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**EROTICISM'S DUAL ROLE IN BELOVED BY TONI MORRISON: A FEMINIST
AND ANTICOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE.**

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American literature.

Valentina Isabel Labbé Huerta

Thesis professor: Maura López Riveros

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to analyze Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* through the concept of eroticism as a dual narrative resource. Eroticism in this novel is a topic that has a double function, since it works as a representation of memory linked to trauma and violence and at the same time as a channel for healing and resistance. The main characters of the book are black women, former slaves that have endured the brutality of slavery while others have not. Morrison interlaces eroticism with violence, presenting images of trauma such as perverse physical and sexual abuse. The author also connects eroticism with forms of empowerment when conducted by desire, intimacy and communication. The latter can become a channel to rebuild broken bodies and identities by extending the possibility to recover the self, not only sexually, but also emotionally, socially and culturally. Besides, orality plays an important role as it gives the characters the possibility of expiation after being the embodiment of abjection. Both oral speech and re-memory become sources of self-expression, healing and reconnection with a community and their common history, also symbolizing the embracement of African oral traditions and folklore in the novel. Utilizing concepts from scholars like George Bataille, Frantz Fanon, bell hooks, Angela Davis, Walter Dignolo and others, this analysis reviews the interrelations an anticolonial thinking, specifically from decolonial studies with black feminism in order to understand their contribution alongside eroticism in *Beloved*, a text that reclaims black female subjectivities through the reimagining of their bodies and identities. Morrison makes political choices on her representation of the black female body, exploiting eroticism as a disruptive form of resistance against colonial heritage.

Key words: eroticism, body, trauma, memory, anticolonialism, feminisms.

Introduction

Beloved is a novel that was written by Toni Morrison and it was published for the first time in 1987. This work has been extensively studied because of its historical portrayal of black women's lives and black aesthetics. The main themes of the novel are slavery, the colonial wound, eroticism, black feminism and the intersections of violence. This research intends to establish the relation between black feminism, anticolonial studies and eroticism as the main concepts to be analyzed. The author represents eroticism in connection with abuse, trauma and re-memory. But also, in relation to pleasure, healing, oral speech, repossession of the self and expiation. These concepts will be analyzed through the main female characters of this narrative in order to get a deeper understanding of how these multiple voices interlace with the mentioned topics in order to validate an alternative truth in narrative, considering the black female experience has been extensively misrepresented by male or white authors and underestimated by universal literature.

In canonical literature, as well as in Western culture in general, the image of black women has been mainly that of an object for sexual pleasure. Other images constructed them as instruments for invisible reproductive and slave labor. If we focus our attention on fictional material and we move away from canonical literature, we identify novels written by black women writers that brings us a different scenario. (Stevens 96)

The problem conducting this study is that even though eroticism has been studied in *Beloved* and other novels by Toni Morrison before, it hasn't been divided and analyzed in its dual function. Instead, it has been linked to other forms of resistance. Weir- Soley states that "*the relationship between sexuality and spirituality is crucial to the restoration of a healthy black female subjectivity hinges upon the concept of Erzulie as a restorative, regenerative model for black sexuality in Beloved*" (121). Meaning that for her, eroticism is the combination of sexuality and spirituality, she analyzes Morrison's use of symbols representing divinities in black cultures of North America and the Caribbean. Barnett describes rape as the main destructive sexual expression for characters in *Beloved* "*Of all the memories that*

haunt Morrison's characters, those that involve sexual abuse and exploitation hold particular power" (70)¹ In this article, she navigates through the worst parts ligated to eroticism. So far, we have seen examples about human eroticism studied in *Beloved* as a source of resistance and empowerment as well as a tool for destruction and submission against bodies representing the otherness. The relevance of analyzing Toni Morrison's *Beloved* through eroticism in its contradictory opposite sides is found on the broadening of eroticism's reading relativized to sexuality only. Therefore, and as it has been previously stated, this research intends to explore the duality of eroticism explored in *Beloved*, contrasting its simultaneous use related to trauma and healing. The opposite use of the same concept to review the image of the black female subjectivity leads us to a set of questions in regards the representation of the black female body in anticolonial literatures. We will analyze this novel through a feminist framework accompanied by some elements of postcolonial and decolonial studies avoiding the reinforcement of victimization and stereotypes². The study aims to deeply navigate these questions and challenges while assessing in which way eroticism, orality and feminism function in *Beloved* as a claim and disruption of the figure of black female bodies, subjectivities and history reinforced by the cannon.

The perspective of a double function allows us to explore deeper in the complex context black women are submerged during and after slavery. The importance of eroticism lies in the representation of violence, trauma and perverse actions but also the empowerment and liberation that come along with it when it is situated in an environment of consent, desire and healing. In summary, this research is an analysis that integrates a feminist approach, especially taken from black feminism, combined with decolonial ideas, looking to expose the repossession of the black female figure in literature since it has been historically marginalized, disrupted and often represented as sexual objects and sub-humans. We will also focus on orality as a consequence of erotic practices that allow the characters to express

¹ From the article *Rape and the Supernatural* by Pamela E. Barnett on the book *Bloom's guides, Toni Morrison Beloved* by Harold Bloom

² As mentioned by bell hooks in *Black race and representation*. (13)

themselves and recover their sense of belonging by being able to participate in a subjectivity reconstruction and also a collective memory reclamation. Besides, this work contributes to the discussion about the representation of black female bodies in literature and the lingering of colonialism's consequences in universal narratives. It helps the awareness about alternative narratives that resist stereotypes and pro-colonial information considering that the effects of these are still present in cultures and societies oppressing the otherness.

Toni Morrison's characters are mainly black women who she usually sets in marginalized and underprivileged environments. Some scholars have claimed that *Beloved* is an anticolonial novel that causes a great impact on readers because it reveals the reality of colonialism that no one wants to remember and its consequences on the character's bodies and subjectivities. The story develops around a parricide that happens as an act of defense against the institution of slavery. The author later creates a path towards expiation that will be constantly interrupted by trauma and the re-memory of it. Yet, she forces the characters to face their ghosts in both a metaphorical and material way. The different voices in the book implicate each other and with the main concepts mentioned above in an attempt to subvert the representations of black bodies created by white western literature. As mentioned before, many studies about this novel take into consideration some aspects of eroticism in a fragmentary way without deeply analyzing how they interact with each other and how they affect the characters' voices and arches. The subjectivities in the novel endure a lot of challenges coming from violence and they are sent in a journey to overcome the trauma of its various intersections during and after slavery. This being said, this study will try to answer the following research questions:

- How does Morrison represent eroticism as trauma and healing at the same time for black women who endured slavery?
- In what ways does a feminist framework enlighten the interpretation of eroticism, body, and subjectivity in the novel?

- How does orality work together with eroticism to help the reconstruction of Black female identity in *Beloved*?
- How do feminist theories contribute to understanding the reconstruction of black female body in literature?

These questions will be a guide to confirm or refute the hypothesis that in *Beloved*, the author employs eroticism as a dual narrative device that simultaneously explores the detrimental aspects associated with the traumatic physical, emotional, and sexual experiences of black women who endured slavery. However, it also permits to rebuild their subjectivities through practices that contribute to healing, reconnection, expiation and resistance in order to reclaim the sovereignty of the body as well as personal and collective memories, supported by the ability to develop orality and an approach to a decolonized feminist thinking.

The characters in *Beloved* share a traumatic past and as a community, they have to face the trauma and look out for detachment to it, in order to move forward with the rest of their lives. This is not an easy task for the colonized minds, because they were set to obey rather than think by themselves, and also have a self-image of being inferior which, according to Fanon happens only as long as the white or the oppressor discriminates and robs both my worth and my individuality, meaning that is not inherent to black slaves just because (98). Slaves are not supposed to protest or go against what they are told to do, because there are always consequences that consist in physical and sexual punishment, emotional suffering and even death, in regards this matter some authors have explained the systemic operation of colonization on the colonized thinking:

The suffering of an incapability to think or act by themselves, leads these characters to a lack of identity and their intention to pursue it, is instantly criminalized by the dominant groups, because most of the time, these minorities' breakthroughs suppose the rupture of rules set by law. (Taylor 5)

The existence of these otherness bodies conveys a disruption, because they cannot approach the traditional conception of identity and subjectivity. They cannot fulfill the role of white people in society because they are racialized, and are not considered their pairs, so there is nothing they can do in order to be part of what is considered to be correct according to social standards. This is worsened when a black person, especially female, deliberately trespasses the norms set up for them. This is the case of Sethe, Beloved, Baby Suggs and Denver, who in their own ways aimed for more than life had for them and were socially punished both by western society and their own black communities. There are some features often used to represent the identity and behavior that have been spread as one whole truth regarding black people, as if they were all the same, in a negative and supposedly natural, inherited way. Specifically talking about black folks, Fanon explains in his chapter *The negro and psychopathology*;

The Negro is a phobogenic object, a stimulus to anxiety (...) Freud and Adler and even the cosmic Jung did not think of the Negro in all their investigations. And they were quite right not to have. It is too often forgotten that neurosis is not a basic element of human reality. Like it or not, the Oedipus complex is far from coming into being among Negroes." (Fanon 151)

Keeping this in mind, it is not accurate to compare black people's realities and actions with whites, because of the context of violence and submission they go through under slavery and the historical neglect towards their communities. When Sethe commits an infanticide, the raw scene stays with her community and the image is so strong that might remind them of all of the vexations perpetuated against them because of racism. Sethe becomes the reflection of it and that is why they poured on her the hate they feel against extreme violence. She was expected to go back with her owner and surrender to slavery, but she tried to defend herself and her children by escaping in desperation when the white men came after her and there were no more resources. Their lives were already in a limbo and her final attempt of defense and protection resulted to be contradictory. After this main event, when characters are already inhabiting the present, orality becomes an important factor in

their new understanding of themselves. The out loud expression of what they had experienced and what they are going through allows them to transit through the acceptance of their conditions. This is manifested in different ways in the characters of Baby Suggs, Sethe, Beloved and Denver. All of them had to speak outside of themselves at some point in order to get a chance to survive, move forward and re-learn what they were as human beings and as free women. Orality is an important part of African traditions because it used to be the main method through which people would pass information to future generations, not only through storytelling, but also through songs, dances and games. This does not mean that written language did not exist *“The ‘vanishing’ of oral genres was at the same time paradoxical, as the postcolonial period witnessed the blossoming of national and international recognition for-African ‘spoken’ productions. This artistic blossoming also did not fit into the dichotomies of traditional/modern and oral/literate.”* (Merolla 22). Morrison rescues this tradition by fictionalizing its importance and also exposes the reality of people for whom written language does not mean anything like her characters who were former slaves and did not know how to read or write, and also did not manage a wide range of vocabulary of the English language they were compulsorily exposed to in their diaspora, so their expression and understanding of everything is different in the context they share with white literate people.

Along with orality, eroticism is a concept often present in black women narratives and it is an element also explored in many works of Morrison. In *Beloved*, eroticism is a topic double used to explain some specific types of violence such as perversions and the use of sexual abuse as a power of submission of female and male slave bodies. With this comes trauma, which can be silent but not forgotten, therefore, memory is another relevant topic in their work. Eroticism is also highly employed through its different branches like; pleasure, work, jealousy, marriage, murder and others, making the characters get to know themselves and giving them the opportunity to inhabit their own bodies and minds, with the possibility to decide for themselves and detach from traumatic memories. In this sense, eroticism is set against the biopolitics applied on black slave women. They were not allowed to think or decide for themselves and were not sovereign owners of themselves either.

Eroticism, when consented and aware, acts as a subversion of white bio-laws imposed for them. Somehow, eroticism returns the management of their bodies and identities because it is a channel into the self that for so long had been denied, neglected and humiliated. In *Beloved*, there is a duality of eroticism, presented to create a contrast because when it's accompanied with perversion and abuse, it can destroy and stuck a person in trauma, but when experienced in first person, in a consensus manner it can be releasing and even a method of healing and expiation. Before achieving healing, Morrison engages her female characters in a deep exploration of themselves that can encounter some destructive behaviors on the way because of the self-repression and self-hate they carry with their alterities.

Without a doubt there is a certain continuity in the literature of independences in relation to what is usually called the 'anticolonial period,' in the settling of accounts with the meaning of social and cultural structures imposed by colonization. Similarly, to a large extent, it comes before identity concerns, dissatisfaction with the new regimes, and the social criticism which later would be brought to the center of the debate. (Baqueiro 24)

In *Beloved*, the author expresses a protest against colonialism and neocolonialism, divergently, this approach acknowledges the myriads of lasting effects—both collective and individual—that slavery and violence have imprinted on black people's psyches and bodies, shaping their experiences and identities in complex and profound ways. This research is a reading of *Beloved*, from a perspective of black feminism with ideas taken from decolonial studies that allow us to consider how is it that these characters' attempt to escape from the oppression and the violence executed against them, represents the struggle of marginalized Black groups and other burdened communities against the structures, narratives, and institutions that continue to neglect them. "*The decolonial turn is built on the border and critical thought, that includes the epistemic principles of modernity and displaces them towards an Other paradigm that builds and at the same time reveals the limits of the imperial thought categories.*" (Mignolo 198).³ Even if these black

³ Quote translated by the author of this research.

female characters are not aware about rights or laws, there is still a hint of feminist and decolonial thinking presented by the author that impulses them to move forward in the search for freedom. Because of temporality and location, Morrison's work can be linked to postcolonialism, but also because of location and more importantly because of the use of non-official narratives and the creation of a space for slave narratives, coming from a piece of history of an abject black woman who really tried to kill her children in order to avoid being recaptured, she is closer to a decolonial way of thinking and working. She also employs feminism as a thinking approach that assists the liberation of these black female characters from their colonized bodies and personalities. Black and decolonial feminisms appear as complementary and different from the feminism propelled by white women. In order to have a better understanding of these political movements, one cannot be analyzed in isolation. This research will consider different spectrums of feminism, since it is important to understand its roots, and equally important to apply it to the topics that will be discussed.

White feminism does not consider the struggles of women who represent other minorities; it is often considered a privileged feminism since white women have not been dehumanized as black women or even black men have historically been.

The slave system defined Black people as chattel. Since women, no less than men, were viewed as profitable labor-units, they might as well have been genderless as far as the slaveholders were concerned. In the words of one scholar, "the slave woman was first a fulltime worker for her owner, and only incidentally a wife, mother and homemaker." 10 Judged by the evolving nineteenth-century ideology of femininity, which emphasized women's roles as nurturing mothers and gentle companions and housekeepers for their husbands, Black women were practically anomalies. (Davis 9)

This sets a vast difference between white and black feminism, as white women would claim their rights as human beings and black women were not considered human at all. Female slaves did not match the description of a woman, they were not considered mothers and they were unpaid, exploited and neglected

workers. Black feminism marks the difference of being a racialized woman and claims the existence of a history that is often kept hidden, especially in North America, where authors concerning the decolonial are hard to find, because these scholars have been more linked to Latin América.

In the past most of the black narratives elaborated were set on the analysis of historical memories and violent relationships between black females and males, spreading a negative image of the black man as aggressive and ignorant. Now, with the appearance of authors like Morrison, the focus is on individuals, and that does not mean that politics have been left behind, on the contrary, the analysis of the otherness and the interconnections between them as complex subjects help to understand their forms of resistance and attempts of defense that are present on the book. About self-defense during the slavery period, Elsa Dorlin states:

Throughout the era of slavery, the disarmament of slaves was accompanied by a veritable discipline of the body to keep them defenseless, which meant punishing the slightest use of martial practices. The philosophy behind this process gets at the essence of the condition of servitude: a slave is someone who does not have the right or the duty to preserve themselves. Disarmament should be understood as a measure for the security of the free population, but more fundamentally it traces a dividing line between subjects, who own themselves and are responsible for their own preservation, and slaves, who do not own themselves and whose preservation depends entirely on the goodwill of their masters. (8-9)

In *Beloved*, Morrison experiments with self-defense and how contradictory it could be when a subject does not know how to manage it, because even if they have access to a material tool, a saw in this case, they never had the approach to use any resource on their defense, because it was not perceived as a possibility and the chances that this action could succeed were minimum. Besides, the exhaustion of these bodies would probably not help, they seem to be doomed from the beginning. In the end, there is the possibility of rebuilding the identity and accepting the trauma. Redemption is uncertain, since the desperate seek for it can also be destructive, as

we can see in the mother-daughter relationship of Sethe and the material ghost of her dead child.

After reviewing the novel's main representations and topics to be analyzed, it is possible to state that the main objective of this study is to analyze in depth eroticism's dual role as a narrative resource in the novel *Beloved* by Toni Morrison. Contributing to trauma as well as healing simultaneously, helped by a feminist framework with some anticolonial features. Considering this, the specific objectives of this study will be:

- To examine eroticism's representation in *Beloved* as an enhancement of the trauma experienced by black female characters during slavery.
- To examine the representation of eroticism as a channel for healing in *Beloved*.
- To analyze the role of the black female body as a space where colonial violence is imprinted.
- To analyze the role of the black female body in an anticolonial narrative as a source of resistance and reconstruction of black subjectivities.

This study will attempt to explain how the author uses eroticism and its double face to represent black women's lives marked by slavery, try to find out what its contribution is to the gender, also how she narrates her story and acknowledge the importance of her writings until the present date, not only because of its content, but also because the disruptive manner of her compositions, accompanied by the oral reflection of narrative, the stream of consciousness and a lyrical transit between inside and outside of the human mind, confronting the past with the present. This study will be divided into chapters: The first one will explore the three main concepts identified to pursue this analysis, which are; anticolonialism, feminisms and eroticism. The second chapter will analyze the role of the black female body both as a recipient of colonial violence and as a source for resistance and transformation.

The next one, will analyze eroticism in its dual role and finally, the conclusions will be presented.

Chapter 1: Anticolonialism, feminisms and eroticism.

Since the goal of this research is to analyze how the author approaches to the concept of eroticism assigning a dual role to it (trauma versus healing), reviewing its contribution to the narrative and also how the novel is narrated through the representation of the black female body both as a recipient of colonial violence and as a space of resistance against it, all of this considering a feminist framework, more specifically related to black feminism, accompanied by some elements of anticolonial studies. This study will adopt a qualitative approach and it will be focused on a text analysis under the paramount aforementioned (black feminism and decolonialism). The analysis will be centered on the novel *Beloved* by Toni Morrison (1987). The interest in this text relies on its relevance for African North American literature and also its disruption within canonical literature. Even though it is a text that has been over-studied from a wide variety of standpoints, its content is so profound and layered that there are still opportunities to point out new ways of reading it. The novel will be analyzed in detail focusing on how the author narrates using ideas from other scholars (sometimes alternative voices), in order to add historical and political value to the novel. The characters will also be part of the analysis, focusing on their relation with eroticism and oral language. This chapter will be divided into three parts. This first section will navigate different branches of anticolonial studies such as postcolonialism and decolonialism. The second will explore feminist theories and the third will develop the concept of eroticism in its different expressions.

1.1 Anticolonial approaches (postcolonial and decolonial).

Anticolonial theories are based on the information and literary production that have taken place in colonized or former colonized regions, such as India, countries of America, Africa and others. This research will focus its reading in an African North American novel, which was based on a real-life story, but it is a magical realism fiction that takes place mainly between Ohio and Kentucky, United States. In the period of time between 1850s and 1870s. Because of temporality and location

settlement, it would be possible to analyze the text from an anticolonial-postcolonial perspective, but this research will be mainly positioned from a decolonial approach understanding that on the one hand, Morrison became a writer in a period of time that followed the massive process of decolonization that started during the 1960's and at that time, intellectuals were developing postcolonial studies, which were mostly related to an academic analysis of life after the colonial period that is one of the most important events on universal history and it also focused on criticizing the use of information and the historical narrative primarily coming from an Eurocentric point of view. And on the other hand, decolonial studies started to arise during the 1990s and were mainly addressed in Latin América, but it is still possible to recognize some initial elements of it in the novel as Morrison, being an academic intellectual, was also at some point an alternative voice who intended to include the perspective of blackness and race in literature. In an interview conducted in 1990 she was asked if she really believed that these topics were not addressed in literature already and she responded:

Not in the critique, not on the discourse, not in the reviews, not in the scholarship around these works. That was not a subject to be discussed, it was not worthy of discussion, not only that, it admitted that the master narrative could not encompass all these things. The silence was absolutely important. The silence of the black person, they were never heard and they don't speak in the text themselves. They are not permitted to say things, so that the academic or the history can't really permit them to be the center stage in the discourse of the text, in art, in literature. But in public discourse, when we talk about neighborhoods, or policy, or schools, or welfare, or practically anything, the real subject is race or its class. (...) The country, particularly this one, is seething with the presence of black people, but it was necessary to deny in critical language that presence when we discussed it. I read all those books in graduate school, everybody did, we never talked about what was really going on. (Manufacturing Intellect interview 00:26:28).⁴

⁴ Quote from a YouTube video, transcribed by the author of this research.

By stating this, Morrison was indicating that blackness and race so far had been vaguely included in literature, with perspectives mainly taken from what she calls the white gaze, and that the information that was considered valid was coming from white intellectuals and they did not elaborate on these discourses because there was an eagerness to keep these memories and these communities silenced. So, what she was trying to do was to expand and legitimate the knowledge coming from other sources mainly linked to minorities. This is why this research considers that her vision of *Beloved* matches with the intention of an anticolonial text. But in order to develop these ideas further, it is necessary to set up a context and a difference between what is colonial and anticolonial (postcolonial and decolonial).

Many writers have stated that the colonial era started with the so called “discovery” of América, but Mignolo goes beyond and states that: *“The inauguration of a frontier epistemology based on the colonial difference, on the subjectivity of the colonial wound, which transfers us from the paradigm of the novelty to the decolonial paradigm of coexistence.”* (129).⁵ Now, even when the studies of the author are deeply connected with Epistemologies of the South, his ideas connect with the need of exposing and undoing the colonial logics that have shaped American society (land dispossession, racial hierarchies, Eurocentric knowledge), expose them and move forward into racial justice, and epistemic plurality. Taking ideas from Heller, he states that instead of the word new for places and people that already existed, it is more accurate to use the word coexistence, meaning that Europeans, Africans and Indigenous people came to inhabit the same land. Also, it was during this time when they came up with the concept of race in order to distinguish the colonizer from the colonized *“The codification of the differences between colonizers and colonized in the idea of race, meaning, a supposedly different biological structure that located the latter in a natural situation of inferiority in relation to the former”* (Quijano 202).⁶ At the same time, based on this social separation of human value there was another factor associated to colonialism that consisted on *“the articulation of all the historical forms of work control, of its resources and its products around the capital and the*

⁵ Translated by the author of this research.

⁶ Translated by the author of this research.

world market.” (202). In consequence, a new world order started during the XIV century distinguishing people between Europeans, blacks, Indians and others. These categories of color were assigned by the dominant group, whites were thought to be on top of this social hierarchy and the racialized groups at the very bottom. This division of race and labor later would open the door for what we know now as capitalism.

Todas las formas de control y de explotación del trabajo y de control de la producción-apropiación-distribución de productos, fueron articuladas alrededor de la relación capital-salario (en adelante capital) y del mercado mundial. Quedaron incluidas la esclavitud, la servidumbre, la pequeña producción mercantil, la reciprocidad y el salario. (204)⁷

In the case of black people, their role was that of the slave only, being mainly workers of the earth that would be subjected to their owner’s authority and would work under different forms of violence and without ever having access to a salary and any form of power over themselves. It is true that the black community as a whole was reduced to slavery only and in the case of black women, their bodies were affected in a different manner because of their capacity of reproduction, which does not mean that they would only serve as breeders, since while being on the task of pregnancy, they would be obliged to continue fulfilling their roles as forced workers, performing a double economical function that would not benefit them.

Rape plays an important role as a weapon for submission of the black female body, because it was a form of applying biopolitics over them *“If the most violent punishments of men consisted in floggings and mutilations, women were flogged and mutilated, as well as raped. Rape, in fact, was an uncamouflaged expression of the slaveholder’s economic mastery and the overseer’s control over Black women”*. (Davis 10). Violence came to be the base of the colonial system; they had to hold

⁷ All forms of labor and exploitation control, as well as the control over the production-appropriation-distribution of goods, were articulated around the capital-wage relationship (hereafter capital) and of the world market. Including slavery, servitude, small commercial production, reciprocity, and wage. (Quijano, 204) Translated by the author of this research.

this system with their work on whites' houses and plantations, also reproducing themselves without any type of control in order to create more labor forces for white groups. They delivered children that many times were the product of rapes and they were unable to nurture them, take care of them, bound to them or make decisions about them. It is important to understand that these conflicts did not end with the downfall of the institution of slavery. Vergès states that there is a difference between colonialism and colonization. *"Colonization is an event/period and colonialism is a process/ movement, a total social movement which perpetuation is explained by the persistence of the social formations born from its sequences."* (31)⁸ Considering this, it is possible to understand that colonialism is an idea that can be sustained after the event of colonization itself, and that is what Morrison reflects with the events her characters go through and their personalities. Even after living in freedom for almost twenty years, they continued to be colonized as a consequence of trauma that would not allow them to move out of guilt, disgust with the self and the memories of the past.

As mentioned previously, as a consequence of the process of emancipation of countries that used to be colonies of European countries, intellectuals started to develop the postcolonial thinking, which was part of an academic battle against these imposed ideas of social and economic division according to race, not in a material way, but intellectual wise, with the main purpose of exposing in which ways colonialism continued to operate even when some countries were supposed to be independent already.

Postcolonial studies privilege more than decolonial studies, the study of history — the colonial period, the precolonial, and the posterior to independences — in their analysis of the neocolonial pressures exercised by former colonizers in order to maintain the control over natural resources,

⁸ Translated by the author of this research.

trade, and finances during the period post-independences. (Sousa Santos 17)⁹

Developing these theories then, was a sort of an exercise of analysis and exposition of a reality and its consequences, looking mainly to create awareness. *Postcolonial studies are based on European Eurocentric intellectuals (Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida) to criticize the colonialist lineages of knowledge and politics (...), decolonial studies promote subaltern voices.*" (Sousa Santos 18).¹⁰ Which means that the idea of postcolonial studies is to criticize colonialism, but still through a European point of view, instead of considering the frame of mind of the colonized or the knowledge produced at those colonized regions. It seems like at that point there was still an inability to validate the information produced outside what Morrison calls the master narrative. In addition, *"While postcolonial studies have mainly taken care of colonialism in regards Africa and Asia, decolonial studies have maintained a predominant focus on the colonialism of the Americas."* (Sousa Santos 18).¹¹ So again, the main reason why the novel *Beloved* in this study is being related to postcolonialism, is because of temporal and geographical reasons mainly. But even though her novel is composed through a critical study of history linked to slavery in North America, which is related to postcolonial ideas, this research considers that her novel is linked to a decolonial approach in a heavier way as she is a writer who gave voice to slaves, that have been historically silenced, while being protagonists and not ornaments of a white society. Although she became a canonical writer, which can be seen as a privilege, she herself still embodied the otherness, because she was a black woman who took ideas from African or Caribbean traditions, which are early signs of a decolonial focus.

⁹ Translated by the author of this research.

¹⁰ Translated by the author of this research.

¹¹ Translated by the author of this research.

“I am where I think” is a general principle, with planetary reach. This formula has not been articulated in Amsterdam (...) but it has been articulated in Africa, in Latin America, by Black intellectuals (academics and non-academics), by Indigenous intellectuals, South Asians, and also from Southern Europe. The epistemic potential of ‘I am where I think’ is double: On the one hand it asserts a geo-historical and bio-historical position that was denied by the imperial epistemology (whether rightist, centrist, or leftist). That is why the subaltern could not speak, because the empire did not authorize them and degraded them, and degrades them through racial and patriarchal hierarchies.” (Mignolo 201-202)¹²

This idea of being where one thinks applies to Morrison because despite her historical and geographical background, she thought and wrote about African ancestors who were brought to the Americas. Some of her characters would even mention the trip by boat and the hard experiences they had to endure even before arriving to these foreign lands. In other words, Morrison created a space in literature that could not be found often, for the colonized to speak their own truth and to describe the white supremacist world they inhabited based on their own experiences and perspectives. In *BeLoved*, the author exposed the limitations of slaves to develop as human beings while being subjected to an economic and political system they were unable to escape from even if they lived in freedom and it is also an exercise of acknowledgement of the colonial legacy in her own present over a century after these events. Morrison accompanies her novel with topics developed by other Africanist scholars and by superstitions of her own community in order to elaborate in regards cultural and linguistic traditions but also about spirituality and folklore through the use of magical realism as a decolonial form of narrative. “*Magical realism has also influenced writers to speak about myths and legends of the folk in order to detach themselves from the mixed lit-culture of their colonizers*”. (Sharma 165). In addition to this memory effort that is not common in North América, Morrison disrupts the Western form of literature by setting slaves lives as the main scenario, telling

¹² Translated by the author of this research.

their stories according to their own narratives, avoiding disrespectful stereotypes and common spaces often found in Western literature in regards black communities and more specifically about black women. Now, the aim of exposing a contrast between postcolonialism and decolonial ideas is not to put the decolonial turn above postcolonialism, but to navigate through the history of the anticolonial thinking and clarify that decolonial ideas were a posterior development that can be considered more radical and for this particular study more assertive.

Pues de eso se trata en el giro epistémico decolonial: de ir tomando, en la diversidad moderno/colonial del globo, el poder epistémico para construir un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos; y donde esos mundos ya no puedan ser controlados por universales abstractos. El giro epistémico decolonial es, precisamente, la negación de los universales abstractos en los que la retórica de la modernidad presento sus victorias y oculto, al mismo tiempo, la lógica de la colonialidad (por ejemplo, el genocidio africano y judío). (Mignolo 203).¹³¹⁴

In a more concrete way, Morrison's novel *Beloved*, reflects what the coloniality is, specifically in North America and in regards to slave-lives. She talks about the ships bringing black people from Africa to America and the lifestyle in a farm, also about the relationships between slaves, how they could not be families because parents were not available to take care or nurture children and people often were sold or killed, so there was an impossibility to attach to someone else. The anticolonial-postcolonial exercise relies on the mere idea of developing this novel in the colonial period from a critical standpoint, taking the responsibility of deeply

¹³ That is what the decolonial epistemic turn is about: going around taking, within the modern/colonial diversity of the globe, the epistemic power to build a world in which many worlds can fit on—and in which those worlds can no longer be controlled by abstract universals. The decolonial epistemic turn is, precisely, the negation of those universal abstracts in which the rhetoric of modernity presented its victories and hidden, at the same time, the logic of coloniality (for example, the African and Jewish genocides). (203) Traslated by the autor of this research.

¹⁴ Quote from Mignolo's article; *El giro gnoseológico decolonial: la contribución de Aimé Cesaire a la geopolítica y la corpo-política del conocimiento*. In Cesaire's book; *El discurso decolonial*, 2006 edition.

studying the history in order to make a resemblance of that past reality, relating it with its present consequences, in an interview when she was asked why in the beginning, she did not want to write about slavery she stated:

I did not think I had resources, emotional, intellectual or artistic to dwell in that period, for the time it would take to write that book, I didn't think it was possible for me (...) Why couldn't this life, this problem, this world I want to talk about be in the 1930's or something that I could deal with, I just didn't want to go there, it was too painful. (...) But it was not my choice to do that, I was convinced that I was describing some very contemporary problems. (...) You don't really have to have had those experiences, you only have to translate them into one's own individual and its human terms because it's still with us, the residue, not only the historical residue, but the conscription, the problems that such women had faced then and are still here, we still have to determine how to be complete human beings. (Toni Morrison interview 00:07:22)¹⁵

Then, the link with the decolonial turn has to do with her artistic and aesthetic decisions, especially when it comes to the use of English language, spirituality and folk storytelling, because in order to develop these important elements of the novel she had to look into other sources of information that were not considered reliable, although she was an illustrated person. Not only did she give voice to slaves, but she also permitted their African roots to be expressed in the text. In the same interview, she was asked if she really believed that ghosts or ancestors were able to come through us and leave memories and she answered:

my whole education was to make sure I didn't believe things like that, and that I dismissed all kinds of things that were indigenous, my family superstitions and the discredited information, the discredited way of knowing that the discredited people always have. But when I began to write that was the place that I had to go, that's where the information was, that's where the images were, that's where the language, the color came, in this tales, folk tales,

¹⁵ Quote from a video, transcribed by the author of this research.

attitudes, the normal, easy acceptance of signs, and then things began to happen in that world really quite startling. (Toni Morrison interview 00:18:37)¹⁶

Morrison's exercise is tightly ligated to the idea of coexistence mentioned previously, also intellectually speaking because she gives space for ideas and stories coming from the otherness and she narrates a side of history that is not official and that historically failed to be documented. *"Morrison's admission that she consciously writes this 'discredited knowledge' systems back into the literature represents a deliberate reconstitution of discursive and theoretical structures—a counterpellative strategy if you will—based on African and new world spiritual practices and beliefs."* (Weir-Soley 84) So, to summarize the initial exercise to write this novel responded to a postcolonial view that required a study of history and its consequences in the present, but then, the idea to develop a slave narrative using slave female voices as protagonists, creating around black aesthetics strongly linked to eroticism and spirituality in order to picture an enchanted world that symbolizes the resistance of African cosmologies responds to a decolonial approach. In this context, we can ask the question of why it is relevant to study a text produced by a North American writer from a decolonial approach, when these studies were developed in Latin America, also since North America's identity is more linked to imperialism rather than colonialism. This is because as from the reading of the author and this particular text, it results interesting to focus the analysis from a different cultural view, which is a lens through which the author of this research read, because of her own geographical background. It seems an interesting exercise to do in order to get a broader perspective of cultural interconnexions that can be found in literatures. Besides, Morrison was a writer that connected her work to the history and aesthetics of Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America as well. For instance, in *Beloved*, she uses magical realism as a narrative tool, and this is a literary movement that was especially explored in Latin America.

Magical realism has also influenced writers to speak about myths and legends of the folk in order to detach themselves from the mixed lit-culture of their

¹⁶ Quote from a video, transcribed by the author of this research.

colonizers. Morrison in an interview spoke thus, “I thought this has got to be the least read of all the books “I’d written because it is about something that the characters don’t want to remember, I don’t want to remember, black people don’t want to remember, white people don’t want to remember. I mean it’s national amnesia”. Thus, there is a need to write such works which are never explored truthfully, owing to several dominating powers still prevalent in the world. (Sharma 165-166)

The identity of the country does not necessarily represent the work the author aims to share, there are many studies done before around this book that also focus on ideas about slavery, the colonial and even the decolonial. As Morrison states, the topic of this novel is something nobody wants to remember, because of how shameful and painful that past was, but colonialism did take place in the United States as well, even if they were not colonies themselves in the period in which the plot is set, slavery was still a consequence of colonialism in Africa and the issues left from it remain to be present in different forms and expressions even now. Colonialism is the matrix of those dominating powers that continue to oppress through race, class and gender too. For the purpose of this study, it is relevant to highlight that for Morrison memory was important and again, the memory exercise she performs with this book responds to the postcolonial influence mentioned before as it is linked to colonialism in Africa and the exploitation of their people in the new world, while the tools and elements around which the text’s aesthetic and arts are built, respond to a decolonial way of thinking.

1.2 Feminist approaches, body and trauma.

Feminism is a concept that can reinforce the urgency of decolonializing history as this movement allowed minority female groups to take action and look for their emancipation through the organization of social movements that would allow the achievement of slaves’ freedom eventually. But also, as a consequence of colonialism little is known about these social and political movements as they were

often kept silenced or were misused, spreading distorted ideas about decolonization processes. According to Vergès:

(...) European feminists elaborated their discourse about their own oppression comparing themselves to slaves. The metaphor of slavery was powerful, since weren't women the property of their fathers and husbands? Weren't they subjected to the sexist laws of Church and the State? The feminism of the European Enlightenment-era did not acknowledge the women who participated in the Haitian revolution (later celebrated by Romantic poets), nor the enslaved women who rebelled, or who resisted, or the maroons. (32-33)¹⁷

Again, race becomes a factor for silence and denial of important historical processes that took place to actually contribute with the abolition of slavery. The early feminisms do not recognize the participation of black women in female emancipation but also it does not make a difference between the races that colonialism enhanced and that gave them certain privileges in relation to black women. This is not an attempt to disregard the importance of feminism, but to point out the shortcomings of its Eurocentric roots, specially from European intellectuals who would base their theories mainly on biological differences between man and women and the power that is inherent to the male figure. It also seems important to visualize other views of the colonial forms of oppression that mostly affected racialized communities. White feminism does not acknowledge that even black men are located under white women in the universal social hierarchy. Vergès adds in regards decolonial feminists;

They undermine, in addition, civilizational feminism which, having turned women's rights into an assimilation ideology and integration into the neoliberal order, it reduces women's revolutionary aspirations to a demand for a 50% share of the privileges agreed for white men by white supremacy. As active

¹⁷ Translated by the author of this research.

accomplices of the capitalist racial order, civilizational feminists do not hesitate to support policies of imperialist interventions, as well as Islamophobic and even blackophobic policies. (26)¹⁸

This makes the spreading of a decolonial thinking as important as feminism because oppression is guided by gender as well as race. This is something Morrison was much aware of, in an interview in 1990 stating that she created her works using the scholarships that other Africanist scholars had already presented. This, with the idea to contribute with exposing these realities and pieces of history that to these days continue to be made invisible by the master narrative, which she described as everything that is taught to be the normal, any ideological narrative that has been imposed by the people in authority to the rest, there is a master narrative in fiction and history as well (Manufacturing Intellect interview 00:08:35).

Feminism is often explored in literature in many different ways and from many standpoints because it is a philosophical and social movement that started to arise over a century ago and it continues to develop different theories and branches around it until this day. Important female authors and intellectuals have influenced literature during the 20th century, such as Simone de Beauvoir, Donna Haraway and Virginia Wolf, just to name a few. And specifically in African North American literature, bell hooks, Octavia Butler, Zora Neal Hurston, Angela Davis, Toni Morrison herself, and others. The contribution of feminist writers is wide, they have been expressing their thoughts and visions about historical, political and systematical issues validating the female experience, presenting an alternative to the universal narrative of male thinking as the only valid truth. The image of black women has often been linked to servitude and sexuality. In *BeLoved*, somehow the image of black women and men is represented as an object of desire as well, for instance, characters like Baby Suggs, Sethe and Paul D were objects for sexual pleasure of white men at some point. But Morrison is not using their image that way as a form of denigration or because she wants to point that those situations are fair, on the opposite, she

¹⁸ Translated by the author of this research.

exposes the situation in order to show something that has happened and continues to happen in different ways, but she is not contributing with miss informing or creating a wrong, underestimated image of black women. Actually, she is showing the dehumanized behavior towards them in first person, putting them in the center of the stage and evidencing the historical exploitation of black women and men. The story of *Beloved* is based on the life of Margaret Garner, a woman who ran away from slavery in real life and attempted to take her children's and her own life to avoid being recaptured by her owner. *"We know that under slavery, children could be taken away from their mothers at any moment; that mothers were forbidden from defending them; that black women had to be available for their owners' children as baby sitters (...)"* (Vergès 43).¹⁹ Morrison shows the truth of colonized women and synthesizes their experiences in her characters, allowing them to be protagonists of their own worlds, mentioning them and elaborating about them rather than representing them only as tangential elements in a white supremacist world. She also gives them a chance to move forward, symbolically implying that they are not necessarily defeated by their history and understanding that they were victims of this systemic violence and repression. The creation of anticolonial and feminist literature has an important impact even until these days, because it gives continuity to a memory that is often isolated from the present. In relation to this Vergès explains:

The temporality of slavery/abolition relegates colonial slavery to a historical past, which allows to ignore the long shadow of its strategies of racialization and sexualization up to these days. The immense contribution of Afro feminism (Brazil, United States) regarding the importance of colonial slavery in the formation of the modern world and the invention of the white world, of its role in the prohibition of family bonds, continues to fail impacting the analysis of white bourgeois feminism. (43)²⁰

As mentioned above, the oppression problems originated in the colonial period that affect black women the most rely on the distribution of labor and

¹⁹ Translation made by the author of this research.

²⁰ Translation made by the author of this research.

resources but also relationship wise. Not only were they attached to a compulsory and excessive form of work unable to make a profit from it, but they were also kept in houses that were not theirs, taking care of children that were not theirs either, impeded to create family boundaries of their own, obligated to throw away any idea of love and maternity as conceived by white women. Moreover, the progression on black people's liberation, not only tried to make black communities to prove they deserved to earn it by making a resemblance of the white world to their communities, but it also overlapped the oppression of black male folks with the colonialist's oppression over black women.

Ironically, the most radical black liberation movement was invaded by a sexism much more severe than what could be present in the reformist civil rights movement. The legacies of Fannie Lou Hamer, Septima Clark, Rosa Parks, Ella Baker, and many other unknown Black women are a testimony of the strength of their presence, of the intensity and the value of their contributions to the struggle for civil rights. Often, black men, without any recognition nor gratitude, appropriated the work of active black women in the black power movement in the 1960's. (hooks 38)²¹

There is no intention to victimize black women but to expose a contrast within stages of time and also share the legacy of women that in the past fought for female liberation as well but have rarely been recognized for doing so. The participation of black women in political movements and theory development has historically been silenced and because it considers so many issues and edges it is also often relativized and in consequence misread. According to bell hooks, for white students and even some black ones, the most attractive part of black cultural studies she taught was to analyze black self-hate and the aim to be perceived by the rest as white as possible, but she intended to teach them that the resistance in fact is found in the loving of blackness, since racial integration and social equality are often promoted in white supremacist systems only in theory, without actually making any changes in cultural attitudes towards black communities (10). White feminism is far

²¹ Translated by the author of this research.

from analyzing these issues and getting to these conclusions, because these problems are not experienced by them. Besides, that type of feminism does not aim to revindicate sources of knowledge or validate the production of information and arts coming from minorities. That is why it becomes important to consider the standpoint of black and decolonial feminisms as well in order to get a wider perspective of the structural struggle racialized women endure.

Los feminismos decoloniales se inscriben en el largo movimiento de reapropiación científica y filosófica que revisa el relato europeo del mundo. Cuestionan la economía-ideología de la falta, esa ideología occidental-patriarcal que ha convertido a las mujeres, a las personas negras, a los pueblos autóctonos, a los pueblos de Asia y África, en seres inferiores marcados por la ausencia de razón, de belleza o de un espíritu naturalmente apto para el descubrimiento científico y técnico. (Vergès 29)²²

No other philosophical movements are able to explain what racialized women experiment in white dominated societies and certainly no other movements collect ideas coming from women in the global south or other 3rd world regions and legitimate them as well. It is quite easy to misinterpret or simplify black literature because, as mentioned before, there is a tendency to relativize towards victimization or stereotyping, when that is not the purpose of work productions of black female authors. An example of this is the appearance of pro abolition literature, like the book *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1852, in regards this, Davis mentions that "*the most popular piece of anti-slavery literature of that time perpetuated the racist ideas which justified slavery and the sexist notions which justified the exclusion of women from the political arena where the battle against slavery would be fought.*" (23). The common misunderstandings in regards black literature occur because there are too many factors to be considered and also pieces

²² Decolonial feminisms are inscribed in the long movement of scientific and philosophical reappropriation that reviews the European story of the world. They question the economy-ideology of the lack, this Western-patriarchal ideology that has turn women, Black people, Indigenous peoples, and the peoples from Asia and Africa, into inferior beings marked by the absence of reason, of beauty, or a naturally apt spirit for scientific and technical discovery. (Vergès 29) Translated by the author of this research.

of history that have been denied and distorted over time, so it can be hard to be well informed and easy to find contradictions. The case of *Beloved* might seem contradictory at first sight as well, because at all times, the characters are living the rawest of life and black subjectivities appear to be beaten over and over again by white supremacy. They might seem to be doomed or defeated by their reality, but Morrison is actually delicately creating a path to awareness, choosing very carefully her images, words, characters and scenes in order to provide a proper vision of blackness and feminisms linked to it. The characters are put on a verge they have to escape from if they are going to survive. For instance, in *Beloved*, motherhood is suffered and cruel, but it is at the same time a force of resistance and abjection, considering that love is revolutionary to the extent that is not supposed to be felt by slaves, but Sethe's love is described as too thick, to the point of appropriation of the lives she created but by law did not belong to her. In accordance with Stevens:

In contrast with the traditional, patriarchal, Eurocentric image of the mother, contemporary black women writing is analyzed as a public celebration of the maternal presence, and her love for her children is seen as an act of resistance in developing a loved sense of the self, whose central aim is empowerment of their children in a racist society. In this context, home is a place for nurturance as resistance, a place to restore dignity denied in the unloving world outside the family, which naturalizes blacks as inferior. (96)

Beloved is also a story of black female and motherhood resistance, while the protagonist's partner Hale became mad watching her being sexually assaulted and neglected, she actually performed an act of self and collective preservation by escaping and sending her children away from slavery. *"Maroon feminism offers the decolonial feminism a historical grounding in the resistance struggles facing the slave trade and slavery. By maroonage and maroons, I refer to all the initiatives, all the actions (...) that represent a radical promise."* (Vergès 41).²³ In the novel this slave woman escaped along with her kids in order to pursue a future that was not possible in the farm, so, when her slave master came to haunt her and her family,

²³ Translated by the author of this research.

she preferred death on her own hands than dirty and death on white men's hands and that was another abject action after escaping, she made decisions she had no right to make. Then, when years went by and there seems to be nothing left but a haunted house by the ghost of her baby, a new sense of resistance settled by keeping a home for her last daughter, despite the disgraces, the memories of the traumas and the isolation, she continued to exist and be a mother and a worker.

Being able to choose over one's body, opening to intimacy, desire, pleasure, intimacy, orality and a path towards healing, expiation and identity reconstruction. In this context, the body is an important concept to be considered for the analysis of the novel, as it works as a place of representation of black women and what they had to undergo during slavery. The body, in *BeLoved*, is a canvas where trauma and perversion remain imprinted in the shape of memories and physical scars as well.

En efecto, el cuerpo es sin lugar a dudas la llave de cualquier contacto directo, real y tangible con el mundo (...) es un hecho que todo sujeto experimenta, a lo largo de su vida, determinadas carencias, dolores, aunque también satisfacciones o amores. Ciertamente en los textos escritos por mujeres, sobre todo, se busca dar cuenta de determinadas experiencias que habían sido silenciadas, olvidadas o, en el mejor de los casos, ignoradas, en aras de privilegiar aquéllas consideradas literariamente más valiosas y, por lo tanto, válidas. (Vivero Marin 79-80)²⁴

Morrison uses the female body to express the reality of blackness and slavery. She gives a symbolical voice to the black female bodies that have been killed, maimed, raped and silenced in reality and in the master narrative. The characters in the novel have suffered different corporal vexations that affect their physicality but equally important their psyches, because memories are in charge of framing their traumas and keeping them on the back of their minds at all times impeding them to

²⁴ Indeed, the body is undoubtedly the key to any direct, real and tangible contact with the world (...) it is a fact that every subject experience, throughout their life, determined lacks, pains, and also satisfactions or loves. Certainly, in texts written by women, especially, there is an attempt to account for certain experiences that had been silenced, forgotten, or, best case scenario, ignored, with the aim of privileging those considered to be more literarily valuable and, therefore, valid. (79-80) Quote translated by the author of this research.

develop their subjectivities. For former slave women it was difficult to find wellbeing in their freedom because they were still haunted by their pasts and the threats of a racist and androcentric society that continued to oppress them, colonialism continued to operate in reality and their escape did not mean safety after all. Almost twenty years these characters are still unable to leave their slave experiences in the past because, as mentioned earlier, colonialism is a movement that outlives colonization, and even if black people managed to get their freedom, that did not guarantee that discrimination would be over, they would continue to be considered inferiors and treated as such at all means, so both past and present experiences would be equally against the restorage of their identities. In relation to trauma Merlin states in an article:

In this sense, trauma or intensely charged memories, as Freud described them at the beginning of his theorization, do not wear out regardless how much time has passed, instead, they continue having pathogenic effects. Even though paradoxical, Freud sustains that the only possibility of oblivion is remembrance, since this constitutes the condition that allows the psychical apparatus to trim and delimit a past. Otherwise, the trauma tends to repeat itself compulsively in an eternal present that does not cease and the subject remains located in the same situation they were trying to avoid. (103)²⁵

This information can be applied to Sethe, as she tried to forget and deny her past living with the last consequence of her trauma haunting her, she would not dare to remember, and she did not want to add more memories to her past, she wanted to keep it intact in a dark, hidden space of her mind. *"Lacking a discourse of her own, Sethe must transform the residual images ("rememories") of her past into a historical discourse shaped by narrativity. These images, however, remain for a time disembodied—without form, sequence, or meaning."* (Henderson 84-85).²⁶ She used to live with the ghost of her little child that was murdered in the house 124, at least that was her explanation for everything that was wrong in her present, but she was

²⁵ This is the author's translation.

²⁶ From the article *Toni Morrison's Beloved: Re-membering the body as historical text* by Mae G Henderson. In the collection of essays *Toni Morrison's Beloved, a case book* edited by William L. Andrews & Nellie Y. McKay

hiding information about her traumatic past and her own abjection, she would not recognize what actually happened back in slavery or about her daughter's actual cause of death in an attempt to avoid pain. So, the embodiment of her daughter's ghost comes to the scene to make her, Denver and the rest of their community face their traumas, re-memory them and elaborate a speech about them to explore the possibility of expiation.

El trauma, pulsión de muerte (...) se define en relación y correspondencia con la realidad psíquica. Cuando ésta última no protege o fracasa, el trauma surge como un peligro económico para el aparato que se manifiesta sin aviso, señal ni preparación. De esta concepción se deduce la función de la memoria: recordar y recortar el pasado para evitar la presencia violenta y siniestra del trauma. (Merlin 104)²⁷

In this case, the presence of trauma is unavoidable, but there is a possibility to revisit in order to set a boundary between past and present situations. Starting with the days in the farm, the body/identity neglection, followed by the separation of the family, the attempt of recapture and the murder of a child. The trauma was unspeakable and too large to connect all the dots, but again, the embodiment of the ghost comes with an imperative request of remembering and accepting the past as it was because there is nothing that can change what already happened. This material body symbolizes trauma itself through a toxic hypersexuality, and dehumanized behavior as she is unable to show any form of mercy, love or any feeling considered morally appropriate. This is because this embodiment is used as the representation the erotic in its most destructive expression and the acknowledgement of the past for Sethe begins with the memories of her sexual assault back in the farm. This type of eroticism is linked to trauma and perverse sexual behavior

²⁷ Trauma and the death drive (...) are defined in relation to and in correspondence with psychical reality. When the latter does not protect or fails, trauma emerges as an economic danger to the apparatus that is manifested without warning, signal, or preparation. From this conception derives the function of memory: to remember and to trim the past in order to avoid the violent and sinister presence of trauma (104). Translation by the author of the research.

The abject is related to perversion. The feeling of abjection that I experience is anchored in the superego. The abject is perverse because it does not abandon nor assumes an interdiction, a rule or a law, but it deviates it, misleads it, corrupts it. And it uses all of these to deny them. It kills in the name of life: it is the progressive despot; it lives in the service of death (...). (Kristeva, 25)²⁸

Initially, this idea of perversion and abjection is related to the white man who trespass every limit when it comes to treat slaves, since they are considered subhuman, there is no respect or boundaries associated to their image, therefore, with all of the excuses mentioned above, they are subjected to the worse dehumanized desires of their owners. Later, this idea of abjection and perversion can also be linked to Sethe and lastly to Beloved, this last character, represents all of those traumatic events white men perpetuated against black women and that is also detonating in the novel, because after her appearance and actions, things continue to change, and the truth about her death starts to unravel. Despite Morrison employs this negative image associated to black women that has often been used as a way of generalization against the figure of the female body, she creates a vanishing point for it as she attaches the ghost to these traumatic features, but gives the rest of the characters the possibility to stand up against this symbolization of trauma and the erotic in its defeatist connotation. She allows her characters to become discursive as they are valid too, and in this way, they become able to open a window for acceptance and eroticism to be experienced in an opposite way that can actually lead to healing and expiation.

1.3 Forms of eroticism.

As stated before, the main topic to be analyzed in the novel is eroticism, which is a concept that was largely studied and described by the author Georges Bataille in the book *Eroticism, death and sensuality*, which will serve as the main source of information for this theme in this research. First of all, it is important to note that

²⁸ Translation by the author of the research.

eroticism is an aspect of life that is linked to different areas of human existence. It might be a common belief that eroticism is purely linked to sexuality, whereas this is not wrong, it is important not to relativize the concept because it actually relates to several other elements of human existence. Considering the context of *Beloved*, this research will explain the importance of eroticism ligated to the inner experience, but also with taboos and death, reproduction and death, transgression, murder and hunting, the transgression of marriage, Christianity, the object of desire, prostitution, work, mysticism and sensuality. Always keeping the intention in differentiating the dual role that eroticism fulfills in the novel *Beloved*. In order to begin developing the concept it is possible to state that “*eroticism is the sexual activity of man to the extent that it differs from the sexual activity of animals. Human sexual activity is not necessarily erotic but erotic it is whenever it is not rudimentary and purely animal.*” (Bataille 29). In simple words, eroticism is linked to human experience only, in order to come across with it, one must be a person, which in the case of *Beloved*, is not so obvious, because the characters develop themselves with the belief that they are subhuman, coming from a colonized background in slavery, they do not think they are the same as white people, so their experience with eroticism, at least in the beginning, is not conscious or pleasant, on the contrary, it is experiencing the rawest and distorted sides of sexuality, not coming from an inner desire, but from being the object of desire of a subject, that is superior and violent. Along this separation from human versus animal experience, eroticism not only considers awareness about the self and the sexuality, but also, in the path of rationality it sets restrictions addressed by Bataille as taboos, in order to develop this idea, he explains:

The significance of taboos if we take them as a whole, particularly if we take into consideration those which we do not fail religiously to observe, is none the less reducible to a simple element (...) Violence is what the world of work excludes with its taboos; in my field of enquiry this implies at the same time sexual reproduction and death. (42)

In a context of slavery, the ideas of eroticism and work will be distorted, precisely because of the issue of dehumanization, restrictions with their relationships

and undelimited time between work and home. While white slave masters were literate people, who could understand about the limits of work and sexuality, they decided not to respect them when it came to their slaves who represented human livestock for them. So, on the side of the oppressed, there is no power of decision or power to set restrictions to others and themselves, because they were not considered human beings, they were forced to set up their minds to believe that they were subhuman, animal-like. In *Beloved*, there were limits in the relations between slaves because Sweet Home was an exceptional place according to its owners. It is said in the novel that black folks do not rape Sethe and let her chose who to marry while the rest of the slaves kept practicing sexual activity with cows. In the asymmetrical relation between Mister or Mistress versus slaves there are no restrictions for the owner's decisions on how to possess slave bodies. The same happened with labor, while there is a consensus in society in regards to work, for slaves' work does not mark a limit in time or space because they are forced to live working, without ever accessing a wage or anything at all in exchange for their time and work. They were just forced to work hard and threatened to face violence and death. Human beings created work in order to get away from violence at all times and to separate from death but in the case of slavery, again, every social rule is distorted. In regards death and taboo Bataille states:

The community is made up of those whom the common effort unites, cut off from violence by work during the hours devoted to work. Outside this given time, outside its own limits, the community can revert to violence, it can resort to murder in war against another community. In given circumstances, during a given time, the murder of members of a given tribe is permissible, necessary even. Yet the wildest hecatombs, in spite of the irresponsibility of their instigators, never entirely remove the malediction falling on murder. (48)

This quote relates to *Beloved* because when the characters finally achieve freedom, they are inserted in a community that, even though it is composed mainly by blacks, the problem of alterity and social boundaries are not yet solved. For former slaves, violence is the normal, but it is expected to come from the other party, the

whites and when it is provided by a member towards a new life, like the case of the murdered toddler, it becomes unacceptable because it reminds them of the malediction and the mysticism of death and also of the abject and perverse. This is why after Sethe's liberation from jail, she becomes nothing but a worker, she spends the next twenty years working flawlessly, possibly demonstrating that she is a human being who respects limits and does only what she is supposed to as a form of expiation. In slavery black women were subjected to the desire of any men and if they ever got pregnant by a slave or a slave master it did not matter, that was actually the idea, because aside from the fact that they would be forced to continue working during pregnancy and right away after delivery, their kids, whomever they came from, would become new labor forces and would endure the same destiny as them, so work and reproduction were tightly linked together as undelimited areas.

Moving forward on the eroticism features present in *Beloved*, we encounter the transgression of marriage, which sets boundaries in sexuality and in intimacy with other human beings but it also represents a disruption as it allows the constant practice of sexuality for those who form the married couple. But the institution of marriage is not the same for whites and slaves, so, there is an attempt of transgression among slaves in *Beloved*, when the protagonist is able to marry who she chose, and that had to be respected by the rest of the slaves while they lived under the rules of Sweet Home. Now, those rules were transformed at the arrival of schoolteacher, and the limits set by Sethe's marriage over her body towards other slaves faded in front of her new owners, while she could be raped by her pairs, her body was subjected to whatever the new slave masters desired. According to Bataille:

The erotic side or, more simply, the transgressional aspect of marriage often escapes notice because the word marriage describes both the act of getting married and the state of being married; we forget the former and just think of the latter. Besides, the economic value of women has long made the state of marriage the most important thing; calculations, expectations and results have focused interest on the state at the expense of the intensity of

feeling that characterizes the brief moment of the act. It is different in kind from the expectations it raises-the home, the children and the domestic activity which will result. (110-111)

Sethe's unofficial marriage (for Western/Christian traditions) set a boundary for other black men in the plantation, but also allows her to explore this shameful act with Hale with some sort of permission to repeat it often. As mentioned before, eroticism does not end in sexuality, it is linked to taboos and transgressions and this are set in people's mind through ideas conceived mainly in the Western world, or also coming from Christianity. Even though Morrison employs several resources like the use of symbols related to African deities, to create her character's particular cosmovision, they are not free from the ideas of Christianity because of course, their cultures have been colonized and have been affected by a combination of beliefs. The same happens with Sethe, whose mind operates in a dual cultural standard, in the beginning she would be attached to this imposed Western culture in which she would not fit, she expected to get married and have a family as whites, but after she experienced being a murderer and becomes a figure of abjection in the novel she continues to break limits within the erotic for a while, detaching from those Christian like expectations and exploring also being the object of desire through the act of prostitution as if she killed all transgressions already and nothing could be worse than slaughtering her own child. Bataille mentions that:

The Christian God is a highly organized and individual entity springing from the most destructive of feelings, that of continuity. Continuity is reached when boundaries are crossed. But the most constant characteristic of the impulse I have called transgression is to make order out of what is essentially chaos. (119)

In *Beloved* the characters happen to find their habitual within chaos, they ignore it, not meaning they do not know it, they are just attempting to omit or negate the transgression that their lives mean for themselves and the rest of the society, they hide that trauma from their own minds. In Sethe's case she looks for shelter, subjecting herself to work and devoting her time to make a living instead of thinking,

remembering, interacting or intimating with other people for almost twenty years. As mentioned before, Bataille expresses that one of the most remarkable areas of eroticism is work, because it separates civilized human beings from savages.

By work man orders the world of things and brings himself down to the level of a thing among things; work makes a worker a means to an end. Human work is essential to mankind, is alone in its unequivocal opposition to animal nature. (157)

The inhabitants of 124 Bluestone Road find an order in their chaotic lives through work and ostracism at the same time. For a long time, these characters spend their days defining themselves as humans and carefully living without trespassing any more limits than they already did in the past. This sacrificial Christian like regimen lasted beyond the erotic's new form arrival into the house. "*The character Beloved is not just the host of Sethe's dead child: she is a succubus, a female demon and nightmare figure that sexually assaults male sleepers and drains them of semen.*" (Barnett 71).²⁹ The ghost stopped hunting in spirit and came to life in flesh as a response to the appearance of eroticism in Sethe's and Denver's life with Paul D's appearance and not only to drain Paul D, but also her mother and make them endure sacrifices as she was sacrificed before. Morrison uses symbolisms that imply eroticism in its wide definition, in this last part, she also adds mysticism along with sensuality, which according to Bataille, also complement the concept of eroticism. "*There are staggering similarities and even corresponding or interchangeable characteristics in the two systems, erotic and mystical. But these connections can only be at all clearly perceived if the two kinds of emotion are actually experienced.*" (226). For those who have not experienced either of them these features will represent the abjection, which means abnormal and repulsive. In *Beloved*, the ghost of the child that was killed is a spirit in a material shape, who is hypersexualized and aggressive, and it is never fully clear if she is just a representation of a spiritual, mystical experience or a material, tangible ghost, the

²⁹ From the article *Rape and the Supernatural* by Pamela E. Barnett on the book *Bloom's guides, Toni Morrison Beloved* by Harold Bloom

reader carries both options, even in the end the community is not sure if they really saw the ghost or not. But, to these main ideas of eroticism that conform the mentioned duality, which means that it represents to extremes that are not fully separated as they interact, are complementary and interrelated. The vanishing point they encounter in the end, that represents a sort of solution for chaos, is the development of the oral discourse in order to access memories and attempt to expiate them.

Orality arises as a consequence of eroticism in the novel and this is not casual. As stated before, Morrison's writing is quite careful, detailed and layered. *"Toni Morrison suggests that what we call a "black aesthetic" is largely informed by an African-centered epistemology. The black writer is invested with an authoritative control that derives from the worldview of her real-world community and is recoded into the mimetic-but imaginary-community in the text."* (Weir-Soley 79). In *Beloved*, language plays a very important role, apart from the language the author chooses to develop the written story, there are decisions made on how the characters express themselves and how their speeches are able to evolve throughout the novel, especially as a consequence of their encounters with eroticism in its different manifestations and this is an allusion to the importance of oral traditions in African societies.

(...) podemos observar las tradiciones orales, los testimonios y cualquier forma narrativa del pasado desde el mismo discurso en el presente. En este sentido poco nos importa su forma verbal, sino más bien entender el valor histórico que ellas contienen en sí, al traspasarse de generación en generación –bajo formas narrativas fijas (como poesías y canto) o no (como leyendas y mitos)– y el cambio de paradigma que esto supone, donde el énfasis ya no está dado por la "forma" verbal, sino más bien por su contenido, el que trae consigo un contexto, es manifestado con una expresión verbal o

no verbal que en definitiva se vuelve la mirada a su valor cultural. (Rock Nuñez 103)³⁰

Morrison situates the characters of her novel between 1955 and 1873, the novel transits through events that took place almost twenty years before and the present. The characters transit the memories of these years by storytelling about the past at all times. The importance of orality remains on the verisimilitude of the novel too; Morrison had to create a self-expression that trespassed plausibility to the reader and that notated a management to investigate and recall in order to select the language that will be appropriate to add this cultural value. Besides, this decision impacts the decolonial reflections the novel delivers. On the one hand, Morrison is saying that the forms to trespass knowledge are not only found in books and there are other valid forms to do so, such as different oral expressions. And on the other hand, she is rescuing non-Eurocentric traditions in regards language and information.

The creative use of African oral tradition is quite visible in the writings of the first and second generations of African writers from the 1950s to the late 1980s. Their skilful retrieval of African oral narratives and their incorporation into structure, theme and style gave birth to the Africanization of the novel form. (Iheanacho 2)

Morrison employs the oral tradition in her novel adding political value to her writing because she is informedly writing for her community and under communicational parameters proper of her community as well. She is disobeying the universal norms of writing while paradoxically becoming a canonical writer. *“However, much research has now admitted that traditional African societies must not be characterized as non-literacy societies or as societies without writing.”*

³⁰ (...) We can observe oral traditions, the testimonies, and any narrative form of the past from the same discourse in the present. In this sense, little do their verbal form matters to us, but instead understanding the historical value they contain in themselves, as they are trespassed from generation to generation—under fixed narrative forms (such as poems and singing) or not (such as legends and myths)— this supposes a change of paradigm, in which the emphasis is no longer given by the verbal “form”, but rather by its content, which brings with itself a context, manifested through verbal or non-verbal expressions, that ultimately returns its focus to its cultural value. (103) This translation was made by the author of this research.

(Adotevi 279). In *Beloved*, many of the characters cannot read or write, and this is against what literature says about African societies, that is not that they are illiterate the reason to emphasize on this channel of communication, it is just their tradition. But this is not what Morrison means when she describes her characters as unable to write and read, this lack of formal education was a consequence of slavery, of people learning a second language without formal instruction, and being denied to access any source of formal information situated on the imposed context they inhabit, not meaning that their cultural knowledge is not legitimate, but that they were inserted in a foreign culture and set aside because of not fitting or not knowing much about it. This illiterate condition is a reflection of the systematic neglect and isolation of the colonized within the colonies. Therefore, storytelling and songs become an important form for the characters of *Beloved* to pass information on within their family and community. Oral dramatization is an important factor in the novel, it is possible to observe that it is a window to reliability, when there is a tense story, a sensitive conversation, a petition for something, the characters use oral expression to remark veracity in what they are telling or requesting. Orality can be considered a consequence of eroticism, because it implies intimacy with others and the recognition of the self as a subject that lives in a system of limits and that can insert the idea of decolonizing the mind in order to be able to move forward and live with dignity and in community rather than around guilt and neglect.

Chapter 2: The role of the black female body in *Beloved*.

This chapter will explore the role of the black female body in *Beloved*. The author gives great importance to the performance of her character's bodies, they function both as a recipient of colonial violence, which can be observed in explicit scenes and in symbolisms as well. The stories of the characters express the real struggles black women endured during the period of slavery and that continued to experience through coloniality. In the book, women were also forced laborers and breeders. It is possible to appreciate that slave women were victims of physical strain and violence, leading to permanent scars and illnesses as consequences of that. Also, the conception of science from a Eurocentric perspective is present to demonstrate that slaves were inferior beings, deserving of perverse actions, punishment and torture. Besides, these black female bodies also function in the text as a source of resistance, meaning that they yearn for freedom, they pursue a denied future, they perform escapes and acts of self-defense and after all, they survive and keep their houses, but also their mother-daughter bonds at all costs. To help themselves in these tasks, they look for shelter in spirituality and a connection with their ancestors that is beyond material life.

2.1 Recipient of colonial violence.

Understanding that Morrison creates mainly female characters to be in the center of her stories and specifically in *Beloved*, the main characters are black women and former slaves, the aim is to analyze what is the role of their bodies as recipients of the colonial violence. "*Colonial violence has a paralyzing effect—it inhibits, and it produces a body petrified in terror. Although this paralysis is an effect of constant repression, of being controlled (...)*" (Dorlin 14). As stated before, the black community was reduced to the role of slaves only, and for female slaves, this implies some differences on the types of violence they suffer. In the first place, apart from being forced workers mainly performing field tasks or endured servitude, they were used as breeders as well, forced to carry children that most of the times they did not desire. This was a complex and combined violent experience that starts with the sexual violence they were submitted to, the results were multiple undesired

pregnancies through a lifetime, but simultaneously, along with this “passive or natural” form of work, they still had hard work to do and the constant threatening of physical punishment was latent even when pregnant. Furthermore, a direct consequence of these multiple and high-risk pregnancies, is the drain of their bodies and health, when the time came, they had to give birth in insanitary conditions, risking their lives and in the end, they would have to continue with their labors normally without being able to nurture their babies. Family bonds would not be possible to sustain because the traditional concept of family only applied for white people. There are many testimonies in *BeLoved* that reflect that reality, an example is when Sethe asks Baby Suggs to move out after murdering her child, to live in a place where nobody knew them, to what her mother-in-law replies:

"What'd be the point?" asked Baby Suggs. "Not a house in the country ain't packed to its rafters with some dead Negro's grief. We lucky this ghost is a baby. My husband's spirit was to come back in here? or yours? Don't talk to me. You lucky. You got three left. Three pulling at your skirts and just one raising hell from the other side. Be thankful, why don't you? I had eight. Every one of them gone away from me. Four taken, four chased, and all, I expect, worrying somebody's house into evil." Baby Suggs rubbed her eyebrows. "My first-born. All I can remember of her is how she loved the burned bottom of bread. Can you beat that? Eight children and that's all I remember." (Morrison 5)

Baby Suggs fears that people would find out anyways wherever they settled, so the struggle would be useless, as they would continue living in the same conditions. She is an example of what today is called a racialized female body marked by coloniality. Her motherhood experience was truncated and she would be raped multiple times and also fooled to exchange sex for the illusion of keeping at least one of her children with her, but for a white man, his economy was more important than a slave woman, so her efforts did not make any difference in her life, whatever she did, she would be unable to maintain bonds with her descendants, her

existence was reduced to work only, rather than becoming a mother in the traditional conception of that role.

Halle she was able to keep the longest. Twenty years. A lifetime. Given to her, no doubt, to make up for hearing that her two girls, neither of whom had their adult teeth, 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. That child she could not love and the rest she would not. (Morrison 23)

Apart from this usage of her body with reproductive purposes, the work itself was tough enough to harm her body as she started aging and lead her to decadence, her hip was injured as a result of heavy lifting, causing her to limp when walking for life. When she was already elder, her last son, Halle, was able to exchange his Sunday's labor for the next five years for her freedom, but she was already sixty years old and only got live ten years of that freed future. This short time was the result of her exhausted and injured body, which was unable to continue producing much more, she became disposable. It was more efficient to have her son working extra instead of keeping her, who was becoming a burden rather than supporting the master's economy.

In the novel, we are able to appreciate the colonial violence in very extensively in the character of Sethe as well. Through her, readers are able to take a look at a female slave life from an early age, until she became a teen mother of four and even after that, when she was already free woman but continued to live under racial, gender and class oppression. When she was asked by *Be/loved* about her woman, meaning her mother, she began to remember her own time as a slave daughter:

I didn't see her but a few times out in the fields and once when she was working indigo. By the time I woke up in the morning, she was in line. If the moon was bright, they worked by its light. Sunday, she slept like a stick. She must of nursed me two or three weeks--that's the way the others did. (...) She

picked me up and carried me behind the smokehouse. Back there she opened up her dress front and lifted her breast and pointed under it. Right on her rib was a circle and a cross burnt right in the skin. She said, 'This is your ma'am. This,' and she pointed. 'I am the only one got this mark now. The rest dead. If something happens to me and you can't tell me by my face, you can know me by this mark.' (Morrison 60-61)

This passage spots the way in which black women were denied to take care of their families or even live within the traditional idea of family. Slave women's bodies were first of all labor bodies. *"Black women came to be increasingly appraised for their fertility (or for the lack of it): she who was potentially the mother of ten, twelve, fourteen or more became a coveted treasure indeed"* (Davis 9). This did not mean they would be treated as more valuable subjects than men, they were still subjected to the same rules and threats. This passage also shows another interesting feature which was the marking of slaves, which of course was also violent. *"In Morrison's Beloved, Sethe's mother is marked with the symbol of the Kongo cosmogram by the master's branding iron"*. (Weir-Soley 110). Sethe mentions this property mark while remembering her mother, in this case the mark is symbolic as the Kongo cosmogram represents life, death and rebirth as well as the physical and spiritual human experience. Her mother tells her she was the last woman in that plantation with that mark, when Sethe asked to get the mark in order to resemble her mother she got slapped in the face by her, which was a violent form of sending a message.

Through routine, habitual activity, our bodies learn what is "inner" and what is "outer," which gestures are forbidden and which required, how violable or inviolable are the boundaries of our bodies, how much space around the body may be claimed, and so on. These are often far more powerful lessons than those we learn consciously, through explicit instruction concerning the appropriate behavior for our gender, race, and social class. (Bordo 16)

Up until this point Sethe was a child who was learning what her place in the world was, through violence expressing in different ways against her. Even language

was a type of violence, as she states that she remembers her wet nurse spoke in a language she would not remember, even though she remembered the messages they were expressing. *"Nan was the one she knew best, who was around all day, who nursed babies, cooked, had one good arm and half of another. And who used different words. Words Sethe understood then but could neither recall nor repeat now."* (Morrison 61). From this passage we understand that the woman who fulfilled that nursing role was maimed and was not worthy to keep her on the fields, so she had to take care, to a possible extent, of all the slave children. As they spoke their own language, it was hard for Sethe to remember and decode that past in which she was not a laborer yet. Later, as an adult in freedom, the only thing Sethe was able to do with her body, apart from taking care of Denver was working. *"The enormous space that work occupies in Black women's lives today follows a pattern established during the very earliest days of slavery. As slaves, compulsory labor overshadowed every other aspect of women's existence."* (Davis 9). Throughout her life, she had learnt that the only value of her as a person was in her labor. Her community would not talk to her, two of her children escaped from her because they were scared of her and her husband was missing. She was isolated by her community because she became the representation of the abject body, so the only thing that made her feel separated from savageness during adulthood was the role of the worker and the mother.

Going back to Sethe's time as a slave, she was a quiet young woman who prepared the master's favorite ink, for him to write things she would not really understand, although she observed. At one point she realizes they are studying her by separating her animal versus her human features, she would not understand this last word and later she found out it meant characteristics. In reality these were common studies performed in the past by white men who were trying to scientifically prove that blacks were inferior beings, animal like. In an article called *Black bodies white science*, Wallis explains the use of the daguerreotypes with this purpose:

The daguerreotypes, which were taken for Agassiz in Columbia, South Carolina, in 1850, had two purposes, one nominally scientific, the other frankly

political. They were designed to analyze the physical differences between European whites and African blacks, but at the same time they were meant to prove the superiority of the white race. Agassiz hoped to use the photographs as evidence to prove his theory of "separate creation," the idea that the various races of mankind were in fact separate species. Though strictly scientific in purpose, the daguerreotypes took on a very particular meaning in the context of prevailing political, economic, and aesthetic theories about race. (40)

The daguerreotype was the first photography technic implemented, and in Agassiz case, it was used with the purpose of registering a visual proof of the physical differences between races, this information was spread as a truth and during the 19th century the image of the black race was closer to the orangutan in the representation of the evolutionary chain (53). Not only the message is violent, but also the form of getting that information, to do so, slave men and women had to pose naked, for their images to be captured. In the present those images are proof of how neglected and malnourished slaves were. Morrison takes this deed from white men of proving the animality and inferiority of the black race to represent in her novel the dehumanized behavior against slaves, being physically violent, but also symbolically. The dehumanized behavior was directed towards Sethe, because she was considered less than a human, her body was not valuable and there was no reason to respect it. She was sexually assaulted by two white men while the school teacher would watch and write as part of his studies and experiments. When Sethe told her former mistress what had happened, they found out and as an act of submission and revenge they whipped her in her back while she was pregnant, leaving the scar with the shape of a choke cherry tree that is often mentioned in the novel. That scar remained in her back as a permanent reminder of the imprinted violence her body carried.

(...) those boys came in there and took my milk. That's what they came in there for. Held me down and took it. I told Mrs. Garner on em. She had that lump and couldn't speak but her eyes rolled out tears. Them boys found out I

told on em. Schoolteacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree. It grows there still." (Morrison 16-17)

For Sethe, the most painful part of that physical punishment was that they took her milk, which was the only source of food she had to offer her children, those white men drank her milk directly from her breast, and that meant both a sexual assault and most likely, starvation for those slave infants. Violence was applied to slaves also through hunger, studies about slave diet confirm that they were malnourished and kept alive and functioning in the cheapest way possible.

Since the costs of slave living expenses represented the most important share of plantation budget, planters had a strong incentive, in the short run, to cut expenses in feeding by means of standardization of slave diet which entailed to choose a very restricted range of staple foods. The choice for pork and corn was dictated by practical reasons: they were cheap commodities and easy to store for long time. (Flores 10)

So, comprehending that there was a lack of food for themselves, slave women did not have anything else to offer their children than their milk. Sethe was somehow a privilege slave in the beginning as sweet home was less sadistic than other plantations. She was the only slave woman at that place and was allowed to breast feed her children as there were no other wet nurses around. That was why she was able to develop a thick love towards her children, because they were allowed to create a bond and at the same time, that was why her concern was bigger, nobody else would feed her children but her.

"Anybody could smell me long before he saw me. And when he saw me, he'd see the drops of it on the front of my dress. Nothing I could do about that. All I knew was I had to get my milk to my baby girl. Nobody was going to nurse her like me. Nobody was going to get it to her fast enough, or take it away when she had enough and didn't know it. Nobody knew that she couldn't pass her air if you held her up on your shoulder, only if she was lying on my knees. Nobody knew that but me and nobody had her milk but me. I told that to the women in the wagon. Told them to put sugar water in cloth to suck from so

when I got there in a few days she wouldn't have forgot me. The milk would be there and I would be there with it." (Morrison 16)

This reflects Sethe's pain about being unable to deliver her milk supply and having to send her children away on their own, when she was the only one who knew how to keep them alive and was willing to do so, even though she did not have the actual right to take care of them or love them, she took the risk to perceive herself as a mother. And she also suffered the physical punishment for speaking, because she accused the men who attacked her with her former mistress even though she would not defend her, so she was whipped while being pregnant and had to run away with those open wounds that Miss Amy Denver compares with a choke cherry tree to protect and sugarcoat Sethe's imagination.

It's a tree, Lu. A chokecherry tree. See, here's the trunk--it's red and split wide open, full of sap, and this here's the parting for the branches. You got a mighty lot of branches. Leaves, too, look like, and dern if these ain't blossoms. Tiny little cherry blossoms, just as white. Your back got a whole tree on it. In bloom. What God have in mind, I wonder. I had me some whippings, but I don't remember nothing like this. Mr. Buddy had a right evil hand too. Whip you for looking at him straight. (Morrison 79)

This white girl compares Sethe's open wounds to the physical punishments she has received, which had been hard, but not as Sethe's, whose wounds would become visible, bulgy scars that would remind her of her past for life. Sethe's pain never ended, after she escapes and arrives in Ohio, she is haunted again by the schoolteacher and then becomes the murderer of the baby she cares so much about to avoid the extension and lingering of that colonial violence over her. In this sense, Beloved as a baby becomes a recipient of this violence as well, and when she returns to life as a fleshed ghost, the first impression she gives to the people in 124 is that of being a traumatized fugitive slave because of her physical and psychical conditions. In an interview when Morrison was asked if Beloved as a character is really a ghost she replies:

Well, she could also be a person, You, see? the evidence is there that she is a traumatized survivor of a slave ship, the language she speaks is a language of someone who indeed may very well have remembered what that was like and it's the language of death. The questions they asked her, they say; what was it like over there? Could be the other life and it could be a whole of a slave ship. And it was dazzling for me to know that the vocabulary was the same. (Toni Morrison interview 00:13:32)³¹

Morrison compares the vocabulary and questions formulated for a slave survivor to the language and questions one would use to talk about death, because *Beloved's* fleshed body represents both of those results of violence. She was murdered as a toddler by her own mother, again responding to violence with more violence and now she was somehow a survivor of death, in any case she was traumatized, unable to breath well, to speak the English language properly, she was extremely thirsty, sick and exhausted and had to sleep several days in order to recover physically and start sharing with the members of the house. She never gave information about her background until it became clear who she was.

These are examples of the violence applied to these female characters in the novel and the different forms in which operated, all of them leading to trauma and corporal reminders of slavery, even if memory would hide things as a form of protection against the horror, the scars, injuries and the dead or disappeared bodies were there haunting. Next, we will explore the representation of female black bodies as a source of resistance against these intersections of violence.

2.2 Source of resistance and transformation of black subjectivities.

In the novel *Beloved*, the black female body also fulfills the role of being a source of resistance that later can lead to a transformation for black women's subjectivities and this can happen individually but it might also have a collective impact. The resistance we talk about has to do with the yearn of survival and a future that slaves have no right to pursue, in order to achieve this, the characters in *Beloved*

³¹ Quote taken from a YouTube video, transcribed by the author of this research.

have to perform certain acts of self defense and preservation, despite the exhaustion of their bodies. To begin analyzing the resistance performance of these racialized female bodies we will revisit the story of Sethe, as the arch of her character makes visible the different moments in which she stands up to confront the colonial violence she faces in order to escape from it.

Sethe's main resistance action is reflected on her survival to slavery, during her last period of time as a slave, she and the rest of the slaves experienced some changes (for worse) in the form of slavery practiced at sweet home. If Sethe's body was respected and exempt from physical and sexual abuse before, with the arrival of school teacher that was not the case anymore. So, in the first place, she survives brutal sexual assaults and whips before sending her children away in the wagon and then running away by herself. While she survived those attacks, her husband Halle became crazy just because he witnessed one of those events and then disappears, but she continues in her duty towards freedom. *"Pregnant Sethe gives birth to a child, while running away to escape slavery. The author describes the physicality of the birthing act in detail, which, based on my readings of contemporary Literature, is absent."* (Stevens 96). Morrison is very detailed in the delivery scene, giving the black and slave mother body a space in literature they often do not have. Giving birth on that boat and arriving to 124 Bluestone Road was an achievement Sethe was really proud of, because she made it herself, alone. Her body was about to pass away in the woods, but with the help of Amy Denver she had been able to survive along with the baby she carried. When schoolteacher came to take them back to Kentucky, Sethe performed what she believed was her last act of resistance, although contradictory, against slavery by attempting to kill her children instead of letting them live as she had so far.

What it took to drag the teeth out of that saw under the little chin; to feel the baby blood plump like oil in her hands; to hold her face so that her head would stay on; to squeeze her so that she could absorb, still, the death spasms that shot through that adored body, plump and sweet with life—Beloved must leave.

Leave before (...) anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. (Morrison 251)

Sethe did not want her children to endure what she had during slavery and thought that death would be better than that. The act seems to be the opposite of successful, but it was a desperate choice that was actually difficult to put in practice. Should she have more time, she probably would have killed the rest of the kids and herself as well, but apart from Beloved, the rest of the members of her family survived and were not taken back to the farm. After that, her body only continues to sustain different forms of resistance and survival. In reference to this infanticide, Danticat comments:

This is indeed a hard killing, a baby's execution, carried out through the determined "arc of its mother's swing." (Finally she is allowed to be a mother.) Sethe's purposeful and sorrowful act is embodied by the arc of that swing, the impossible choice she ends up making as well as the level of concentration required to carry it out. (105)

The mentioned "arc of its mother's swing" refers to the infanticide scene, in which Sethe makes sure the baby dies by swinging the body and attempting to hit it against the wall. That swing between life and death is a metaphor of her motherhood experience, she manages to kill one of her kids, which was hard in the performative way, it required her knowledge, gut and nerves to be alert and functioning in that distressful moment to complete the task. But then she and the rest of her children survived and had to continue enduring trauma and oppression. Sethe continued to live with the burden of her past and was left by her children as soon as they were thirteen years old. She was haunted by the ghost of her dead baby, she never found out what happened to her husband, she went to jail with her new born, she was isolated and ignored by her neighbors and acquaintances, but as Danticat mentions, she was finally allowed to be a mother, she was not just the "negro woman" anymore, she was free to mother the kids she had left. *"Once only, and in a radical way, this bigger-than life character is in control of her child's body and life, as she never had been of hers"* (Stevens 97). Also, even though she killed her baby, she made that

decision, not a white man, after multiple vexations. Then in her present, even if she had only one child left, Denver, she was now allowed to embody the role of the mother and live in a house inhabited only by them, in which they did not have to serve anybody else or live completely dominated, dehumanized and owned by someone within their space, despite the structural oppressions around them outside their house.

Another character who embodied resistance is Baby Suggs, she was an elder former slave and she was ill, filled with aches and pains. She had spent sixty years as a slave when she got the chance to pursue a future in freedom. When she finally arrived in Ohio and her body was already too worn out to work and make money for the first time, she decided to start preaching, using her voice to accompany others' sufferings, this was the only service she was able to offer at the time, and she wanted to do this in order to move on with the rest of her life joining her community, providing comfort. She took cover under spirituality, which is manifested in different ways in the novel, but in her case, it was expressed through her eagerness to become a preacher at first.

It was in front of that 124 that Sethe climbed off a wagon, her newborn tied to her chest, and felt for the first time the wide arms of her mother-in-law, who had made it to Cincinnati. Who decided that, because slave life had "busted her legs, back, head, eyes, hands, kidneys, womb and tongue," she had nothing left to make a living with but her heart--which she put to work at once. Accepting no title of honor before her name, but allowing a small caress after it, she became an unchurched preacher, one who visited pulpits and opened her great heart to those who could use it. In winter and fall she carried it to AME's and Baptists, Holinesses and Sanctifieds, the Church of the Redeemer and the Redeemed. Uncalled, unrobed, unanointed, she let her great heart beat in their presence. When warm weather came, Baby Suggs, holy, followed by every black man, woman and child who could make it through, took her great heart to the Clearing--a wide-open place cut deep in the woods nobody knew for what at the end of a path known only to deer and whoever cleared

the land in the first place. In the heat of every Saturday afternoon, she sat in the clearing while the people waited among the trees. (Morrison 87)

Baby Suggs body was exhausted and ill, but still willing to give something for her community. When Morrison says Baby Suggs belonged to the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the author is letting us know that there is a dual religious practice *“through the figure of Baby Suggs, Ryan makes a case for syncretization of west African religions with Christianity in the development of what we know as African American spirituality”* (Weir-Soley 85).³² This could also be considered an act of resistance because when receiving the imposed religion of the dominant, these groups were able to keep part of their own beliefs, not fully integrating the imposed religion, but blending it with their own belief systems, so they did not really disappear and continued to exist through them and the generations after them. Babby Suggs could not be considered an official preacher, because she was a woman and did not take the information from books as she was illiterate at least in English, instead she let herself feel the connection with her own wisdom, her ancestors and her life experiences.

Even when they are not thematized within beloved, these spiritual elements are a “haunting” presence in the narrative, enacting a double-voiced discourse that speaks to the resiliency of African spirituality and its efficacy not only as an enabler of the “site of memory” for a people who have had their culture stolen from them, but also as a polyvalent signifier, fully capable of being pressed into service as a literary device that allows for narrative complexity and open-endedness. (...) this narrative interventions allow the narrative to encode racial resistance strategies even when the characters themselves are too mired in the historical exigencies of the period to set themselves free. (Weir-Soley 81)

After slavery, Baby Suggs got the house 124 and she was able to keep a home of her own until the end of her life and she would spend her time preaching

³² In *Spirituality as Ideology in Black Women's Film and Literature*, Judlyn Ryan examines the centrality of kinship ties in *Beloved* and in west African cosmologies. (85)

about self-love and loving blackness as a vital chore. *“Blackness has been about all of that: search of our identity, affirmation of our right to difference, a requirement made to everybody of acknowledging that right and the respect towards our community personality.”* (Cesaire 90).³³ Baby Suggs was for a long time a figure of resilience, she was indeed a woman who was elder and wiser, so she was able to realize that she and her community deserved to express their identities and reconstruct their subjectivities because they were human beings as well, who had a background and their own cultural/religious practices, which were valid too and this responds to a decolonial like perspective. The only issue is that period of time did not last long, because the white supremacist world continued to work against them and everything changed after Sethe’s arrival.

There is a sort of inner uprising that leads to rebellion, no matter how brief this lasts. It may be momentary, but it has taken place. That space within oneself in which resistance is possible continues to be there. It is different when we speak about becoming subjects. This process only emerges when we start to understand how do structures of domination work in our own lives, as critical thinking and critical consciousness develop, as new alternative life habits are invented, and we resist from that marginal space of difference that is defined from within. (hooks 37-38)³⁴

So, Baby Suggs’ rebellion had taken place, even if in the end she became disappointed again with life and was unable to carry on with her preaching service until the end of her time. Knowing that she had been beaten over and over again by white men, she looked for comfort in the pleasure of color as her last ritual. Before that, when Sethe killed Beloved, Baby Suggs was isolated by their community as well, she had even started to be excluded before the infanticide, when they threw a party with too much food and the community felt that she was being ostentatious, which was not correct for black people as they did not have the conditions to be

³³ Translated by the author of this research.

³⁴ Translated by the author of this research.

opulent and wasteful. All of this caused Baby Suggs to stop having hopes about life and just go to bed to wait for her time on earth to be over.

Baby Suggs grew tired, went to bed and stayed there until her big old heart quit. Except for an occasional request for color, she said practically nothing--until the afternoon of the last day of her life when she got out of bed, skipped slowly to the door of the keeping room and announced to Sethe and Denver the lesson she had learned from her sixty years a slave and ten years free: that there was no bad luck in the world but white people. "They don't know when to stop," she said, and returned to her bed, pulled up the quilt and left them to hold that thought forever. (Morrison 104)

This does not invalidate her resistance and does not mean that she died defeated, it only means that she realized that even in freedom and in her future, she was unable to defeat slavery and racism and that was why disgraces would never stop, but her beliefs and ideas had been put out there already and had served other people who would continue to live after her, "*Baby Suggs is not just a preacher; she is a spiritual leader whose stewardship of her community is based on a profound sense of inter-subjectivity between the individual, the community, and the entire cosmos.*" (Weir-Soley 106). Sethe and Denver, kept relying on her knowledge after her passing as she was their most direct ancestor, so they would continue having a bond with her and her wisdom after her passing. Her legacy lingered and her presence transcended death, the generation of women after her continued looking for comfort in her memory.

Africans do not worship their ancestors, as some westerners believe, but they do maintain interconnectedness between the living and the death through rituals that may resemble worship when observed through a western lens. Because the time is cyclical in west African cosmology, the ancestor is revered as the spiritual and physical head of the family, and this relationship does not terminate after death. (Weir-Soley 85)

In *BeLoved*, time has the effect of being cyclical as well, the narration goes back and forth between the past and the present. The same happens with Baby Suggs

after she is dead, she keeps a connection with the material world. In life, her body was resilient as she survived sexual, physical and emotional brutal attacks, and then, she got to live a future in freedom even if brief and bitter as well. She was able to work in freedom spreading the word of love and giving comfort to other black folks. *"I think in identity not as an archaism devouring of itself, but instead, devouring of the world, that is to say, it empowers especially of the present to improve the reevaluation of the past and even more, to prepare the future."* (Cesaire 88)³⁵ Baby Suggs was able to at least aim to become a subject and attach her subjectivity to a black identity, inviting her folks to do the same and most importantly, she was able to trespass these ideas to younger people so that they could attempt to develop as subjects as well. So again, spirituality was a source that allowed this corporality to move forward and understand that she and her community could reconstruct their subjectivities individually but also collectively, as they were human beings that could grow a valid sense of belonging within blackness too.

The appearance of the spiritual elements is not casual; they are carefully spread through the text by the author. There are explicit references to deities like Erzulie. *"Erzulie's symbol, the red heart, appears in Beloved in connection with Paul D, mister —the intrepid rooster —and Beloved"* (Weir Soley 82). Erzulie is a deity in Haitian voodoo that is related with love and femininity. And the red heart symbol is attached to her and it appears when Paul D places all of his traumatic memories in the tobacco tin he has instead of a heart. To some extent Paul D develops his vulnerable and emotional side, that is why women feel comfortable and cry around him. Then when the ghost of Beloved, representing the traumatic acts of white men, wants him to call her name and compel him to touch her private parts, instead of calling her name, he calls "red heart" repeated times, because he is in fact, attempting to resist this domination.

Finally, the representation of the black female body on *Beloved* as a source of resistance can be appreciated, as stated before, in the survival methods the characters employ, their actions of self and collective preservation, the performances

³⁵ Translated by the author of this research.

of escapes and the attachment to their houses and family bonds. It can also be seen in the hope of a future outside slavery, which they are not supposed to visualize as they are also not supposed to hope to develop themselves as subjects who are equals to the rest in value as human beings, but attached to their identity in blackness, because their experiences had made them different. This resistance is greatly expressed through some elements of spirituality that allow them to connect with others and find comfort, but spirituality functions in the text as a narrative tool as well, that simultaneously expresses resistance in the book's discourse itself as it permits to explore some features of African cosmologies spread through America and the Caribbean with slavery. At the same time, it gives the characters the chance to modify their perception of themselves as individuals, and whether or not this is completed because of how immerse the characters are in their own historical context, there is a transformation process that takes place in relation to subjectivity, an approach if you will, to the extent that, even if it is just a brief moment, they experiment that rebellion that is a consequence of this new awareness and sense of the self and that opens a space to start building an identity around blackness and community.

Chapter 3: Eroticism's dual role in *Beloved*

In this chapter we will discuss eroticism's dual role, the use of a dual form of analysis rather than a dichotomic form, is because in *Beloved*, eroticism is represented in two different ways, and there are encounters of them in between, meaning that there are two extremes that are complementary with each other but they do not strictly exclude one another, instead they feed from each other. On the other hand, a dichotomic standpoint would be linked to a binarism that is proper of a Western way of thinking, in which two sides are opposite, correct or incorrect, without a spectrum to be evaluated in between. In the first section of this chapter, we will analyze the relation of eroticism with trauma, that is the constant re-memory of trauma, of sexual violence, rape, ideas of cannibalism, the relationship with Christianity, marriage and murder. In here memory can be harmful but also protective, as it hides events as a preservation coping method, but then the revisiting and reconstruction of it can also lead to acceptance and healing. On the second section, we will explore the role of eroticism as a channel for healing, through the erotic camaraderie and healing skills of Miss Amy Denver and Baby Suggs, Baby Suggs preaches, Sethe's sensual experience with Paul D along with the oral re-memory that leads to an acceptance of the past and finally, Dever's jealousy and eventual seek for help and work in the outside world.

3.1 Representation as an enhancement of trauma.

Beloved is a novel that transits between the past and the present of the characters, as well as their inner and outside realities, meaning psychic and body experiences. Eroticism is linked by Bataille to an inner experience that separates human beings from animals through the creation of taboos and transgressions (29). In this chapter, the intention is to analyze what happens with the erotic when there are different classes of people according to race divisions, especially with those considered the inferiors. In the case of slavery, black subjects had no rights protecting their lives. While white masters were part of the dominant group, blacks were the colonized bodies subjected to their master's will. So, eroticism during slavery is an experience that is ligated to transgression mainly. Because the

victimizer is able to discern between human and animal nature yet, they decide to view the slave as an animal that must be dominated through violence and perverse actions. On the other side, the possibilities left for slaves to experiment eroticism is reduced to violent forms of sexual abuse perpetuated by their masters against them and there is no delimitation between life and work.

To start, we have Sethe, who is the main character of the novel and her experience with eroticism is the most powerful in the text as it is very detailed from the beginning. At her arrival in sweet home, she was a 13-year-old girl who was brought to the plantation after Baby Suggs got her freedom. She had to choose one of the male slaves to marry. Her options were "*Paul D Garner, Paul F Garner, Paul A Garner, Halle Suggs and Sixo, the wild man. All in their twenties, minus women, fucking cows, dreaming of rape, thrashing on pallets, rubbing their thighs and waiting for the new girl*" (Morrison 11). At that point rape was not allowed at sweet home and somehow, they respected monogamy, so while she was able to marry one man, the rest had to content themselves obtaining sexual relief with animals. Marriage in this case was not the same as it was for white people. Sethe found a partner on Halle but they were unable to sustain a relationship as actual lovers. "*Sethe had the amazing luck of six whole years of marriage to that "somebody" son who had fathered every one of her children.*" (23). She was lucky because of what she got, which was one same father for all of her babies, unlike other slaves who were raped by different men, including their owners and had to carry their children only to be separated from them later without having any power of decision over them. Sethe thought she would be able to have a wedding because she was too young and did not fully understand her condition as a slave yet. Morrison narrates Sethe's wedding situation as it follows:

"But I mean we want to get married."

"You just said so. And I said all right."

"Is there a wedding?"

Mrs. Garner put down her cooking spoon. Laughing a little, she touched Sethe on the head, saying, "You are one sweet child." And then no more.

Sethe made a dress on the sly and Halle hung his hitching rope from a nail on the wall of her cabin. And there on top of a mattress on top of the dirt floor of the cabin they coupled for the third time, the first two having been in the tiny cornfield Mr. Garner kept because it was a crop animals could use as well as humans. Both Halle and Sethe were under the impression that they were hidden. Scrunched down among the stalks they couldn't see anything, including the corn tops waving over their heads and visible to everyone else. (26)

In reality, her marriage was just a permission to practice sexual activity with the partner she was allowed to choose. Now, the human erotic experience is also related with privacy, with allowing a separation of sexual encounters from the eyes of the community, but this couple was only able to go away, deep in the corn fields and even though they were not directly seen, they were noticed by the rest of the slaves, causing excitement and jealousy at the same time because she was the only woman there. The trauma reaches Sethe with the realization that there was nothing else from here on, just be able to be respected by the rest of the group, knowing that they wouldn't come to her at nights and she would be able to have sex on demand, sort of speak, with her partner to start reproducing themselves without a break. At the age of eighteen, Sethe had been pregnant each year and was now carrying her fourth child. Her master had passed away and her mistress was advised to bring a new master so that she would not be alone, surrounded by black people only at her home. The new master was the schoolteacher with his nephews or sons; Sethe was not sure about how they were related. He arrived at sweet home with more traditional ideas about slavery. *"Violence is what the world of work excludes with its taboos; in my field of enquiry this implies at the same time sexual reproduction and death."* (Bataille 42). Up until that point, sweet home had been practicing a softer type of slavery, slaves were not whipped or raped but that was gone now and replaced by its normal version. In the first place, schoolteacher started to use them as objects of investigation, as mentioned earlier with the study of animal and human features. Sethe was sexually assaulted by these white men on two different occasions. These are some of the most traumatic life experiences for her. Not only because of the non-

consented sexual activity, but mainly because of the perversion associated with their actions. The first time she reencounters with Paul D; they get physically intimate and she begins to remember immediately.

Naked from shoulder blade to waist, relieved of the weight of her breasts, smelling the stolen milk again and the pleasure of baking bread? Maybe this one time she could stop dead still in the middle of a cooking meal--not even leave the stove--and feel the hurt her back ought to. Trust things and remember things because the last of the Sweet Home men was there to catch her if she sank? (Morrison 18)

These past events she starts to revisit with this new sensual experience, are the ones that lead her to abjection before. Her body was supposed to be a resource for her children according to her, but instead was “dirtied” by these men. There are psychic and physical traumas associated to this assault. Afterwards, a tree shaped scar grew in her back and remained there forever, working also as a metaphor of what is there, haunting and serving as a reminder of the pain but cannot be seen or it is perceived as something different than what it is in reality. She called it a tree because of what Amy Denver told her, although she was unable to see her own back; Paul D saw only an ugly scar. Sethe used these imaginations to protect herself from remembering the trauma enhanced during slavery and also by her posterior actions. Kristeva mentions that “*Abjection involves one of those violent and dark rebellions of the self against what threatens it and seems to come from an outside or an overwhelming inside, cast beyond the bounds of the possible and the tolerable, of the thinkable.*” (9)³⁶ Therefore, Sethe’s abjection begins with her escape; slaves were not supposed to be aware of self-defense and even less to put it into practice. But she became able to discern, and see herself and her family as free people and made the decision to run away from the institution that had kept her prisoner since she was born.

³⁶ This is the author’s translation

During her path to arrive in Ohio to meet her children, Sethe had a close encounter with death when she was about to deliver her daughter Denver. Before her first encounter with Amy Denver, Sethe was about to stop walking, thinking she would drop dead, but knowing it would not be an easy death because of everything she had risked to pursue freedom with her children. As she was deepening in her death pulsion, she heard someone coming and feeling the danger approaching, gave back to her a life pulsion, she was so hungry and weak, she thought about cannibalism, she was willing to eat what she imagined was a white man coming closer to catch her.

She told Denver that a something came up out of the earth into her--like a freezing, but moving too, like jaws inside. "Look like I was just cold jaws grinding," she said. Suddenly she was eager for his eyes, to bite into them; to gnaw his cheek.

"I was hungry," she told Denver, "Just as hungry as I could be for his eyes. I couldn't wait." (31)

Escaping from sweet home, seemed to unblock something on Sethe, now she was too tired because of her self-defense performance, she was worn out because she was pregnant as well, but it was like she had lost her fear and was willing to kill and even eat a white man had he crossed her path. She became willing to break any restriction society had set for humans. *"The man who eats human flesh knows full well that this is a forbidden act; knowing this taboo to be fundamental he will religiously violate it nevertheless."* (Bataille 71). Sethe had gained control of herself by escaping and since she was free now, she could either die by herself, eternally rest and surrender to continuity or make her escape worthwhile and kill whatever was threatening her future with her children. In the end, her instinct of eating her hunter disappeared when she noticed it was a girl. Amy Denver was a white trash girl who was an endured servant and whose procreator was her mister. She also represented the erotic symbolically, which will be reviewed later in detail. She was a woman who had escaped and was travelling by foot alone too. She specifically wanted to find the capital city, meet with civilization and the beginning of capitalism,

but far from getting there, she made a stop to help Sethe deliver her child. When Sethe was finally able to arrive, she entered in 124 Bluestone Road to reunite with her children and meet Baby Suggs, her mother-in-law. She was able to spend only twenty-eight days in freedom, a typical menstruation cycle until she was hunted again by her former owner, reclaiming his live property. After the infanticide of Beloved, Sethe's abjection could only broaden. She was sent to jail because of property stealing instead of as a murderer. After that the only approach to sexuality known before Paul D's arrival is through prostitution one time.

Ten minutes, he said. You got ten minutes I'll do it for free. Ten minutes for seven letters. With another ten could she have gotten "Dearly" too? She had not thought to ask him and it bothered her still that it might have been possible--that for twenty minutes, a half hour, say, she could have had the whole thing, every word she heard the preacher say at the funeral (and all there was to say, surely) engraved on her baby's headstone: Dearly Beloved. She thought it would be enough, rutting among the headstones with the engraver, his young son looking on, the anger in his face so old; the appetite in it quite new. (Morrison 5)

This passage reflects two traumatic situations linked to the erotic at the same time. On the one hand, there is Sethe, exchanging sex for the letters on her child's grave stone, because she did not have the money to pay for it and in fact, her baby did not even get to have a name, she only placed one of the words pronounced by the reverend at the funeral. On the other hand, she saw the man's son looking at them, aware that they were creating a trauma for him as well, who was too young to be looking at something like that and also used to these raw images that were somehow sending a message, normalizing this behavior and awakening his own desire at an early age.

The main theme of the novel is the murder of Sethe's third daughter; the number 124 of the house is also symbolic for the missing 3. Even though she was not aware, the murder of this toddler is in a way a sacrifice that was intended to extend to the rest of her family as well. *"A violent death disrupts the creature's*

discontinuity: what remains, what the tense onlookers experience in the succeeding silence, is the continuity of all existence with which the victim is now one." (Bataille 82). Sethe tries to surrender to death with her children in exchange of finding peace and somehow it worked as after offering that one child to death, she and the rest were able to continue living in freedom. But the only child that was brutally killed goes back to this mentioned continuity of all existence and becomes a sort of omniscient mind who is present at the house haunting them, but is also able to access images of past moments, and knows things about Sethe that she shouldn't know either because she was too little or because she was not present in those events. With Paul D's arrival in 124, Sethe is able to experiment sensuality and seduction again and in a new form. The first sexual encounter is rather disappointing; Morrison describes it as it follows:

It was over before they could get their clothes off. Half-dressed and short of breath, they lay side by side resentful of one another and the skylight above them. His dreaming of her had been too long and too long ago. Her deprivation had been not having any dreams of her own at all. Now they were sorry and too shy to make talk. (20)

But the most important part of this encounter does not lay on the sexual activity and the ordinary search for the orgasm, instead, the erotic is founded on a destabilization of the events around them. Denver is also now open to a new experience. *"Now her mother was upstairs with the man who had gotten rid of the only other company she had. Denver dipped a bit of bread into the jelly. Slowly, methodically, miserably she ate it (19)".* She was aware about her mother's sexual relation with Paul D, which was something new, as she never had seen her as someone able to experience desire and she herself had not been exposed to that feeling before, so now she was also jealous. Since this experience did not belong to her, she looked for comfort in the only thing that could provide pleasure for her; food. In addition, the ghost that used to bother them seemed to become mad as well, Paul D, this new male figure impersonating desire, attempted to get rid of the ghost by

throwing a spell and it seemed to disappear, but it came back in flesh and an adult shape.

Beloved is the embodiment of the erotic as trauma as she is a flesh ghost that was murdered by her mother and then expelled from her house by her new lover. She arrived to remind them about her murder, which was an unspeakable truth at that house, that event was kept in silence and sent to Sethe's and Denver's unconscious memories. Plus, she is also looking forward to vindicating her expulsion from the house as a ghost by this strange man and then her expulsion from life performed earlier by her own mother. In the beginning she seems to be a former slave who has lost her memory due to trauma, but as she gains a space in the home, she starts kicking Paul D out of it. It seems like Beloved was also symbolically vindicating past experiences linked with slavery using the only male figure available as a target. When Paul D arrived, Sethe started to remember trauma.

Strong women and wise saw him and told him things they only told each other: that way past the Change of Life, desire in them had suddenly become enormous, greedy, more savage than when they were fifteen, and that it embarrassed them and made them sad; that secretly they longed to die--to be quit of it--that sleep was more precious to them than any waking day (Morrison 17)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Paul D allows himself to express vulnerability, he is soft and tender, and in front of Sethe, he is able to express his most painful memories and expects the same in return. But the arrival of Beloved interrupts this seductive game between them as she comes to enhance trauma, representing the violent forms of the erotic that are common in white men.

The succubus figure, which is related to the vampire, another sexualized figure that drains a vital fluid, was incorporated into African American folklore in the form of shape-shifting witches who "ride" their terrified victims in the night (Puckett 568), and Beloved embodies the qualities of that figure as well. In separate assaults, Beloved drains Paul D of semen and Sethe of vitality: symptomatically, Beloved's body swells as she also feeds off her victims'

horrible memories of and recurring nightmares about sexual violations that occurred in their enslaved past. (Barnett 71)

This passage resembles the effect *Beloved* has on Paul D as well as Sethe. *Beloved* at first glance is the representation of the femme fatale or the succubus, but Morrison is not using this form of representation to denigrate the image of the black woman, on the contrary, she through *Beloved* she is representing the unmerciful behavior of the colonizer. When Paul D started to sleep with Sethe, he was compelled by an unknown force to leave the house little by little, moving through different rooms until he ended up sleeping on the shelf where *Beloved* was murdered. In that place he was seduced by *Beloved* and even though he did not want to touch her, he surrendered unwillingly to *Beloved*'s demands, she drained him of fluids and filled him with memories of trauma, especially sexual trauma.

"Breakfast? Want some breakfast, nigger?"

"Yes, sir."

"Hungry, nigger?"

"Yes, sir." "Here you go."

Occasionally a kneeling man chose gunshot in his head as the price, maybe, of taking a bit of foreskin with him to Jesus. (Morrison 107-108)

Within these passages, it is possible to observe how not only women were subjected to sexual violence but also men. *Beloved* seems to be returning to him the arousal of memories that his presence brought to Sethe. His encounters with *Beloved* leave him remembering the abuses he also suffered during slavery as well as his difficult escape only achieved in the end with the help of Cherokees. As he continues to develop unfolded memories, he also remembers about methods of torture used against him and his fellows. He is also able to reconstruct the truth about what happened with Halle, which was unknown for Sethe and disappointing at the same time, because while he went mad looking at what they were doing to her.

Finally, Baby Suggs' story was marked by disgrace and trauma as well. Her approach to love and eroticism was more characteristic of a normal slave as nothing was sweetened for her. She was unable to get symbolically married like Sethe and she was often sexually abused in the plantations where she was kept. So, in her life, there was never a delimitation between work, death and birth before freedom, and when she got her freedom, she did not have many options to experience the erotic in a different way anymore because of the exhaustion of her body.

Anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn't run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized. So, Baby's eight children had six fathers. What she called the nastiness of life was the shock she received upon learning that nobody stopped playing checkers just because the pieces included her children. (Morrison 23)

The nastiness of life was for her the game that played with slaves' lives. In literature that term has been used to describe the female body parts as they hold feces, urine and men's semen in order to grow life. For Baby Suggs the nastiness was related to white people and their inability of knowing when to stop. For her, the savageness was found in whiteness and their perverse, performing mean actions against black people. Baby Suggs knew about limits even if they were not applied to her body and life because of the consequences of colonialism and coloniality. Her memory also protected her from trauma by hiding things of her past. When mentioning she does not remember anything about her children, Sethe tells her that is all what you let yourself remember (Morrison 5). Meaning that she only kept those narrowed memories in order to safeguard herself from traumatic pain. In the case of elderly people like Baby Suggs or Ella, eroticism had been extensively linked to trauma. For Ella the worst evil were white men as well, because they could "only dirty you". She used to be raped by her master and his sons and locked up in a room where her body would only be used with that purpose. In the long run, the role of eroticism as an enhancement of trauma is deeply related to violent and perverse sexual expressions and also to murder and sacrifice. To come, this study will also

review some of these and other forms of expression of the erotic but working as an instrument for healing for these characters.

3.2 Representation as a channel for healing.

This section is going to review eroticism's role as a channel for healing in connection with the development of an oral discourse that functions as a means for storytelling and expiation as a consequence. Eroticism will be explored in relation to the characters' experiences through it, and how they allow themselves to be vulnerable enough to navigate seduction and also revisit the memories they had been avoiding to share with themselves and others. In *BeLoved*, the arrival of Paul D seems to defrost time and memories for Sethe, although his presence has a repercussion on Denver, and the ghost of Beloved as well. For Sethe, the encounter with this male figure, brings the possibility to speak outside of her mind to someone who shared a common past with her. But it also initiates an experience through sensuality and mysticism as she starts a game of seduction with a lover, after spending a long-time experiencing solitude as a form of eroticism. At the same time, mysticism takes place as she resumes a deeper connection with her beloved ones who passed away a long time ago and that for her represent the sacred and divine.

When Paul D shows up to 124 for the first time, he is the last of the sweet home men and has the particularity of being a soft and protective man that happened to have had feelings for Sethe at sweet home, but she decided to stay with Halle, who married her and fathered her children. So, for Paul D, Sethe was both sacred and sin at the same time, because even though Halle was not physically present, his memory and the mystery of his disappearance haunted them. Immediately when they met again, they began a seductive game in which they show their weaknesses to each other, alternating turns until their darkest secrets are revealed.

The law of seduction takes the form of an uninterrupted ritual exchange where seducer and seduced constantly raise the stakes in a game that never ends. And cannot end since the dividing line. that defines the victory of the one and the defeat of the other, is illegible. And because there is no limit to, the challenge to love more than one is loved, or to be always more seduced - if

not death. Sex, on the other hand, has a quick, banal end: the orgasm, the immediate form of desire's realization. (Baudrillard 22)

When Paul D saw Sethe for the first time in almost twenty years, she was sitting on her porch barefoot which for the time denoted nakedness. There are no clues of Sethe having any type of relationship with another partner after Halle's vanishing, the only episode mentioned is the one sexual encounter with the grave keeper and that was only an exchange for the word Beloved on the gravestone. This reunion with Paul D ends with a fast and disappointing intercourse, that ended soon.

Sethe lay on her back, her head turned from him. Out of the corner of his eye, Paul D saw the float of her breasts and disliked it, the spread-away, flat roundness of them that he could definitely live without, never mind that downstairs he had held them as though they were the most expensive part of himself. (Morrison 21)

As stated before, the experience of the erotic is not reduced to sexuality only and even though the scene does not seem to describe a healing situation. This first sexual encounter is marked by a desperate desire of company and human touch and when it is over is disappointing because it gives them a feeling of fugacity and false desire, but in the end, this first physical approach between them is only the beginning of their journey into her past and back to her present in order to be able to heal. Paul D was a survivor of slavery, he had endured being captive, a chained man, freed to become a homeless walking man who would find shelter at ladies' houses, but now he was open to share his vulnerability, at least with Sethe, because they had inhabited the same space in the past. *"To seduce is to appear weak. To seduce is to render weak. We seduce with our weakness, never with strong signs or powers. In seduction we enact this weakness, and this is what gives seduction its strength."* (Baudrillard 83). Paul D and Sethe started to share their bad memories of the past immediately when they reunited after so many years, they exposed their traumas to each other, even though it was difficult, specially for Sethe, who did not want to add more images of disgraces to her imagination, but she still continued deepening in her memories and sharing parts of them with this man. With his arrival

many things are removed within Sethe and her house and family as well. First of all, the ghost that haunted her house seemed to be exorcised when he first entered, then, while talking to him, Sethe surrendered to remembrance right away. Him holding her breasts took her right back to the scene of her breast milk being stolen by the white boys. Sethe started maintaining an appearance, she was a runaway that had succeeded in getting her freedom, she had a house, one daughter and a paid job, but she hid her worst trauma from him, the killing she had performed in order to keep him nearby.

Paul D's arrival, also brings a new sentiment that invades Denver and she develops a rude behavior around him, her solitude was disrupted, and her mother and the ghost were different and distant now, she felt in danger of losing them. Her mother slept with Paul D and the ghost went away for a while. So, Denver exacerbated her jealousy. Denver got mad when they talked about sweet home because she was not part of that far away past. She only liked to hear stories from her own birth, because it included her and the miracle of her survival. The scenes around Denver's birth are very descriptive, more than *Beloved's* death itself. When Sethe was a fugitive, she meets the intricate character of Miss Amy Denver.

While physically "white", is figuratively "not white" because her class position exempts her from the associative signs of white womanhood. Amy is on a journey to Boston in search of velvet, an item that connotes the life of luxury, ease and sensuality associated with nineteenth century southern (plantation) white womanhood. (Weir-Soley 94)

In order to fully understand the arch of Denver's character it is important to observe her story from the beginning, to do so, we are going to go back to the anecdote of her birth. The labor and delivery process to bring Denver to the world was assisted by a complex character called Amy Denver, the child is named after her and she is a key character that embodies both the erotic and the healer. Amy was an endured servant, who, as stated by Weir-Soley is looking for Boston, the capital city, in order to get carmine velvet, but that is probably a delusion as she is traveling without any money, starving, by foot and without any actual idea of where

to go. But she wants to resemble the white womanhood of the south, and that is an attempt of Morrison to include not only race but also class in her discourse (94). Apart from these symbolisms of eroticism present in this character, she develops an implicit homoerotic camaraderie relationship with Sethe. Even though Amy refers very rudely and in a racist manner to Sethe, to differentiate from her, she fulfills the role of the healer, first by massaging her feet and creating shoes out of leaves for her to continue walking. In order to reinforce this idea, we are going to observe Weir-Soley's description about Amy's medicine knowledge, most likely obtained from her own self-development in a black environment from which she was trying to detach at that time.

Amy Denver is the possessor of knowledge and experience that enable her to act as a savior, healer and midwife to Sethe and the baby she is carrying. The narrative invests this white female character with secrets of folk medicine and healing, knowledge common-though not exclusive to-practitioners of African and syncretic new world religions. For example, Amy Denver applies spider webs to the open sore on Sethe's back. She seems to know exactly what to do and how to do it. (95)

Amy helped Sethe to survive by practicing this unofficial natural medicine and also turned into her midwife when Sethe gave birth in a boat. This last scene was also very symbolic as it seems to lead Amy Denver to be represented as Yemonja, considered the queen of the ocean, representing protection, life and fertility. *The orisha Yemonja is the quintessential mother-figure, nurturer, healer, and midwife in the Yoruba religion. She protects children and officiates their births.* (96). Simultaneously, this very decisive scene of the novel delivers a representation of Oshun, as Sethe's labor is assisted by Amy Dever in a boat in the water of a river. *"Yemonja is sometimes conflated with the river deity, Oshun. Oshun's characteristics include creativity, sexuality, fertility and sensuality. She loves sweet things and is usually given honey, sweet cakes and gold or yellow fruits in ritual offerings."* (96). This crossover with Oshun seems to vaticinate about the person Denver becomes when she grows up. In the first place, she is a divine baby that unbelievably survives

that traumatic birth and she knows that. Later when her family throws that opulent party mentioned before with the community, it resembles a ritual thrown for Oshun as it involves a lot of food. Denver becomes a young girl who is not very attractive per se. *"Most of the literature on Oshun is quick to point out that while her children are not all beautiful, they all possess an unmistakable sensuality and charm."* (98). Her loneliness is compulsory, but she is creative, she is the first person in her family who has the chance and the eagerness to learn how to read and write and she finds great pleasure in food as described in multiple scenes, but we will continue elaborating on Denver later. After Sethe achieves to cross the river in that boat with the newborn and is picked up by Stamp paid, she is welcomed by Ella, another type of healer who helps the former slaves who arrive in their community and she is taken to her mother-in-law. This first encounter with Baby Suggs is also erotic and sanatory for Sethe. Morrison lets the reader know that she receives Sethe kissing her on the mouth and then proceeds to take care of her as if they had known each other their entire lives.

She led Sethe to the keeping room and, by the light of a spirit lamp, bathed her in sections, starting with her face. Then, while waiting for another pan of heated water, she sat next to her and stitched gray cotton. Sethe dozed and woke to the washing of her hands and arms. After each bathing, Baby covered her with a quilt and put another pan on in the kitchen. Tearing sheets, stitching the gray cotton, she supervised the woman in the bonnet who tended the baby and cried into her cooking. When Sethe's legs were done, Baby looked at her feet and wiped them lightly. She cleaned between Sethe's legs with two separate pans of hot water and then tied her stomach and vagina with sheets. Finally, she attacked the unrecognizable feet. "You feel this?" "Feel what?" asked Sethe. "Nothing. Heave up." She helped Sethe to a rocker and lowered her feet into a bucket of salt water and juniper. The rest of the night Sethe sat soaking. The crust from her nipples Baby softened with lard and then washed away. (93)

Baby Suggs was like a nurturer mother from the first moment, even though she was related to Sethe only through her marriage with Halle, she was very close and helpful, contributing with her body healing and comfort after the impossible runaway and baby delivery. For Baby Suggs, erotic life was in the first place marked by trauma, but she also found her identity on it. As mentioned previously, she had eight babies with multiple fathers, but she only considered one of them to be her husband and she named herself after that man. He used to call her baby and his own name was Suggs, so when she was freed and she was asked if her name was Jenny as shown on the papers from sweet home, she stated her name was Baby Suggs because of the above-described reasons. She symbolically rebaptized herself before becoming a preacher. She found love in blackness and within herself, and attempted to share that experience with her community through the employment of spoken word, which was her channel of communication and passing information, resembling some African oral traditions. By the end of her life when colonialism seemed to have defeated her, she found pleasure in color detained observation from her dying bed.

Baby Suggs's seemingly benign contemplation of color is one such ritual that has the "power so shape the world relations" by exorcizing vengeful spirits, and teaching those she leaves behind how to wage the necessary spiritual warfare (ritualistically) that will engender their recuperation from personal and historical tragedy. (Weir-Soley 107)

So, in the end, despite how bitter and disappointing life had been, baby Suggs found one last shelter in contemplation. "*The experience of contemplation was linked early on with the liveliest awareness concerning spiritual joy and sensual emotion.*" (Bataille 225). So, not only is she going through a ritualistic ending of life, but she was also experiencing one last time joy and celebration in color, that at the same time was something scarce when immersed in cold weather and poverty, in this way she appears to make peace with life before leaving her physical existence and becoming a link with the spiritual world. It is interesting that immediately after this ritual performed by Baby Suggs of exorcising and recovering, Sethe and Denver

invoked the spirit of the haunting baby in order to meet it and allow its release to the spiritual world.

Baby Suggs died shortly after the brothers left, with no interest whatsoever in their leave-taking or hers, and right afterward Sethe and Denver decided to end the persecution by calling forth the ghost that tried them so. Perhaps a conversation, they thought, an exchange of views or something would help. So, they held hands and said, "Come on. Come on. You may as well just come on. (4)

From this calling upon the baby, they begin their journey towards a symbolic death and rebirth through healing. It is never fully clear if *Beloved* is an actual fleshed ghost or if she is pure symbols and metaphors of Sethe's mystical experience going forward, either way, the ghost paid attention to their call so that they are able to speak and the ghost can find peace and stop haunting them. But going through this would be longer and more painful than they expected and it would require their ability to orally elaborate memories and also a discourse in which they can find acceptance of themselves as subjects, part of a black identity. When *Beloved* arrives, again the figure of Yemonja appears through the big stream of water Sethe leaks squatting down in her back yard, and also the figure of Oshun becomes clearer through the arch of Denver's character. *Beloved's* memory is not clear and she is unable to properly explain where she came from and why she came her, the only thing she seems to remember is the image of a bridge.

The bridge that *beloved* claims to have lived on is a metaphor for the space between the physical and the spiritual world. (...) the bridge also symbolizes the connection between the past and the present, the living and the death, and links the enslaved Africans who made the middle passage journey across the Atlantic with their new world descendants. (Weir-Soley 103)

This bridge that allows Sethe and Denver to revisit the past is a connection with memory, the unspeakable past and at the same time reflects Morrison's exercise of memory in a country that does not aim to remember the painful past of slavery. From now on, Sethe reconnects with sexuality and *Beloved* does it as well, creating

an awakening in Denver, who had never experienced that physically, but found sensuality in her solitude and in food. Now Denver begins to develop jealousy and manipulation as a form to control it. But in the end, when the ghost of Beloved begins to consume her mother's life, Denver goes on the quest of becoming herself a worker in order to become a subject and she is able to tell her story to a stranger in order to get support from her community. *"Nobody was going to help her unless she told it--told all of it."* (Morrison 253). From here on, Denver starts to incarnate Oshun's qualities more clearly, as she develops her charm and is able to share it with other people. She, also continues to develop her creativity by continuing to practice her reading and learning, she also continues to find pleasure in food, especially sweets, but now, her community started to provide for her as well.

At least once a week, she visited Lady Jones, who perked up enough to do a raisin loaf especially for her, since Denver was set on sweet things. She gave her a book of Bible verse and listened while she mumbled words or fairly shouted them. By June Denver had read and memorized all fifty-two pages--one for each week of the year. (Morrison 250)

Denver developed her discourse ability in its different skills, but it was her storytelling that got her to connect with the community that had isolated her family for so long. As stated by Morrison, she begins to study again and her main source of information is the bible. In this context, *"the prevalence and centrality of 'healing' and 'deliverance' rituals in contemporary African Christianity is without doubt anchored on the resilience, affinity and reality of traditional religious worldview."* (Iheanacho 3) Denver, as her ancestors, developed a system of beliefs that took credence both from their African roots and Christianity at the same time, the latter is one religion that was imposed on colonized regions in America. *"Syncretism was originally a strategic means for survival and preservation. From the standpoint of its etymology, syncretism and the needed process for its fruition, appear to occur in situations of tension or crisis"* (3) Therefore, this cultural and religious blending can be identified as a resistance method as well, allowing social acceptance while maintaining beliefs and practices attached to their cultural origins. Apart from

expanding her language skills through the out loud reading and memorization bible, Denver also put into practice the oral form of passing information that is often linked to African traditions.

The oral tradition in diverse forms through the centuries has given to Africans their cultural identity as a people. It has created an impression of Africanness upon them that has remained indelible whether they be Christians, Muslims or adherents of traditional religions. (7)

Denver had observed the use and the power of storytelling both in Baby Suggs as a preacher and in Sethe through the constant story telling of her memories that in the end become a form of expiation for her that led her to revive her crime in order to explain Beloved how difficult it was for her to sacrifice her. Denver's success in developing an oral speech to communicate with her community allows her to survive and help herself and her mother. She is able to find different works to do and she mentions to Paul D she might even go to Oberlin, which is a college in Ohio that began accepting African American students in 1835 and female students only a few years later. This is a feminist expectation, understanding herself as entitled and capable of studying, it could be wishful thinking due to the limitations of that period of time but the idea was still there and she was actually working now, besides, through this oral sharing she was making an initial approach to feminism, as she was assisted by thirty women from her hometown who joined together to expulse Beloved from her mother's house.

Sethe opened the door and reached for Beloved's hand. Together they stood in the doorway. For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it (...) (Morrison 261).

This scene is symbolic and reflects the ability of women to speak up and get away from what threatens them, but also their ability to find a voice and use it to tell their truth, from their own perspective to help others to understand their oppressions and limitations. Sethe heard the female voices from the clearing, where Baby Suggs

would preach and also, she heard the prayers of the women from the community and they made sense for her, she and Denver felt their support and ran towards them, leaving Beloved behind. Their female community had come to help them to get rid of the ghost that was draining them of life and punishing them beyond what they had already suffered because of racism. In the past. They did not want to have any type of contact with Sethe because of her crime, but most likely, it was due to Sethe committing a crime against one of them, which was a major taboo. It is precisely death in the context of murder, a phenomenon that Bataille discusses while wondering why is it accepted to kill others, for example, in war but punished to kill a person from the group you belong to, in regards this, he indicates:

As a rule, the community brought into being by work considers itself essentially apart from the violence implied by the death of one of its members. Faced by such a death the body politic feels that a taboo is in force. But that is only true for the members of the community. Within it the taboo has full force. Without, where strangers are concerned, the taboo is still felt but it can be violated (47).

In this context, the worst part of Sethe's crime was that she committed it against one member of her own family and the rest felt like she violated a code within their own community as the ones haunting them were whites and they were propelling enough suffering already, that is why when Beloved disappears in the end, Morrison places the image of a white man looking over the pile of black people in front of the house. *"Then Denver, running too. Away from her to the pile of people out there. They make a hill. A hill of black people, falling. And above them all, rising from his place with a whip in his hand."* (Morrison 262). Along with Beloved, the gaze of the white man symbolically disappeared as Sethe had expiated her guilt, through her back-and-forth journey she was able to at least find acceptance, but after that she remained too exhausted and felt she needed to perform the last ritual in life before passing to the spiritual world. *"Continuity is reached through experience of the divine. The divine is the essence of continuity."* (Bataille 118). Sethe had called the divine, which for her was her dead baby and was able to experience storytelling

as a form of expiation and thought she was ready now to let herself go too and find continuity, so she looked for one last shelter in Baby Suggs' bed and colorful quilt with the aim of performing the same last ritual before leaving life, but Paul D returns to offer himself in the role of the healer that Amy Denver and Baby Suggs had performed in the past to take care of her.

I'm a take care of you, you hear? Starting now. First off, you don't smell right. Stay there. Don't move. Let me heat up some water." He stops. "Is it all right, Sethe, if I heat up some water?"

"And count my feet?" she asks him. He steps closer.

"Rub your feet."

Sethe closes her eyes and presses her lips together. She is thinking: No. This little place by a window is what I want. And rest. There's nothing to rub now and no reason to. Nothing left to bathe, assuming he even knows how. Will he do it in sections? First her face, then her hands, her thighs, her feet, her back? Ending with her exhausted breasts? And if he bathes her in sections, will the parts hold? (Morrison 272)

Paul D offered Sethe to physically take care of her and also to continue living discontinuity while she could still be somebody, but this time accompanied by him and Denver. He and the community had set judgment aside to allow her to survive once again and move forward after the enormous task of reconstructing her memories and attempting to heal. And they continue their own seductive performance through the silence of Sethe's secret, which they both knew now but would not mention anymore, because everything was said already. *"Thus, I know another's secret but do not reveal it and he knows that I know, but does not acknowledge it: the intensity between us is simply this secret about the secret."* (Baudrillard 79) Through remembering and orally sharing these memories, they developed complicity, which is an important element to continue with seduction after all of the weaknesses and vulnerabilities had been exposed. Sethe had survived again after being in a limbo in the symbolic bridge between life and death and despite

the pain she had to revive in order take herself out of isolation and attempt to become a subject part of a collective. After all, she along with Paul D and Denver were able to reconstruct their own delimitations as human beings, which is part of the erotic experience. They had endured slavery and oppression but were able to make a collective reconstruction of memory and in truth, they were victims of structural violence coming from colonialism and Sethe was not a deliberate criminal.

Conclusions

In the novel *Beloved*, Morrison proposes eroticism as a double-faced that can be explored through the arches of several characters. In the first place, eroticism is constituted by different characteristics of human life and the delimitations of boundaries and transgressions set by communities in order to live an existence that can separate them from other animals. "*Man is an animal who stands abashed in front of death or sexual union.*" (Bataille 50). Considering this condition, the limitations and transgressions mentioned orbit around sexual life and death as they are elements common to all human kind, so, these experiences are assimilated as a reflection and a destination for human beings. Since eroticism is such a vast concept that includes many aspects of life organization, the author employed it through her characters attaching a dual role to it. As proposed in the beginning of this research, Morrison links eroticism both as an enhancement of trauma and as a channel for healing. In order to explore this hypothesis, this study focused its analysis from a feminist perspective, also considering some elements of anticolonial theories and because of these elements through which the text was read, the objective was to analyze this dualism of eroticism and the points of encounter of those two extremes. But it also resulted pertinent to deepen into the representation of the black female body as well, which was the main figure through which eroticism was employed and expressed. The representation of the black female body was connected to a dualism as well, since it exposed this figure as a recipient of colonial violence and as a source of resistance simultaneously.

In this framework, it has been stated that both eroticism and the black female body are linked to a dual role, which seemed to be more pertinent than connecting that double face to a dichotomy, because this last one resulted more limiting as it would only consider these components as opposite extremes, while the dual function permitted a wider revision of those portions taking into consideration some features in between and even in common. Besides, a dichotomic revision, would be linked to binarism, that is characteristic of a Western form of thinking in which extremes are linked to a positive and negative point of view, without giving space for analyzing what can be found in-between. According to the research made, that form of

processing information would be a legacy of colonialism, therefore, it did not match with the intention of the text *Beloved*.

lo binario de la colonialidad occidental sitúa asimétricamente a la y el otro, pues no es capaz de abrirse a otros lugares de conocimiento y aprendizaje, está casado con una alteridad reduccionista, con pretensión de verdad y validez universal e impuesta, originalmente, por la violencia que transmite una no-verdad. (Mejía 314).³⁷

Eroticism itself is full of dualities as it represents the human inner and outer experience, birth and death, the sacred and the profane, the continuity and discontinuity, life and death, taboo and transgression, etc. But they are not necessarily opposite, they are confluent and can occur simultaneously in a person's life without meaning that they are correct or incorrect. Following this idea of dualism, this study offered in the first place, an anticolonial view, taking into account *Beloved*'s encounters with postcolonial and decolonial studies. Again, the perception that the text did not fully coincide with just one of those theories came from the idea that not everything has to be just black or white, especially when analyzing such a complex novel. Weir-Soley has shared that whenever she teaches *Beloved*, she advises her students that there are many ways to approach this difficult text, including three main models of interpretation: the historical, the psychoanalytic and the African cosmological. And that they are not supposed to choose only one of them, instead they should layer these interpretations to make a more complete critic (83). This idea resonated with this study as the aim was to get a wider picture of the author's work rather than just proving one standpoint.

In conclusion, the anticolonial reading of the novel is composed by postcolonial and decolonial elements as this study considers that both approaches were present and addressing both of them provides a broader and intercultural view

³⁷ The binary in western coloniality asymmetrically places the other, as it is unable to open up to other places of knowledge and learning, it is married to a reductionist alterity, to the pretension of truth and imposed universal validity, originally, because of the violence that expresses a non-truth. (Mejía 314). Translated by the author of this research.

to the analysis. The postcolonial perspective was related to the rescue of memory performed by the author and the repercussions of colonialism in some affected regions. Morrison had to spend an extensive period of time studying history in order to describe a historical context in an appropriate and plausible way. Postcolonial studies were mainly based on the struggles left by colonialism in certain areas along with the facts that took place within that time frame, its development started after the decolonization processes of Asia and Africa, the latter being the focus of Morrison's studies. The author's focus was placed on the consequences of European colonies settling in Africa in order to exploit their resources and their people through forced labor and also by bringing them to the Americas to be sold or traded as slaves. Colonialism in the United States had ended almost a century before the time in which the novel takes place and this country became an imperialist power eventually, but that was a posterior event and it has to do with the control and dominance of other countries without settling there, so that did not seem to be the target of Morrison's concerns. Apart from this geographical focus, the importance given to memory was greatly observed throughout the novel, especially in the end, with the repetition of the phrase "this is not a story to pass on" and how fast the community forgets *Beloved* right away after her disappearance. Morrison speaks in general, using the word she when expressing that her memory was right away forgotten, her voice was silent and the community even doubted if she had been real. This, referring to black female history, which had been silenced and forgotten due to the lack of memory exercise in her own country, emphasizing that this story should not pass on, meaning, happen again because of the cruelty and dehumanization spread towards black people.

In addition, the decolonial approach was pertinent firstly because of its vast content related to African cosmologies. These studies started to be developed in Latin America during the 90's which was after the launch of *Beloved* and also in a different region of the American continent, in countries colonized by other European states. Still, the artistic strategy and the use of what Morrison calls "discredited knowledge produced by discredited people" was what made the novel closer to a decolonial point of view. Other than that, the novel is marked by the use of magical

realism, which is usually used by writers who want to set a separation between their work from the colonizers' traditions. In this case it was a form to develop a folkloric story that expressed the existence of a fleshed ghost as something plausible, reflecting both the beliefs people would have in the enchanted past world and also the normal communication between the material and the spiritual world that is common in some African cultures.

Magical realism works as a very powerful tool in overturning the existing frameworks of power. It tries its hands at revisiting the past and rewriting the history with a changed viewpoint. It is aimed at being written from the point of view of the depressed and the marginalized. (Sharma 163)

In the end, this reflects Morrison's employment of decolonial writing devices such as the female, slave viewpoint, the reconstruction of the past with the oppressed as protagonist and the emphasis in cultural traditions of the otherness in terms of belief systems, folk medicine, language and others. Even if the ideas taken from decolonial studies were not developed in North America, they can still be related to the reverberations of colonialism in that region, and it results interesting to analyze the effects of this transversal event through ideas coming from different cultures. Similarly, as mentioned by Verges, decolonial feminisms started to be developed and practiced by women from the global south and other 3rd world places, but nowadays women from places like, Spain, France and United States have been joining manifestations against racism, sexism, capitalism and imperialism as well (25). Meaning that there are encounters in cultural sensitivities that can be addressed from a variety of angles and still being valid.

In connection to the anticolonial prism through which *Beloved* was read, the feminist perspective also became important due to the complex representation of the black female body presented by the author in the novel. According to the literature consulted, the types of feminisms approached by the author are different from those Wasp, European, and civilizational kinds, because these do not explore the struggles that slaves and black women have endured historically. Therefore, the analysis was made mainly from a black and decolonial feminist approach as Morrison forces

situations to allow her characters to experience freedom, although in oppression, she offers a realization of these oppressions that continue to operate against them in that denied future they pursued. Enduring the struggles of racism and colonialism in the end permits the characters to free themselves from personal and collective judgement in order to start reconstructing their subjectivities and getting closer to a black identity that gives them a sense of belonging. Morrison attached a dual role to the black female body to conceptualize its function in the text in a complex and complete way with the aim of providing a panoramic perspective of the slave and post slavery experience especially for black women. Also, through their bodies she reconstructed a denied and silenced collective memory, allowing the readers to visualize the brutal consequences of slavery in the female body and the ancestral knowledge these women had available to nurture and lead each other to resist the abuses and the physical exhaustion. As mentioned above, Morrison's open ending works as a metaphor of these silenced black female realities. While she is describing how easily the community moved on from the unpleasant interaction with the ghost of *Beloved*, she talks about the girl without a name referring to all of those unknown women whose lives were ruined and lost. She is also pointing out to the discomfort of facing the truth of black women's life back then, the phrase "it was not a story to pass on" is repeated several times because again, it is a story people do not want to remember, also a story that has been suppressed from universal history and finally, the story of slavery should not be repeated because of how brutal it was. This open end was presented by Morrison as it follows:

Everybody knew what she was called, but nobody anywhere knew her name. Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her, and even if they were, how can they call her if they don't know her name? Although she has claim, she is not claimed. In the place where long grass opens, the girl who waited to be loved and cry shame erupts into her separate parts, to make it easy for the chewing laughter to swallow her all away.

It was not a story to pass on. (274)

In this way, Morrison uses the ghost figure as a symbol of the denied identities of slave women and eroticism was an experience expressed through the black female body in its different forms of interaction as a form of vindication of their lives and truth. As mentioned in the hypothesis, this research intended to analyze how eroticism simultaneously led characters to trauma and to healing. Through the analysis of the novel, it is possible to visualize in the first place, that the traumas related to the erotic come from sexual violence and the anguish of death, for instance, the novel has clear allusions to rape, profane prostitution, ideations of cannibalism, the oppression of Christianity, murder as an unconscious sacrifice and others. These experiences guided some characters to abjection, like Sethe and Beloved, who became transgressors of their community codes and in most cases, trauma had the tendency to be protected by a lack of memory since by partially forgetting, the characters of Babby Suggs, Denver, Paul D, Sethe and Beloved were able to survive until they were ready to remember again, and in this part, memory is not a threaten anymore, but a tool that can lead the way through healing. Elsa Dorline adds that the phantasmic body works as a dramatization of the colonized body.

The phantasmic body is hyperbolic, its muscular existence extending to infinity, and it is a crucible for pathogenic subjectivity, one stripped of any real capacity. The alienated, colonized subject is no more than a witness to the anguish of dematerialization, the derealization of their bodies and agency. But it's this very process of derealization that initiates a liberatory dynamic involving rebellious sensuality, or rampant sensuality, inexorably violent. (13)

Considering this, the novel *Beloved* and the character of Beloved might work as a metaphor of this alienation of the colonized bodies and subjectivities. She states that the only situation in which slaves were free was in their dreams, in the case of Sethe, she was only able to free herself from the past through the reconstruction of images and memories. She passed from conceiving her body as not real, to something existent, not something subjected to constant punishment and threats of death. Only then she became ready to use memory as a device for healing as well, ultimately, a reconstruction of eroticism appeared in the form of sensuality, mysticism and

storytelling. In this sense, it was expected to observe the role of eroticism in healing through the characters of Amy Denver and Baby Suggs as the practitioners of folk medicine, in the case of Amy performing as a midwife and nurturer and in the case of Baby Suggs in her preaching and rituals, in addition to this, it was also found that eroticism as a healing method was represented through some deities of the Yoruba traditions such as Erzulie, the goddess of love and sexuality reconstruction; Yemonja, the goddess of motherhood and protection and Oshun, the goddess of sexuality and charm. All of these divinities characteristics were expressed through the characters' personalities and experiences as a form of and healing the trauma. In the end, through eroticism and spirituality, the characters were able to at least begin to reconfigure their subjectivities.

Finally, the current relevance of these topics is found of course, on the remaining struggles of colonialism and neocolonialism in the world and in different cultures as its legacy has not died after the decolonization of colonized areas, there are still divisions of money and labor that work around gender, race and class, and the forms of oppression are continuously regenerating. In Vergès chapter *Who cleans the world?*³⁸ There is a reflection stating that after colonization and slavery, the people who are in charge of maintaining private and public areas clean, are mainly women, especially poor or racialized (127). Nowadays it is possible to notice that even young women who have studied, but belong to third world countries will migrate to first world states to work cleaning houses or offices, because white women from these regions and certainly white men are not interested in fulfilling these roles. This is one example of the inheritance of colonialism and imperialism in relation to labor repartition as well as race, gender and economic oppressions that continue to take place globally after all this time.

³⁸ Chapter from the book *Decolonial Feminism (2022 edition)* by Françoise Vergès.

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