment of the past that interrupt seethe present and devour her will to live with and love other people even her own child Denver.

In another scene, Paul D tries to justify Sethe's crime because he is finally convinced that her love for her children drove her to kill her daughter: "She ain't crazy. She loves those children. She was trying to out-hurt the hurter" (Morrison, 1987, p. 447). He considers her act a way to hurt the slaveholder, "the hurter." By depriving him of other slaves he longed to possess, she sought to either kill or seriously injure them so they would become useless to him. Sethe does not ask for forgiveness; she aims to convince Beloved "that what she had done was right because it came from true love." Denver confirms: "Sethe didn't really want forgiveness given; she wanted it refused. And Beloved helped her out" (Morrison, 1987, pp. 446-477). The only justification Sethe provides to defend herself is love, which she considers something vital to protect her children.As a slave, Paul D escaped several times from his owner, but he never succeeded until he was freed at the end of the Civil War.

Slaves were not allowed to love even the earth on which they lived; they were both owned by the whites. Morrison narrates:

> being astonished by the beauty of this land that was not his. He hid in its breast, fingered its earth for food, clung to its banks to lap water and tried not to love it. On nights when

> the sky was personal, weak with the weight of its own stars, he made himself not love it. Its graveyards and low-lying rivers. Or just a house—solitary under a chinaberry tree; maybe a mule tethered and the light hitting its hide just so. Anything could stir him and he tried hard not to love it (Morrison, 1987, p 511).

Love under slavery is repressed by ownership and the slaves are protecting themselves from being used to it, because for them, love is a privilege, a luxury they could not afford. Love after slavery is haunted by the past memories, which intensively discourage the black people to feel it since it represents their unforgotten losses and pain.

Furthermore, when love is felt or expressed, it is always done through the strings of past slavery repression. This idea is illustrated through the coming back of Beloved in Sethe's new life. Despite the fact that Beloved is a source of troubles and madness, it has reawaken Sethe's emotions of love. Sethe justifies to Beloved the motives behind for her past deeds. Thereby, she sought to release herself from all her bad memories and by extension compensate Beloved eagerness for maternal love (Mohammed, 2018). For her, it is an opportunity to revive her motherhood that has been long subverted by slavery.

4. Conclusion

This paper discusses the impact of the past and its memories burdened with slavery and violence on the characters in Beloved. It also addresses the emotional and bodily burdens that enslaved Black people have endured, which led to the distortion of their, inner, familial, and familial bonds. Selfhood, motherhood, parenthood, and male-female relationships were damaged by the brutal ownership that the institution of slavery exerted over them.

Before Morrison, Black and white authors failed to report how the memory of the enslaved impedes them from constructing a new communal and individual life free from the past. This failure to resist the past and its traumas is the current situation among Americans, who underestimate the impact of past slavery on the psychological and physical well-being of both Blacks and whites. Therefore, they resort to its burial rather than opting for healing and reconciliation to reconstruct a peaceful society. In response , Morrison chooses to address this issue through a process of retrieval of this painful past. She recounts the narratives of former slaves and pieces them together in her literary work, Beloved.

The novelty in her novel is the exclusive voices of her Black characters, with no interference from the white oppressors who had long silenced them. She seeks to represent Black individuals as fully human to subvert the biased image spread by other authors and historians. In Beloved, Morrison combines the useful with the agreeable by thoroughly interweaving historical facts, such as the existence of slavery as an institution, with fictional elements, like the presence of the ghost. She portrays forgetting as inconceivable and memory as constant and inevitable. In Beloved, memory functions unconsciously; it is dynamic and possesses a strong energy with the ability to shape personal and shared identity. Morrison is aware of the dangers of living memory laden with pain and suffering; escaping it does not lead to oblivion. Its consequences always return unless healed, as the slavery files in people's memories can be closed but never forgotten.

The exorcism of the ghost of Beloved, performed by the women of the Black community at the end of the novel, is a process of healing that epitomizes the pathway to recovery and the aspired union of the Black community Morrison wants to show her readers. Paul D's return signifies the new start

offered to Sethe, who desperately wonders if it is relevant to have someone to count on and someone to love. It also displays the end of her struggle against her past trauma. Denver's education in the house of a white woman and her new job represent the continuity of life under different circumstances for the new generation, which is finally free from the past their ancestors brought with them.

5. *Bibliography List*:

- Duran, M. D. M. G. (1994). Community and Love: Understanding the Pastin Toni Morrison's Beloved. *Revista de Estudios Norteamericanos*, (3).
- Guth, D. (1993). A Blessing and a Burden: the Relation to the Past in Sula, Song of Solomon and Beloved. *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, *39*(3), 575-596.
- *Fuston-White, Jeanna. "From the Seen to the Told": The Construction of Subjectivity in Toni Morrison's Beloved". African American Review 36 (2002): 461*-473.
- Keizer, A. R. (1999). Beloved: ideologies in conflict, improvised subjects. *African American Review*, *33*(1), 105-123.
- Krumholz, L. (1992). The Ghosts of Slavery: Historical Recovery in Toni Morrison's Beloved. *African American Review*, *26*(3), 395-408.
- *Kubitschek, Missy Dehn. Toni Morrison: A Critical Companion. Greenwood Press, 1998*
- Mohammed, M. (2018). The Impact of Slavery in Toni Morrison's Beloved: From the Communal to the Individual. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, *7*(6), 48-51.
- Morrison, T. (1987), *Beloved, Alfred A. Knopf, New York.*
- Scarborough, Dorothy. "Modern Ghosts." Peter B. Messent (ed.). Literature of the Occult. Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1981, pp. 105-116. Print.
- TANRITANIR, B. C., & Akşak, Ö. (2008). Beloved: Showing the dehumanizing effect of slavery on Sethe. *Atatürk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, *11*(1), 249-259.
- Vickroy, L. (2002) 'Remembering History Through the Body', in *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*, (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press) pp. 167-220.