

Magic(al) Realism as Postcolonial Device in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

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Abstract

*Magical realism as a dominant literary mode in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* can be considered as a decolonizing agent in a postcolonial context. Morrison's narrative in *Beloved*, takes the advantage of both realism and magic to challenge the assumptions of an authoritative colonialist attitude and so can be alleged as a powerful and efficient method to project the postcolonial experience of African-American ex-slaves in the United States. It can also provide an alternate point of view to Eurocentric accounts of reality and history to attack the solidity of Eurocentric definitions and as a consequence to portray the hidden and silenced voices of numerous enslaved generations of African-Americans in the history of United States. The present study attempts to explore magical realism's decolonizing role in Morrison's *Beloved*. In pursuing this goal it will trace the narrative and thematic strategies of magical realism that highlight the novel as an essential text of postcolonial literature.*

Keywords: binarism, decolonization, defocalization, Euro-centrism, magical realism, marginality, The Middle Passage, Postcolonial theory.

1. Introduction

Throughout the recent years, magical realism¹ has become a popular term which refers to a particular narrative mode that provides “a way to discuss alternative approaches to reality to that of Western philosophy, expressed in many postcolonial and non-Western works of contemporary fiction” (Bowers 1). The popularity of magical realist fiction in English in postcolonial nations has promoted a debate on the suitability of magical realism as a postcolonial strategy of writing. Stephen Slemon in his influential article “Magic Realism as Post-Colonial Discourse”, calls on a mixture of postmodernist assumptions to claim that magical realism is able to express a number of postcolonial elements. He draws attention to the production of binarism and dualities operating in settler cultures that foreground the “gaps, absences and silences produced by the colonial encounter” (Slemon 410). Slemon claims that magical realism's strength is in that it encodes “a concept of resistance to the massive imperial centre and its totalizing systems” (410). He inserts that, “magical realism, at least in a literary context, seems most visibly operative in cultures situated at the fringes of mainstream literary traditions”(408). Slemon explains that there are two discourses in the magical realist narrative that each of them has a different perspective: the magical and the real. To him neither of the two is dominant but there is a continuous tension and resistance between them. According to him, this structure reflects the tension between the ever-present and ever-opposed colonized and colonialist discourses in a postcolonial context in which the narrative structure reflects the relationship between the two, so that the “texts recapitulate a postcolonial account of the social and historical relations of the culture in which they are set” (409).

A large number of writers who are currently in conditions of oppression in the United States, have taken up magical realism as a means to write against the dominant American culture.

1. The terms “magic realism” and “magical realism” appear to be used interchangeably and denote the same literary mode. For the sake of consistency, “magical realism” is used throughout the present study.

Among them is Toni Morrison, an African-American writer, whose fifth novel, *Beloved*, has been described as one of the most prominent texts to emerge out of the African-American literary tradition. She is concerned with the concept of blacks as marginalized and black literature as the non-canonical literature and tries to redefine white/black hierarchy of mainstream discourse, a discourse which always has undermined black's existence in the construction of American literature and culture. In *Playing in the Dark* Morrison claims that:

There seems to be a more or less tacit agreement among literary scholars that, because American literature has been clearly the preserve of white male views, genius, and power, those views, genius, and power are without relationship to and removed from the overwhelming presence of black people in the United States. This agreement is made about a population that preceded every American writer of renown and was, I have come to believe, one of the most furtively radical impinging forces on the country's literature. The contemplation of this black presence is central to any understanding of our national literature and should not be permitted to hover at the margins of the literary imagination. (63)

Beloved is written from the marginal point of view of African-Americans who do not have social and political power. It is the story of Sethe, an ex-slave, who grieves the fact that she murdered her baby girl in order to save her from a life of slavery. She mourns so much that her grief becomes manifest into a body of a young woman named Beloved, a ghost in the beginning, the same age that Sethe's dead baby would have been had she lived. The presence of two opposing discursive systems of magic and real in *Beloved* can reflect the tensions between the colonized and colonizer discourses in a postcolonial context. Applying postcolonial terminology, realism represents the hegemonic discourse of the colonizer while magic refers to the strategy of opposition and resistance used by the colonized. Magical realism can also provide a way to fill in the gaps of cultural representation in a postcolonial context by recovering the fragments and voices of forgotten histories from the point of view of the colonized. In other words, magical realism may serve as the transformative decolonizing project of imaging alternative histories. The magical realism of Morrison's text by addressing historical issues critically and in so doing attempting to heal historical wounds, not only can reflect history, it may also seek to change it. Thus, *Beloved* can be read as a postcolonial historiographic intervention, a strategic re-centering of American history in the lives of the African-Americans who are historically dispossessed.

2. The Decolonized Space of Narrative in *Beloved*

The binary logic of imperialism is establishing a relation of dominance in the imperial world through seeing the world in terms of binary oppositions. The dominant values of Western culture privilege formal realism, the logical and ordinary rather than the mysterious and fantastic. This Western discourse defines a European center through the textual creation of non-European 'other' and relies upon scientific and social terms to describe societies in a manner that supports the ideology that the European view is universal. If one considers magical realism from the place of 'other' and knows that magical realism introduces non-logical and non-scientific accounts for things, it would be clear to see that the transgressive power of magical realism provides a means to attack the assumptions of the dominant culture and logical truth. Hence magical realism forms a new decolonized space of narrative which is not already taken by the assumptions and techniques of European realism.

Wendy B. Faris has coined the term "defocalization" and has argued that "the defocalized narrative and bridging techniques of magical realism challenge the colonial authority of European realism by disengaging it from the empirical basis on which that authority seems to be built" (154). According to her:

In magical realism, the focalization - the perspective from which events are presented- is indeterminate; the kinds of perceptions it presents are indefinable and the origins of those perceptions are unlocatable. That indeterminacy results from the fact that magical realism includes two conflicting kinds of perception that perceive two different kinds of event: magical events and images not normally reported to the reader of realistic fiction because they are not empirically verifiable, and verifiable (if not always ordinary) ones that are realism's characteristic domain. Thus magical realism modifies the conventions of realism based in empirical evidence, incorporating other kinds of perception. In other words, the narrative is "defocalized" because it seems to come from two radically different perspectives at once. (43)

The defocalized narrative structure in *Beloved* challenges the authority of European realism and its dominance and as a result can be considered as a powerful decolonizing agent.

The subversive power of magical realism originates from “juxtaposition of objective and subjective realities in ways that call the objective into question, allowing authors to challenge official readings of social, political, and historical events” (Hawley 283). The source of this transgressive and subversive aspect of magical realist narrative in *Beloved* lies in the fact that, once the reader finds that the category of the real is not definite then all assumptions of truth becomes vague. Because the setting of *Beloved* is realistic, when the category of the real is questioned within the fiction, the world outside the fiction is made less certain as well. In *Beloved* there is no distinction between the spirit world and the material world, between the living and the dead, between past, present and future. The family accepts the presence of a child ghost who later takes human form, as the grown-up version of the child who was killed by Sethe eighteen years earlier.

Ghosts thrive in magical realist fiction and are central to definitions of magical realism as a literary mode. According to Faris, the cultural rebirth in a colonized society emerges after an encounter with death:

In this context, the fact that the cultural pasts and beliefs present in magical realism often include encounters with the dead takes an additional significance. In a process analogous to initiation rites that enact ritual experiences of symbolic death and rebirth, readers and their societies strengthen themselves through narratives that bridge the worlds of living and eclipsed or dying cultures. Thus colonized societies may undergo an experience that approximates a kind of symbolic death and reconstruction of their cultural bodies through these narratives, which rediscover and affirm extinct or vanishing indigenous beliefs in the face of colonial ones. (137)

Since “ghosts make absence present”, Lois Parkinson Zamora states, “they foreground magical realism’s most basic concern -- the nature and limits of the knowable -- and they facilitate magical realism’s critique of modernity” (498). As said by Zamora, they “embody the fundamental magical realist sense that reality always exceeds our capacities to describe or understand or prove and that the function of literature is to engage this excessive reality, to honor that which we may grasp intuitively but never fully or finally define” (498). The presence of *Beloved* as a ghost is oppositional in Morrison’s novel because it bothers “the scientific and materialist assumptions of Western modernity: that reality is knowable, predictable, controllable” (498). Moreover, *Beloved* in her return as a ghost makes the absence of past slavery, present again. By bringing this ghost, Morrison tackles the bloody heritage of slavery. She clearly links *Beloved* to the “Sixty Million and more” by joining her spirit to the body of a woman who died on one of the slave ships in the Middle Passage. In a monologue *Beloved* gives an account of slave ship experience:

I am always crouching the man on my face is dead . . . in the beginning the women are away from the men and the men are away from the women storms rock us and mix the men into the women and the women into the men that is when I begin to be on the back of the man for a long time I see only his neck and his wide shoulders above me . . . he locks his eyes and dies on my face . . . the others do not know that he is dead. (*Beloved* 211-212)

When Denver asks her about the place she is coming from, she says that she was in a “Dark” place: “Hot. Nothing to breathe down there and no room to move in... A lot of people is down there. Some is dead” (92). This description can be connected to that of a typical slave ship during the Middle Passage. On the slave ships, people were stuffed between decks in dark, stooped spaces too low for standing. The heat of these horrid places was so great and the smell so offensive that it was impossible to breath. Conditions on the slave ships were so wretched. Men, women and children crammed into every available space, denied adequate room, food or breathing space. They were not given enough water to drink and when “some water was brought; it was then that the extent of their sufferings was exposed in a fearful manner. They all rushed like maniacs towards it. No entreaties or threats or blows could restrain them; they shrieked and struggled and fought with one another for a drop of this precious liquid, as if they grew rabid at the sight of it” (“Aboard a Slave Ship” 2). When *Beloved* comes out of the water she is extremely thirsty: “She said she was thirsty ... the woman gulped water from a speckled tin cup and held it out for more. Four times Denver filled it and four times the woman drank as though she had crossed a desert” (*Beloved* 64). In her monologue, *Beloved* assumes the guise of Sethe’s mother, saying that, “it is the dark face that is going to smile at me the iron circle is around my neck she does not have sharp earrings in her ears or a round basket,” a description that may also suggest *Beloved*’s representation of the millions of Africans killed during the passage from freedom to slavery (250–251). Morrison have brought this ancestor into realization in her novel, so that she can speak to the living about the lives of the dead.

Since one of the most important elements of magical realism is the use of legend, myth and folklore, Morrison focuses on African American oral culture to recover black historical experiences. During the period under consideration, African-American ex-slaves were perhaps the most ex-centric to the privileged centers of power. At the same time, however, they supposedly could be independent enough to utter their otherness. The use of ancestral myths for reestablishing an identity lost through slavery, gives Morrison's writing a political meaning. While the literature of African-American writers has experienced a displacement from the center and has been marginalized until its rebirth at the very end of the twentieth century, novelists like Morrison contribute to the redefinition of that marginal position, going from invisibility to visibility. At the same time they claim another kind of reality. Invisibility not only is a frequent theme in African-American narrative, it also forms an image directly related to the supernatural because it represents the invisible as opposed to the real or visible. As Rosemary Jackson points out:

[...] ghosts offer an alternative to the established reality, celebrating the diversity of the real. Literature must be pluralist, in the same way as society should be, as Morrison claims. This implies the relativization of truth and reality; there is not one single reality but several realities, nor is there a single truth but several truths. On the other hand, the recurrent journeys into the past through ancestral characters and ghosts entail the breaking of a linear narrative prescribed by the Western literary canon. (45)

Morrison's narrative is influenced by "African American oral culture and mythology adapted from West African culture" (Bowers 58). Black lore, the myths and rituals of black culture are the most prominent elements in *Beloved*. Morrison feels a strong connection to ancestors because they were the culture holders. She applies magical realism in order to be able to use black folklore instead of authorized beliefs of Western world. Her magical character Beloved might have been formed after a mixture of *abiku*, *bakalu* and *orisha*, Oshun of West African Yoruba mythology.

In West African Yoruba mythology, *abiku* is a child who returns from the dead to be born again to the same mother. The term is applied to spirits in the form of children who must repeatedly die and be reborn. According to Brenda Cooper, "[it] is the willful sprit child, who masquerades as human baby, only to recurrently 'die' and be re-born, causing grief and mischief among the living ... its issue is a commentary on the health of the human condition" (50). Beloved can be considered as an *abiku* baby, who has an ambiguous existence. Morrison introduces Beloved into her novel, as a baby ghost who returns to the place of living. The novel opens with the words: "124 was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom" (*Beloved* 3). The narrator remarks that "the women of the house knew it and so did the children"(3) and that Sethe's two boys left the 'spiteful' 124, "as soon as two tiny hand prints appeared in the cake"(3). According to Bowers; "*Abiku* babies torment their mothers by being spirits in the guise of babies, spirits who repeatedly are born, only to die and return to the spirit world" (68). They are reportedly constantly hungry and thirsty with no stomach and are therefore obliged to eat continuously because they never know the satisfaction of feeling full. "It was as though sweet things were what she was born for. Honey as well as the was it came in, sugar sandwiches, the sludgy molasses gone hard and brutal in the can, lemonade, taffy and any type of dessert Seth brought home from restaurant" (*Beloved* 68-69).

John Vlach, an art historian, states that: "It is believed in lower Zaire that deceased ancestors become white creatures called *bakulu* who inhabit villages of the dead located under river beds or lake bottoms; they may return from this underworld to mingle with the living without being seen and can then direct the course of the living" (qtd. in. Holland 54). The reader can also see a connection between the *bakulu* and Beloved. Beloved as "a fully dressed woman walked out of the water. ... nobody saw her emerge or came accidentally by ... She had new skin, lineless and smooth, including the knuckles of her hands" (*Beloved* 62).

Morrison might also have modeled Beloved after the *orisha*, Oshun, who, according to anthropologist Migene González-Wippler, is the "Yoruban divinity of the rivers, . . . [t]he symbol of river waters, without which much life on earth would be impossible. In the same manner, she controls all that makes life worth living, such as love and marriage, children, money, and pleasure. . . . [W]omen who wish to bear children propitiate the *orisha* to help them achieve their desires" (qtd.in. Holland 55). In addition, Diedre L. observes that "Oshun is a woman of great beauty, wealth, and intelligence. She is the leader of *aje*, human and spiritual beings who manifest prodigious and transcendental energy"(55). According to him, *orisha*, Oshun, "controls all that makes life worth living"(55). The discourse of slavery made pleasure, marriage, and children impossible to achieve for slaves.

As a manifestation of African spirit(s), divinity, and African-American child, the character of Beloved can be considered as the root from which collective desires are revealed. The reader can see Beloved as orisha who wishes to be recognized. This desire can be traced in the weird relationship between Beloved and Paul D. Beloved asks him to impregnate her. She whispers, "I want you to touch me on the inside part and call me my name ... you have to touch me. On the inside part. And you have to call me my name" (*Beloved* 143). Beloved wants to be an individual, to be called; she needs to be removed from her nothingness. Luisah Teish explains oshun as "the queen of the performing arts," whose womb is "the sacred drum"(qtd. in. Holland 55). Here, Beloved can represent orisha. Her sexual union with Paul D is a demonstration of this ritual and Beloved's pregnancy is a proof of her enlarged drum.

As stated, by navigating the boundaries of magic and real, Morrison's text is able to claim African-American ancestral folk beliefs as a transformative and transgressive power. Her defocalized narrative structure questions the validity of a set of assumptions conventionally accepted and taken for granted among literary Western historians and critics. In other words, her text overturns the assumptions of Western empiricism and questions the binary oppositions of magic and real from the viewpoint of another narrative tradition that lacks those assumptions and that opposition. She uses this to make specific political commentary on her nations' postcolonial status. By applying magical realism into the dominant Western cultural form of the novel her text is able to reverse the Western/indigenous binary upon which Western realism is based. Accordingly the defocalized narrative of Morrison's magical realism moves discursive power from colonizer to colonized similar to postcolonial works, and offers a fictional ground in which alternative narrative visions of agency and history can be imagined. She also revives suppressed texts of African-American writers and brings them inside the canon.

3. The Healing Process of Re-imagining History in *Beloved*

Postmodernist history usually highlights the lack of absolute historical truth. It is believed that versions of history that claim to be the only truth are usually created by people in power in order to justify their position and keep it. For this reason, such an approach to history is recurrently adopted by postcolonial writers. To place their texts in a post-colonialist context and to bring into question existing historical assumptions, magical realist works hold historical references. Magical realism can act like contemporary theories of history that move history closer to fiction, and give a greater position to the perception of the historian and his or her own background. By doing so, one can view a past that has never been entirely accessible and thus can question existing historical assumptions.

The critic Marie Vautier argues that, magical realist works "bear witness to their liberation from a teleological and homogeneous historical discourse and to an acceptance of postcolonial heterogeneity with regard to historiography and to myth" (qtd. in. Bowers 101). Michael Dash, another critic, remarks a close relationship of history to post-colonialism for post-slavery nations. Dash argues that magical realism provides a means to recover not only the past but also the creative and spiritual aspects of the colonized people. He notes that Magical realist writers "have turned to the myths, legends and superstitions of the folk in order to isolate traces of a complex culture of survival which was the response of the dominated to their oppressors" (101). Magical realist texts, Slemon states, "read as a form of postcolonial discourse, ... comprise a positive and liberating engagement with the codes of imperial history and its legacy of fragmentation and discontinuity" (Slemon 422). Caroline Rody in her introduction to *The daughter's return: African-American and Caribbean women's fictions of history* argues that: "As groups or peoples gain cultural authority within larger social and political orders ... they develop simultaneously the desire to retell their histories" (5). According to Rody this desire is connected to "group identity, to the rise of 'imagined communities', in Benedict Anderson's term" (5). She concludes that "History as memory ... remains nevertheless a vital, valuable mythographic process for marginalized peoples, who tend to privilege 'remembered' (as opposed to 'learned') history, not least because of the need to reassert the reality of their historical trauma against the officially sanctioned and taught histories that would erase it" (5).

Thus, magical realist works of marginalized authors can challenge assimilated or unassimilated pasts and can resolve the history of the Americas with the reality of the present. They can recover history and then subvert it. They can also present the ordinary as reality and then introduce the realm of the spirit as actuality. Indeed, magical realism can restore indigenous and other marginalized histories as a site of truth in literature. As Wendy B. Faris argues, "one of magical realism's paradoxical projects is how to be grounded in history but not crushed by it and, alternatively, how to rise above it enough to re-imagine it without shortchanging its intractability"(Faris 59).

By this re-imagination, magical realist writers, like postcolonial writers, can rewrite received historical narratives in order to challenge existing discourses of power and knowledge. Morrison is acquainted with the fact that the history of the slavery of African-Americans from their own perspective has remained untold because of the oversight of dominant American and previously slave-owning culture. In an interview in *Time* magazine, she described *Beloved* in this way: “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” (Angelo, 257). What everybody wishes to forget is slavery. The problem stems from a failure to completely recognize the horror of slavery. This horror is found in the fragmented memories of daily life that haunts the individual and collective memory. Any development of a new identity after the slavery is based upon remembering and disremembering these moments of horror. Morrison notes that, “There is a necessity for remembering the horror in a manner in which it can be digested, in a manner in which the memory is not destructive” (qtd. in. Matus 32).

The reader can notice a conflict between the freed body and the enslaved psyche of the ex-slave in *Beloved*. Set in the post-Civil War era, the novel tells the story of a community of ex-slaves that share a common horror which is the horrible memories of slavery. In this community, “not a house in the county ain’t packed to the rafters with some dead Negro’ grief” (*Beloved* 5). The novel centers the life of an ex-slave woman, Sethe, who, as a fugitive slave, cut the throat of her infant daughter in order to prevent her from coming back into slavery. She is haunted by the guilt of this act, and the horrible memories of her previous life in slavery and is forced to remember her daughter’s death by the presence of her dead daughter’s ghost in her house. “To Sethe the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay” (42). Her brain has no room to ponder the future because it is so loaded down with the past (71). The pain of such a past means that Sethe is unwilling to think of it and is unable to tell her surviving daughter about the past.

Morrison uses the magical realist device of a ghost child, who later changes into a human form, to return the memories of the intensely disturbed Sethe. According to Lock, “For Sethe, in particular – whose name echoes Lethe, the mythical river of forgetfulness – rememory provides the key to unlocking and ultimately transforming, a past her rational memory has repressed” (qtd. in. Myrsiades 203). When Denver asks Sethe if this means that “rememories” never die, Sethe’s reply is: “Nothing ever does” (*Beloved* 36). The manifestation of the past in the form of *Beloved*, provokes the characters to recover their memories and narrate their stories. The baby’s return is an illustrative example of the past that, activated by the present, comes to be revised. Commenting on Morrison’s *Beloved*, Mariangela Palladino refers to Carl Plasa’s definition of the re-imagining of the past as Freudian terms of “Nachträglichkeit,” which is literally translated as “belatedness”, that suggests a “deferred action” or a “retroaction”(55). Palladino explains that: “Freud formulated this notion in relation to the reworking of traumatic experiences through memory where the act of remembering works not only as a connection with the past, but also a means to re-possess forgotten experiences”(55). She states that in *Beloved* “past memories are often awakened by the present, thus the subject re-experiences past traumas in the light of later events. The advent of present incidents confers to the past its full significance: the subject, although traumatized after the fact, reaches a closer and complete understanding of his/her memories” (55-56).

In Denise Heinze’s words, “Supernatural to a world with limited notions of reality, *Beloved* is nothing more or less than a memory come to life that has too conveniently been forgotten” (qtd. in. Marks 67). *Beloved* as a magical character, is a means of reunion with the past. In order to survive, Sethe believes she must forget the painful events of her past. *Beloved* haunts her mother and the others because they try to repress the painful memories of slavery. While slavery is a disturbance to all normal relations and courses of human experience; Shannin Schroeder believes that *Beloved* confronts this account of slavery by revisiting the past and by “revising slavery’s effects on individuals” and by proposing “an alternative to [that] past” (106). She states that:

Since *Beloved* ‘also contains the effects that slavery had, its profound fragmentation of the self and of the connections the self might have with others’, she is the alternative to the past. She is also the embodiment of a ‘particular historical contradiction’ who ‘also represents the treat of being engulfed by that past’. If Sethe and the community allow *Beloved* to engulf their present, they can no longer hope for a future. Thus, the ‘dangerous power of [the myths of slavery] to rigidify meanings and fix identities’ and the linear progression of history must both be explored in order to reorder the community. (106)

The unspoken horrors of slavery lies in the “telling”, or in what Barbara Solomon calls the “elliptical, ambiguous, and repeated descriptions of events” (qtd. in. Henderson 86). By telling, repressed voices can speak the unspeakable. Sooner or later Sethe has to revisit her past in order to see a future in which she can live without Beloved. The remaining daughter, Denver, with the help of Beloved, draws out Sethe’s stories so that together they can go through a process of healing. They create history themselves by telling stories to each other which are made up from the fragments of the past that they have been able to gather.

It was the horrors of slavery that caused Sethe to kill her daughter. By re-encountering Beloved, who revenges her mother and witnesses her suffering and learns the reasons of her own death, Sethe is able to partially heal the wound she made on her child and on herself too. She decides to explain her actions to her child: “I’ll explain to her even though I don’t have to. Why I did it. How if I hadn’t killed her she would have died and that is something. I could not bear to happen to her. When I explain it she’ll understand, because she understands everything already. I’ll tend her as no mother ever tended a child” (*Beloved* 200). By facing rather than repressing, these wounds can be somewhat healed. For Sethe, it is to face the horror of the past that her rational memory has repressed and that she has been “circling”, avoiding “beatings back the past” (73). In the course of re-memory, the past is rebuilt and this rebuilding enables Sethe to see the facts. According to Lock, her “visceral reenactment [when white men return to her yard] enables Sethe to see past the facts and place the blame for her daughter’s murder where it belongs, exorcizing at least part of the guilt (and, finally, the ravenous Beloved) herself” (qtd.in. Schroeder 111). Finally, Sethe stops suffering her soul and body. In the end of the novel, she takes “a crucial step towards self-ownership in directing her protective violence against the oppressor (schoolteacher in the form of Bowdin) instead of against her own flesh and blood” (110).

Denver is also able to move ahead from her childhood and take her place in her community. She works together with Beloved to create “what really happened” (*Beloved* 78), which focuses on the story of her own birth. For Denver, Beloved “held for her all the anger, love and fear she didn’t know what to do with” (103). She finally gives up her isolation and rejoins the community she left. She has taken “her mother’s milk right along with the blood of her sister” (152). So, she can be a symbol for her community, “the post-Civil War black family that was nourished by the combination of these essential elements: mother’s milk, the blood of relations lost to the violent reality of slavery, and the stories that are passed down to each subsequent generation, even if they require raising the dead” (Heller 114). She can also be considered the site of hope in the novel. Her growth is the most promising aspect of *Beloved*, and by the end of the novel she takes as much space and role in the text as her sister and her mother. Essentially, she saves her family and herself by pulling them out of her chosen isolation.

Paul D during the process of re-memory says that Beloved “moved him ... and [he] didn’t know how to stop it because it looked like he was moving himself” (*Beloved* 114). With her he tries to express himself sexually. He finally feels free to love himself and others. Beloved forces Paul D to remember his true self and leave the badly built self he has developed over the years with women. He succeeds in “touching Beloved on the inside part” (116). This union awards him the self that has the ability to feel and live as a complete being which is very essential to his survival. In other words, his exchange with the past is embodied in the form of Beloved. For him, the healing also comes when he places his story beside Sethe’s, because she is the only woman who can “gather the pieces and give them back to [him] all in the right order” (273).

Morrison also creates a link between public and personal memories through the character of Beloved. Sethe says to Denver, “Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it’s not . . . even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there,” living, breathing, eating. When Denver asks Sethe if other people can see it, Sethe replies: “Oh yes. Oh, yes, yes, yes. Someday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it’s you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It’s a rememory that belongs to somebody else” (36). In accepting this shared history and pain, Sethe sets the basis for Beloved’s appearance in physical shape in the novel. Sethe’s struggle to live with her painful memories is also seen in her community. Beloved’s return, represents not just Sethe’s past, but also the community’s past. It represents Ella’s child, the runaway captive from Deer Creek, and above all Middle Passage. This communal reclaiming happens when Beloved returns to 124 Bluestone Road. For the people in this community, Beloved’s presence can be read as the spiritual claim of an inherited past. Their memories of slavery are buried and repressed or deliberately exorcised.

Beloved's entrance into this world brings for them not only the river spirits but also those other disturbed spirits, "the people of the broken necks, of fire cooked blood and black girls who had lost their ribbons" (181).

In search of their Beloved, Sethe and Denver get their people, as well. Beloved's stories and actions propose that she is the symbol of all the children taken away from their mothers and oppressed as others in the white culture. She is suggestive of history by bringing back to life one of its anonymous victims. Thus Beloved can be considered not only as a manifestation of Sethe's guilt; she can also be considered as the bridge that joins the individual to the community. In other words, Beloved is the bridge that joins personal history to communal history. The two histories are connected in Beloved's flesh form as she makes it possible to deal with these memories in a way that healing of some wounds becomes possible. In the last section of the novel *Beloved*, who has turned out to be evil, is finally exorcised. It is done by the women of the community: "So thirty women made up that company and walked slowly, slowly toward 124 (257). The painful memories of the past overwhelm Sethe, causing her to be silent. The members of the community realize Sethe's miserable conditions in the presence of Beloved. They see:

Beloved bending over Sethe looked the mother, Sethe the teething child, for other than those times when Beloved needed her, Sethe confined herself to a corner chair. The bigger Beloved got, the smaller Sethe became; the brighter Beloved's eyes, the more those eyes that used never to look away became slits of sleeplessness. Sethe no longer combed her hair or splashed her face with water. She sat in the chair licking her lips like a chastised child while Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it. And the older woman yielded it up without a murmur. (250)

As P. Gabrielle Foreman argues, "Beloved's most basic premise lies in the magical: it is the community's shared belief in magic that enables them to save Sethe from Beloved's negative effects"(299). Beloved's appearance allows the community to see the pain Sethe is experiencing: "the singing women recognized Sethe at once and surprised themselves by their absence of fear when they saw what stood next to her. The devil-child" (*Beloved* 261). They confront not only Sethe's past but their own past as well: "when they caught up with each other, all thirty, and arrived at 124, the first thing they saw was not Denver sitting on the steps, but themselves. Younger, stronger, even as little girls lying in the grass asleep" (258). In consequence their images of a younger self, which was caused by the presence of Beloved, let them recognize a spirituality shattered by the experiences of slavery. In this way, they are able to call forth their dismembered selves created in slavery.

The black community of Cincinnati, after acting frightfully by ignoring 124, finally come together and take a winning stand. In their own attempt to reorder the past, the members of the community try to exorcise Beloved one final time. The rewarding outcome is Beloved's disappearance, signifying that all communal assumptions can only be what the community determines such to be. A remarkable fact about Morrison's magical character Beloved is that she does not have any scars on her body. According to the text, she has a new skin and smooth knuckles. With contrast to the scars that Sethe has on her back from slavery, Beloved's body conveys a form of rebirth that can only happen in memory's fantasy space. In this space one can imagine the body without its wounds. It is through the help of others that Sethe is able to reappear from this space and get back her identity. Finally, Sethe must become her own "best thing" and love herself even with the scar on her back and the haunting past that threatens to devour her being (272).

4. Conclusion

Postcolonial literature deals with the cultural identity of the subaltern in colonized societies and also the dilemma of developing a national identity after colonial rule. These struggles of identity, history, and future possibilities are present in magical realist work of Toni Morrison. Introducing a magical character with a narrative voice, *Beloved* distorts the traditional conception of reality according to Eurocentric definitions. Moreover, Beloved becomes the medium through which victims of the Middle Passage gain a literate voice. This functions as a narrative strategy of transgression since it allows for the voices of under- or un-represented. In this way *Beloved* can be understood as a writing back from the periphery. Accordingly, Morrison's work adds to the incomplete canon of American literature that has neglected the story of the silenced African-Americans who survived slavery. In a word, being dedicated to "Sixty million and more", *Beloved* is quite successful in memorializing a vast absence the words can never fill.

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