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Abstract: The situation of black women during and after slavery times is a question that has remained aside due to the seriousness and cruelty of the institution of slavery itself. However, the aim of this paper is to take under close scrutiny the role of women during slavery times, the harsh treatment they were subjected to, and their boundless strength and hope throughout the 250 years in which slavery was legal, contrasted to the so awaited and idealized world without slavery afterwards. In both cases the strong bond of mothers with their children will be present, depicting the unconditional love mothers felt towards their beloved, up to the point of doing the unimaginable. To carry out this analysis an interdisciplinary methodology will be used with a socio-cultural approach. In order to illustrate the main theoretical points of this paper, I will provide readings of Tony Morrison's *Beloved*, together with that of Harriet Jacobs, Frances Anne Kemble, and Nancy Chodorow.

Keywords: Motherhood, Slavery, American Civil War, Runaway Slaves, Broken Homes, Revolving Past, Dreams and Nightmares.

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The Slave Woman in the United States of America: A trip from chains and dreams to freedom and nightmares

0. Introduction

African-American literature has a regrettable direct bond with slavery, a notion perfectly depicted in slave narratives, the testimonies of countless slave men and women who endured slavery and had the courage to make their experiences public. The gravity and harshness of the cruel institution of slavery left aside other crucial issues such as the hard role of the **slave woman** at the time, whom from as far as the 17th Century not only had had to endure the sad reality of slavery but also the hard task of motherhood within that dreadful world.

This paper analyzes the role of black women, whom apart from being already one step behind due to their female condition, the fact of being black placed them at the very bottom of the social scale. As slaves, women not only had to deal with the physical suffering, but also with the fact that most of them were mothers, and had to bear the anguish of having their families shattered and never recomposed again, and what is worse, the eternal pain of losing their adored ones or being deprived of the right to even embrace them. This immeasurable agony, strongly boosted by their mother instincts, often resulted in constant **dreams and nightmares** that persecuted women for life, as in *Beloved*, the novel by Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison and main pillar of this research.

The legacy of these slave women testimonies was and is still today an inspiration to African-Americans, and more specifically to African American mothers. Many contemporary authors like Toni Morrison herself, were strongly influenced by these stiff testimonies, creating beautiful masterpieces such as *Beloved*, a fictional novel based on a true story about the harsh experiences of Margaret Garner, a former slave who after an endless fight finally achieved her freedom.

Together with *Beloved*, other works set around the period of the American Civil War will be taken as secondary sources in order to examine the situation of the black woman at different stages. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, a deep psychological study of Nancy Chodorow will remain the base of the secondary sources, analyzing today's family structure and the role of women in it, helping us compare it to their former situation. The rest of secondary sources will complement this study by exhibiting the state of the still slave women during slavery times. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation* will show us two very different points of view: the one of a slave mother, and the one of a slave-owner who being a mother herself thoroughly empathizes with female slaves, two key works that will complete our understanding of *Beloved*.

1. Chains of Slave Mothers

The situation of slave women in the United States of America from as far as the 1619 was offensive. Like their male counterparts, women had to bear the burdens of slavery: strong physical work, severe punishments and lack of basic rights until the American Civil War, that is, 250 years of servitude. However in the case of women, they had to endure their usual Masters' sexual harassment, which as it has been proved was not an unusual practice. Furthermore, the hardest task of slave women was that of motherhood. Being most of them mothers, they had to suffer the sad phenomenon of the **"broken homes"**, the harsh experience of losing their beloved, a terrible experience that would persecute their lives forever.

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Since slaves were considered as mere properties that one could buy and sell, men being highly valuable considering their great potential at work, and girls (especially those with lighter skin) greatly demanded to become concubines or prostitutes, the **separation of family members** was then an everyday issue. Couples were split, siblings distributed, and what mothers feared the most, their adored little children taken away from their gaze, in all probability to never see them again. From the very beginning, this notion is perfectly depicted in Tony Morrison's *Beloved*, in which the theme of motherhood plays a primordial role, perfectly portrayed not only by the protagonist Sethe, a slave woman who's blinded by her maternal instinct, but by the stories of several secondary female characters whose mother instinct leads them to suffer, risk their lives or even die.

This powerful maternal instinct boosted the strong and restricted desire of mothers to see their "**stolen**" babies again, as the case of Sethe's own mother, a woman whom she got to see only in a few limited occasions and total darkness, the only moment when their secret meetings could take place. Not even being able to feed their own babies since roles were strictly established, women were meant to **work in the fields** whereas a few others had to nurse white and black babies, being the former the privileged ones: "The little white babies got it first, and I got what was left. Or none. There was no nursing milk to call my own." (*Beloved* 236) This is a fact that Sethe's own mother could not stand, the incapacity of being able to nurse her own daughter, which is what led her to carry out the illicit secret encounters with her little Sethe in the safe darkness of the night, while showing her marked breasts to her so that she would be able to recognize her own mother among other slave women. This notion of black mothers not being able to nurse their own infants and, on the contrary, having the task of nursing all white babies is quite controversial. Whereas there was a huge inequality and "disgust" towards blacks, when it came to feeding and taking care of white babies this disgust disappeared, being black women the main providers of milk to white babies, while leaving black babies aside.

In *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation 1838-1839*, white British actress Frances Anne Kemble accounted her personal observations during the period she lived at a Southern plantation in Georgia, a place that her oppressive husband run mercilessly. Apart from the general devastation and poor conditions of the blacks, she witnessed how slave women were the ones nursing white babies, and how white parents did not seem to mind it. In her preface, Kemble states how hypocritical it is to despise blacks for such small reasons as their personal odor and how suitable it is to exploit the usefulness out of them whenever convenient.

The Southerners you know insist that it is inherent with the race, and it is one of their most cogent reasons for keeping them as slaves. But as this very disagreeable peculiarity does not prevent Southern women from hanging their infants at the breasts of negroes, (...) it seems to me that this objection to doing them right is not very valid. I cannot imagine that they would smell much worse if they were free (Kemble: 2)

Another factor that as a mother she found astonishing and made her forge the strong empathy she ended up feeling towards/with the black woman was the fact that these nursing women in charge of taking care of white babies had been **deprived of the right to take care of their own infants**, not even being able to see them once more after the very moment of their birth. When it comes to Sethe's mother-in-law Baby Suggs, we are told how after having the large sum of eight children, as it is "the natural thing", they are all simply taken from her, never getting to see them ever again in her life, all but Sethe's husband Halle, her most beloved one.

I had eight. Every one of them gone away from me, four taken, four chased (...) 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. (*Beloved* 6)

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The harsh experience of their beloved children being stolen is a fact that persecuted mothers throughout their lives, not only during slavery times, but also afterwards once freedom was finally attained. As portrayed in *Beloved*, constant memories, or more accurately nightmares, of their lost ones only resulted in either a constant agony or a **tireless desire of seeking** them unceasingly once the war was over, a desire that not only mothers, but all family members tried to achieve in order to reunite their sadly fragmented families.

Odd clusters and strays of Negroes wandered the back roads and cowpaths from Schenectady to Jackson. Dazed but insistent, they searched each other out for word of a cousin, an aunt, a friend who once said: Call on me. Anytime you get near Chicago, just call on me. (*Beloved*: 63)

This desire was, in some occasions, impossible, due to the lack of information and overwhelming fear. Nevertheless, joy was finally achieved in other cases when those searched were finally found, although closely followed by sorrow again after the disheartening findings of the dark past of their beloved.

The devastating effect of broken homes strongly **marked the ex-slave community**, leading them to stick closely together and welcoming anyone in need of love and compassion in spite of being foreign to the family in question, that is, to acquire a stronger sense of solidarity. By promoting their earlier fragile family ties, families forged a tight unity, a unity that is still reflected in today's African American families, where mothers are the "glue" that holds them together, continually showing a forceful motherly love and constant support to take care of their children, a right that was denied to them during slavery times.

2. Sethe's Personal Story: Situation Before The Civil War

Sethe's strong sense of motherhood is utterly present throughout *Beloved*. She has to endure the consuming pain of her children being born to slavery, a dreadful world she terribly despises, and everything she does is for the sake of her children. Even the hardest decisions she makes are all led by the overwhelming love she feels towards them, their beloved, the most important thing in her life.

Risky, thought Paul D, very risky. For a used-to-be-slave woman to love anything that much was dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settled on to love. The best thing, he knew, was to love just a little bit" (*Beloved* 54)

The situation of Sethe is different from the usual situation of black slaves however, not having her children taken away from her. The singular opportunity of being able to keep all of her four children becomes contradictory, since she would prefer not to have had her children than to have had them in the dreary world of slavery. What she wishes most in her life is to save them from this world in the ironically-called "Sweet Home" plantation, a place where she was able to experience and suffer herself the degradation and violence of that immoral environment constituted by Schoolteacher, a ruthless man who considered slaves simply as animals, who could only be domesticated through brutal punishments, which end up in his writing of a book where he analyzed slaves' animal features.

One of the first incidents that strongly influenced Sethe's present and became the pivotal element to boost her desire to withdraw her children from this awful reality, was the '**milk incident**', her beloved baby's milk literally taken from her own breasts by a couple of white children who blinded by the education provided by Schoolteacher considered her as a mere animal.

I am full God damn it of two boys with mossy teeth, one sucking on my breast, the other holding me down, their book-reading teacher watching and writing it up. I am still full of that (*Beloved* 83)

This dreadful action perfectly portrays the way slaves were considered and therefore treated in numerous Southern plantations. As a woman, the shame of having

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her body handed just like an object and the impotence of not being able to do anything about it is a burden that will psychological mark her forever. For a mother, having her adored children's milk simply stolen in such a disrespectful and brutal way is a trauma that will result in a persistent feeling of impotence, agony, and the desire of preventing them, especially her daughters, of going through the same incident.

It is this experience what turns Sethe's world upside down, triggering her dangerous escape and consequent events that come with it. Such is the anguish and suffering that Sethe goes through, that she is driven to carry out the radical act of **intending to murder her own children**, actually taking the life of her youngest daughter. This tragic event will mark Sethe's past and powerfully affect her present by reviving this dark memory over and over again. The aim of **killing** all her children and herself, and the actual assassination of her two-year-old daughter, is told from Schoolteacher's point of view. This way we get a different perspective of the action, an explicit view of how a mother simply takes the life of her baby, a surprising behavior that leaves the readers at an immediate shock:

Inside, two boys bled in the sawdust and dirt at the feet of a nigger woman holding a blood-soaked child to her chest with one hand and an infant by the heels in the other. She did not look at them; she simply swung the baby toward the wall planks, missed and tried to connect a second time (*Beloved* 175)

The question that remains is how a mother was able to perform such an atrocity to her very own children. Sethe is simply portrayed as some kind of cruel and savage monster determined to take the life of her children. She is so blinded by whatever force that is driving her that even her eyes seem to be gone:

But the worst ones were those of the nigger woman who looked like she didn't have any. Since the whites in them had disappeared and since they were as black as her skin, she looked blind (*Beloved* 177)

However, later on we are shown another perspective, after seeing how Sethe herself regarded the incident and the reasons of this radical act: the protection of her children to whom she wishes to avoid slavery at any price, being pushed then to do anything in order to prevent them from going back to Sweet Home and having the chance of experiencing the suffering she went through, being disrespected, abused or even killed as Schoolteacher and his pupils considered them, mere animals.

"And if she thought of anything, it was No. No. Nono. Nonono. Simple. She just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them. Over there. Outside this place, where they could be safe." (*Beloved* 192)

These events will mark Sethe's memory and powerfully affect her life once she is no longer a slave, not letting her fully enjoy her freedom, being continually tormented by her dark past and the constant prosecution of dreadful memories. This will result in the apparition of her daughter's ghost, *Beloved*, to torment Sethe incessantly bringing nothing but illusions and nightmares. This gothic element, later on analyzed in detail, will be continually present throughout the book, pursuing and reminding Sethe of her eternal guilt.

Every mention of her past life hurt. Everything in it was painful or lost. She and Baby Suggs had agreed without saying so that it was unspeakable; to Denver's inquiries Sethe gave short or rambling incomplete reveries (*Beloved* 69)

These tough experiences that marked Sethe's past so powerfully end up impregnating her present, a present infected by endless nightmares that will not cease until her maternal instinct finds its peace.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is a fictional work that beautifully unleashes the hidden experiences of what happened to thousands of slave women before the American Civil War, a phenomenon that has been shared before by many slave women themselves in slave

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narratives, as the case of Harriet Jacobs, a slave woman who related the harsh experiences of her life under the pseudonym of Linda Brent in order to protect herself. In her work *Incident in the Life of a Slave Girl*, published in 1861 a relation to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* can be perfectly observed, since both protagonists share very similar situations and feelings. Apart from suffering her Master's multiple abuses and having to run away risking her life to obtain her freedom, 'Linda' had to also abandon her children in order to protect them, bearing an eternal guilt just like Sethe's.

The harsh conditions under which women were exposed is also emphasized in Harriet Jacobs' autobiography, which analyzes how dreadful it was to be a woman in the world of slavery, since apart from physical and psychological abuse that male slaves also had to endure, on the contrary of men, women had as well to tolerate sexual abuse from their masters, and as stated before, the horrible task of motherhood in that cruel world previous to the abolition of slavery.

When they told me my new-born babe was a girl, my heart was heavier than it had ever been before. Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women (Jacobs 119)

The notion of motherhood then, is thoroughly present in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* just as it is in *Beloved*, however the most shocking similarity is the most alarming event in Toni Morrison's work, the desire of death of your own children. "Alas, what mockery it is for a slave mother to try to pray back her dying child to life! Death is better than slavery" (Jacobs 96) Just like Sethe, we can see how Linda feels towards her children living in a world of slavery, preferring them to die rather than having to actually live in it and go through the experiences that she herself had to suffer as a slave. "As I held her in my arms, I thought how well it would be for her if she never waked up" (Jacobs 133)

The difference however, is that Sethe actually does take the life of her daughter, suffering then the successive consequences that this act brings, whereas Linda just reflects on the idea. This can be regarded as a crazy action on behalf of Sethe, taking the idea of killing her children to another extreme level, or on the other side, rather as an extremely hard decision full of courage and pain, since her children are what she loves most in her life, being her only concern not to harm them but to actually protect them, ending up desiring to really murdering them only for their own sake and as an action of blind and true motherly love. The drama of a mother killing her own children because she thinks there is no place for them in the world is rather recurrent in history. Though in quite different circumstances, it brings to mind the murdering of the six children of Magda Goebbels, the wife of the Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels who killed the little children minutes before her suicide because she thought they would have no place to live in a world without the *Führer*. Similar cases, like Antigona's killing of her own son to take revenge on his unfaithful husband Jason, can be found in ancient Greek drama.

In her deep psychological study *The Reproduction of Mothering*, which even though not recent is utterly congruous with our study, American psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow takes under close scrutiny the role of women in today's and yesterday's society, how they are taken for granted as mothers, and the traditional family structure involving the absent figure of the father. One of the notions Chodorow tackles in her study is how women are expected to assume the task of **motherhood** on their own. This notion is well illustrated in *Beloved*, where we can see a Sethe fighting like a lioness in order to bring up and protect her children without any help or support, totally on her own.

I did it. I got us all out. Without Halle too. Up till then it was the only thing I ever did on my own. Decided. And it came off right, like it was supposed to. (...) it was me doing it; me saying, Go on, and Now. Me having to look out. Me using my own head. (*Beloved* 190)

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Sethe's husband Halle in *Beloved* is firstly portrayed as "the perfect man", being a man with an immense heart, loving and protective: "Halle, of course was the nicest. Baby Suggs' eight child, who rented himself out all over the country to buy her away from her" (*Beloved* 27) The years of hard work he carried out in order to free her mother from slavery show his genuine morality, making him the perfect husband for Sethe, whom she got to choose out of all the men in Sweet Home. The paternal role of **Halle** becomes entirely absent however due to the appalling effects of slavery. It is the milk-incident what triggers not only Sethe's running away but also Halle's insanity and hence disappearance. Sethe, who always thought nobody witnessed the incident at the shed, later on finds out the real truth:

Add my husband to it, watching, above me in the loft –hiding close by– the one place he thought no one would look for him, looking down on what I couldn't look at all. And not stopping them– looking and letting it happen (*Beloved* 83)

The fact that Halle is on the scene observing everything can be regarded as an act of cowardice, something Sethe will never forgive, together with his unexpected disappearance as if it was some kind of escape from their family. Chodorow states this kind of family pattern has been the usual one throughout the centuries, a pattern which even though is starting to evolve today, it is notwithstanding well present in our society. The story of Sethe represents the case of many African-American women who had to experience motherhood on their own.

The case of children should also be taken into account, since without the natural family unity, they end up having traumas, confusion, or insecurities as Chodorow analyzes. In *Beloved*, Denver lacks not only a paternal figure practically from her birth, but also all male figures in her life, after the runaway of her brothers Burglar and Howard. The yearning for her father's return without knowing his voluntary escape, gives Denver some kind of hope to procure a normal family unity hoping things will go back to normal again. These symbolic escapes that Chodorow analyses are constant throughout the novel: Halle, Burglar and Howard or even Paul D carry out a silent escape when it comes to confronting problems. Yet it is Paul D the only man who finally becomes faithful putting his heart and soul at the very end.

From the onset of slavery **running away was** an everyday issue, slaves constantly escaped their ruthless masters, and were chased in accordance with the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 which severely punished runaway slaves. Slaves had to leave everything behind, their families, their security and their fear, having to risk everything, even their own lives.

Forbidden public transportation, chased by debt and filthy "talking sheets", they followed secondary routes, scanned the horizon for signs and counted heavily on each other. Silent, except for social courtesies, when they met one another they neither described nor asked about the sorrow that drove them one place to another. The whites didn't bear speaking on. Everybody knew (*Beloved* 63)

Sethe's case in *Beloved* is an extraordinary example of hope and endless courage. Although pregnant, she was full of strength and motivation to escape since she had nothing to lose, she did not want to go back to the hell she had lived in Sweet Home ever again, being her children her biggest concern, and thus hoping to prevent them from going through the same torture she did, no matter what the risks. Nevertheless, even though the escape was success, there were some things that she could not run away from, as the "chokecherry tree" printed in her back, result of infinite whippings, the loss of her beloved ones, or the constant guilt that overtakes her, that is, the past, from which there is no possible escape.

Running away towards the North in order to obtain freedom is a notion that was not simply vanished once slavery was over, since **Toni Morrison herself experienced** some kind of symbolic escape from the South when she was just a girl in the 1930's, that is, just 80 years ago. Moving northwards was the greatest concern of her father, a respected

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University teacher who wished to move to the North, to the city of Chicago, in order to avoid Southern discrimination and provide his family a safe and happy life plenty of opportunities.

This event illustrates how far North-American culture has indeed evolved since the abolition of slavery. The gift of freedom was still symbolic for a long time, for even when blacks were legally free they still suffered a huge discrimination, especially in the Southern states. This issue is well present in *Beloved*, where we can observe a finally free black community which is however still discriminated and not properly integrated into the society since they are gathered in an "all-black" community, being the Bodwins the only whites involved with them. The symbolism of this fake freedom and the nightmares of blacks after obtaining it will be analyzed in the following and last section.

3. The long-awaited "freedom" after Civil War

"He knew exactly what she meant: to get to a place where you could love anything you chose—not to need permission for desire—well now, *that* was freedom." (*Beloved* 191)

The **American Civil War** entirely shaped the course of the story taking an unexpected turn which provided hope for the dispirited circumstances of slaves. Numerous right movements were carried out by black individuals of course, as it is the case of well-known author Frederick Douglass or preacher Sojourner Truth, both ex-slaves who campaigned to put slavery to an end. However, whites also played an extremely important role in this fight, being women the ones most concerned with the unfair situation of slaves, as author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Harriet Beecher Stowe. After the Civil War, the success of the abolition of slavery gave black citizens equal rights to the whites, supposedly becoming totally free. Unfortunately, the situation was way more complicated than that.

Toni Morrison defines a very clear picture of her characters' state of still **dependence even after reaching the so long-awaited and desired freedom**, the effect that the past has over ex-slaves has such a power on them that they can never run away from it and finally become free. When it comes to mothers, the effect of the past is even more erosive, since the dreadful memories of the suffering or loss of their infants overtakes their haunted minds ruled by their maternal instinct, as the case of tormented Sethe. Just when the obscure and prosecuting memories seemed to be forgotten, when life seems to go back to normality and what is more, to a newly discovered happiness, the sudden appearance of a girl curiously named Beloved changes the turns of the story making the forgotten past alive again. Even though it is not clear for Sethe from the very beginning, she soon realizes that Beloved is of course the reincarnation of her assassinated baby girl.

The apparition of Beloved which seems like a holy gift at the start ends up becoming a poisoned present. Beloved's presence in 124, the chaotic family house which family seemed to have found its peace, brings nothing but decay, Beloved meticulously plays her cards in order to get what she has been yearning for such a long time, her mother. The manipulation, resentment and seduction of Paul D, the only "normal" person in the house, sets a perfect environment for Sethe's nightmare to begin.

What at the beginning seems to be a harmless relationship based on love, Sethe and Beloved's relationship soon becomes a mad obsession from both parts. Whereas Sethe starts feeding her sudden obsession after finding out Beloved is her strangled daughter: "BELOVED, she my daughter. She mine" (*Beloved* 236), Beloved maintains the fascination she showed from the very beginning towards Sethe, a devoted fixation which finally grows into a dangerous obsession: "I am beloved and she is mine" (*Beloved* 248)

Sethe's torment commences once her obsession towards Beloved is developed. Beloved, a sweet and loving little girl turns into the constant reminder of Sethe's indelible guilt. A guilt that she tries to justify unceasingly without achieving any relief however.

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See. She come back to me of her own free will and I don't have to explain a thing. I didn't have time to explain before because it had to be done quick. Quick. She had to be safe and I put her where she would be. But my love was tough and she back now. [...] 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 (*Beloved* 236)

Even though Sethe keeps on trying to convince herself that it was the rightful thing to do, she is tormented by a constant **guilt**, a guilt that is reminded over and over again by Beloved's presence. She keeps on trying to justify such an arduous act as it is the strangling of her own baby girl daughter pleading for forgiveness, stating that "Beloved was more important, meant more to her than her own life." (*Beloved* 284) Nevertheless Beloved's constant psychological abuse leads Sethe to feel a constant auto guilt that harrows her persona

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 [...] Denver thought she understood the connection between her mother and Beloved; Sethe was trying to make up for the handsaw; Beloved was making her pay for it. (*Beloved* 295)

Sethe demonstrates her overwhelming maternal instinct by making firm that the best thing she had in the world was her children and that her only craving is not to see them go through the same experiences as she had, longing to keep them "clean", unfortunately unlike she is.

And though she and others lived through and got over it, she could never let it happen to her own. The best thing she was, was her children. Whites might dirty her all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing—the part of her that was clean. (*Beloved* 296)

At last, it is through the people supporting her and especially her own daughter Denver, who is led by the reciprocate love she feels towards her mother, that Sethe realizes Beloved's manipulation and perversion, being her nightmares successfully vanished after all. This symbolizes some kind of forgiveness and resolution at long last, but allowing her maternal instinct to finally find its peace. In this way Sethe can eventually enjoy her freedom banishing all ghosts from her life, which are no others than the ghosts of slavery, previously empowered by her boundless maternal instinct.

4. Conclusion

In the heinous history of slavery, men have played a main role due to the economic importance of slave labor for the running of plantations. Slave males have been therefore the subject of most studies and research on slavery. The common vision society retains of slavery –a poor chained slave man working in the fields– prevents us from noticing at any moment the extremely difficult situation of women, a situation that was unmistakably worse than that of their male counterparts.

Yet, there is another side to/of the story, the female side. Women had usually been kept in the background, however they were even more important than men since they did provided not only lighter as well as heavy work, but they were the ones who by nature design, were meant to provide new generations of slaves to the master.

But slave women were human beings, and as such, liable to the feelings of motherhood and love, and they were deprived of both. As women, they were subjected to sexual abuses, as mothers they were deprived of their children. Therefore, black women within this harsh world had to bear a triple agony, being not only slaves, but also women and what is worse, mothers.

In her book, Toni Morrison beautifully unfolds this issue by exhibiting this previously masked/veiled notion, and thus making the reader aware of this sad but truthful

Morenas López, María Luisa. "The Slave Woman in the United States of America: A trip from chains and dreams to freedom and nightmares." *JACLR: Journal of Artistic Creation and Literary Research* 3.1 (2015): 33-42
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reality. Being mothers was definitely black women's hardest task. Mothers within the world of slavery not only had to live the cruelty of slavery itself but the agony of watching their children living in it, up to the extreme point of wishing their children to die before having to endure that reality.

Sethe's case in *Beloved* is common to the faith of many other black women, women who alone had to risk it all to protect their dear ones. In the case of the unlucky protagonist of our story, her suffering goes beyond abolition. When men are supposed to be rejoicing at the new granted freedom, Sethe tortures herself with the suffering of the past and her lost child. For her freedom can never arrive, for her mind is subject to an everlasting torture.

The footprints of slavery lay within the hearts of the black community, a sentiment that will always remain part of the history of the United States of America, which as stated in *Beloved's* closing page: "This is not a story to pass on" (*Beloved* 324), a story never to be repeated, never to be forgotten.

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