

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA
PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM LETRAS/INGLÊS E LITERATURA CORRESPONDENTE

RECONSTRUCTING IDENTITIES: A STUDY OF TONI MORRISON'S *BELOVED*
AND DIONNE BRAND'S *AT THE FULL AND CHANGE OF THE MOON*

por

MAGALI SPERLING

Dissertação submetida à Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina em cumprimento
parcial dos requisitos para obtenção do grau de

MESTRE EM LETRAS

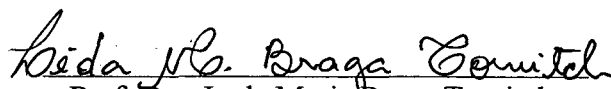
FLORIANÓPOLIS

Fevereiro de 2001

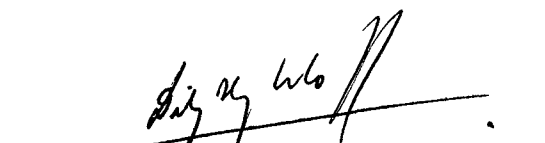
Esta Dissertação de Magali Sperling, intitulada *Reconstructing Identities: A Study of Toni Morrison's Beloved and Dionne Brand's At the Full and Change of the Moon*, foi julgada adequada e aprovada em sua forma final, pelo Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras/Inglês e Literatura Correspondente, da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, para fins de obtenção do grau de


MESTRE EM LETRAS

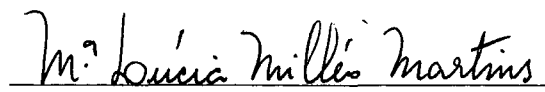
Área de concentração: Inglês e Literatura Correspondente
Opção: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa


Prof. Dra. Leda Maria Braga Tomitch
Coordenadora

BANCA EXAMINADORA:


Prof. Dr. Dilvo I. Ristoff
Orientador e Presidente


Prof. Dra. Eloína Prati dos Santos
Examinadora


Prof. Dra. Maria Lúcia Milleo Martins
Examinadora

Florianópolis, 19 de fevereiro de 2001.

For my parents, Néco e Tereza,

my brother, Jr.,

Vó Ana, Vô Natal e Vó Sybila (*in memoriam*).

And for my whole family,

my most precious fans.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank some very special people who always helped me a lot, encouraging and loving me when I needed it the most. I thank you, father, for having taught me important values, like respect and freedom. I thank you, mother, for being so loving and loyal to my dreams. I thank you, brother, for always making me laugh, and for being there to share all my secrets. I thank you, Vó and Vô, for being so good it would be impossible not to love you with all my strength. And I thank you, my family, for being so encouraging, always supporting my plans, and making me feel capable of doing everything I wanted.

I would like to say ‘thank you’ to Felipe (and his entire family), for being so nice, cooking when I was hungry, being patient when I was almost neurotic, and, most importantly, for treating me like the most special *Neguinha* in the world.

I am also thankful to many friends, who were always by my side *pro que der e vier*. Thanks, Rubelise, for being more than a friend and roommate, you have been a real sister to me. Thanks, Karina, for your friendship and happiness. Thanks, Ale, for always coming to Floripa to *matar a saudade*. Thanks, Ana Carolina, for your fellowship, and for being a *parceira* at the beach and *na Lagoa*, and thanks, Rodrigo, for the jokes, beer and songs that made us laugh, relax and sing when we really needed. I say ‘thanks,’ to my Porto-Alegrense friends Adri and Miele, too.

I would like to express my most profound gratitude to Eloína, who introduced me to literary research, and really encouraged me in my career. And thanks, for being more of a friend than a professor to me.

At last, but not the least, I thank Prof. Dilvo, my advisor, for helping me in this work, and CAPES for the scholarship granted.

Submitted to the examining committee on February 19, 2001.

ABSTRACT

RECONSTRUCTING IDENTITIES: A STUDY OF TONI MORRISON'S *BELOVED*
AND DIONNE BRAND'S *AT THE FULL AND CHANGE OF THE MOON*

MAGALI SPERLING

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA
2001

Supervising Professor: Dilvo I. Ristoff

This thesis investigates Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, in order to see how the reconstruction of the past in these novels influences the authors' construction of black identity. I have based my analysis on the discussions about identity of Frantz Fanon, Stuart Hall, and Cornel West, who understand that black identity is a constructed category that acquired its meanings through stereotypes forced upon blacks since colonization. These writers also point out an analysis of the colonial situation to a better understanding of the construction of black identity, which is viewed more as a process than as something already fixed. As in those novels there is a re-telling of the colonial past, this work tries to show the relation of this slavery past with the identification strategies Toni Morrison and Dionne Brand portray in their works. Since each author describes different life experiences and speaks from different loci of enunciation (one is an Afro-American and the other an Afro-Caribbean immigrated to Canada), they portray different strategies of identity-formation. In *Beloved*, identity is constructed through resistance to white domination, which leads to an emancipatory strategy of survival. In *At the Full and Change of the*

Moon, on the other hand, black identity is disintegrated since blacks are dispersed all over the world, which leads to an assimilationist strategy of survival. This work concludes that both authors try to show the importance of the understanding of the slavery experience to the reconstruction of black identities.

Nº de páginas: 89

Nº de palavras: 28.661

RESUMO

Esta dissertação faz uma análise das obras *Beloved*, de Toni Morrison, e *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, de Dionne Brand, para investigar de que maneira a reconstrução do passado, presente nestes dois romances, influencia a reconstrução da identidade negra feita pelas duas autoras. Para fazer esta análise, utilizei alguns conceitos sobre identidade discutidos por Frantz Fanon, Stuart Hall e Cornel West. Estes escritores entendem a identidade negra como um conceito que foi construído através da imposição de estereótipos coloniais. Além disso, eles sugerem que se faça uma análise crítica da situação colonial para um melhor entendimento da construção da identidade negra, que é vista por eles mais como um processo do que algo já fixado. Como nos romances já mencionados o passado colonial é “re-contado”, este trabalho tenta mostrar a relação do passado de escravatura com as estratégias de identificação que Toni Morrison e Dionne Brand retratam em suas obras. Já que cada autora narra experiências diferentes e fala de um local enunciativo específico (uma é afro-americana e a outra uma canadense afro-caribenha), elas também retratam diferentes estratégias de formação de identidade. Em *Beloved*, a identidade é construída através da resistência à dominação branca, o que leva a uma estratégia emancipatória de sobrevivência. Já em *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, a identidade negra é desintegrada, pois os negros estão espalhados por todo o mundo, o que leva a uma estratégia assimilacionista de sobrevivência. Este trabalho conclui que as duas autoras tentam mostrar a importância do entendimento da experiência de escravidão para a reconstrução das identidades negras.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter I - In Search of Black Identities.....	5
Chapter II - The Construction of Identity in <i>Beloved</i>	20
Chapter III - <i>At the Full and Change of the Moon</i> : The Construction of "Un-identity".....	54
Conclusion.....	78
Bibliography.....	85

INTRODUCTION

Since 1441, when Africans were first taken to Portugal as slaves, the problem of establishing a racial identity based on the relationship between whites and blacks has been present. The dislocation of thousands of blacks to the colonies was forced by white colonizers, who had social and economic power to *define* races and to *decide* which was better than the other. Not only philosophers and theoreticians, but also many literary writers, have been interested in the question of how the colonization of black people influenced the construction of their identity. Contemporary writers like Toni Morrison and Dionne Brand are examples of this.

Toni Morrison is one of the most famous black writers, not only in the United States, but also all over the world (she was winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993). She was born in Lorain, Ohio, in 1931, named Chloe Anthony Wofford. In 1953, she graduated in English at Howard University and, in 1957, she returned to Howard as an instructor, after earning a master's degree in English at Cornell. When she graduated, she changed her name to Toni Wofford, which was again changed to Toni Morrison after her marriage to the Jamaican architect Harold Morrison. In 1964, she got divorced and went to New York City, to work at Random House.

Her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, was published in 1970 and, in 1973, she published *Sula*. *Song of Solomon*, from 1977, is her third novel, with which she won the National Book Critics' Circle Award and the National Book Award. In 1981, she published *Tar Baby*, and six years later, *Beloved*, winning the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Her latest novel, *Jazz*, was published in 1992. These works have established Morrison as one of the greatest writers in American literature.

Dionne Brand is also a very famous writer in Canada and her work has been the object of much literary research. She was born in 1953, in Guayaguayare, Trinidad, but emigrated to Toronto, in 1970, where she still lives. She majored in English and

Philosophy at the University of Toronto in 1975 and, in 1989, she finished her master's course in Philosophy of Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Fore Day Morning, published in 1978, is her first book of poetry, which was followed by a book of poetry for children called *Earth Magic*, also from 1978. In 1982, 1983, and 1984 respectively, she published three more politically engaged books of poetry, *Primitive Offensive*, *Winter Epigrams and Epigrams to Ernesto Cardenal in Defense of Claudia*, and *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun*. In 1988, she published her first collection of short-stories, *Sans Souci and Other Stories*, publishing another book of poetry, *No Language is Neutral*, in 1990. Her first novel, *In Another Place not Here*, was published in 1997. In this same year, she published *Land to Light On*, for which she won the Governor General's Award for Poetry and The Trillium Award. Finally, in 1999, she published the novel *At the Full and Change of the Moon*. Carmen Lassota argues that Dionne Brand's works "arise directly out of her political involvements" (2).

In the books analyzed in the present work, *Beloved* and *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, both Toni Morrison and Dionne Brand deal with the reconstruction of the slavery period as a way to show the reader how past experiences influenced blacks' construction of identity. In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison reconstructs the past through the "remembered" experiences of the main character, Sethe, a run-away slave, and through some other narratives of characters who also experienced slavery. Personal and collective history are mixed in these narratives, through which Morrison is able to tell a different "version" of the past and the history of slaves during the nineteenth century. Furthermore, her "telling" (written to a twentieth-century audience) enables a better understanding of the construction of black identity since colonization.

In *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, Dionne Brand reconstructs the history of Trinidad, writing about the slavery experience during the nineteenth century. However, she brings her story telling to the twentieth century, portraying a kind of "saga" of a family of slaves and free black people. Bola, the character who survives the slavery period, has many children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, whose stories are also told in the narrative. With the narratives of this "family-saga," Brand is able to

show the complexities and paradoxes of the slavery experience and how this experience still influences black people's present lives.

The present study carries out an investigation of how past experiences of slavery, portrayed in the works *Beloved* and *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, influence black people's search for and construction of identity. Since each author retells her past from different *loci* of enunciation, I will show that they portray different or even opposing strategies of identity-formation.

With this comparative study, it is possible to see how complementary these two literary works are to each other. Reading these works, the reader can get a clear notion of what has been happening to black communities since colonization, especially in terms of the construction of their identities. In addition, an analysis of the criticism about Toni Morrison's *Beloved* reveals that a lot has been written about the act of remembering the past and how it influences the search for meaning in slavery and in freedom. Yet, little has been said about how the "making sense" of history (both personal and collective) influences the construction of racial identity. This work is an attempt to do this, comparing and contrasting Morrison's book with *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, and showing how the latter dialogues with *Beloved* and presents a different view of blacks' identification process.

In the first chapter, a theoretical discussion about identity, based on the ideas of Frantz Fanon, Stuart Hall, and Cornel West, is presented. These writers analyze the construction of black identity through the understanding of the problem of colonization. Chapter II is an analysis of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. In this chapter, I describe Sethe's attempts to remember her past and how it affects her understanding of the identification process. Moreover, I try to demonstrate how Sethe's process of identity-formation is important, not only to her daughter Denver, but also to the whole black community where she lives. In the third chapter, I analyze Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, showing how Bola's act of spreading her children around the world is a reflection of the diasporic condition blacks undergo since the Middle Passage. In addition, I try to show in what ways the diasporic experiences Bola's descendants

undergo influence the disintegration of black identity. Finally, in the conclusion, I compare and contrast the strategies portrayed in each novel, showing that, in *Beloved*, black identity is constructed through resistance against white people, leading to an emancipatory strategy of survival. On the other hand, in *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, there is an attempt to construct an un-identity, since the characters want to overcome the idea of being “inferior,” which leads them to an assimilationist strategy of survival.

CHAPTER I

In Search of Black Identities

A colonized people is not simply a dominated people.
Frantz Fanon

The notion of identity has been the subject of many theoretical discussions in the last decades. The previous conception of identity as something stable and essentialized has been challenged by new representational practices which, for Cornel West, should be understood in terms of history and culture. This means that, like many other contemporary concepts and ideas, the notion of identity has been affected by historical events which influence the understanding of its meaning(s).

Cornel West has already pointed out some important historical influences on our understanding of representational practices today. According to him, the “Age of Europe” and its ambiguous legacy is a starting point to the formation of an identity concept, since Europe had an important role in the creation and consolidation of archetypes. Between 1492 and 1945, European breakthroughs shaped the modern world. In this way, the idea of European superiority was spread all over the world, especially because Europe had economic and political power to guarantee a “privileged” identity.

The second important historical event pointed out by West is the United States’ consolidation as *the* world power after the Second World War. One significant effect of this is that assimilated Jewish Americans were able to be present in “higher” institutions, such as the academy and mass media, which started to change the male WASP cultural hegemony. Moreover, American homogeneity started to be challenged

after the 60's by some anarchic alternatives, such as mass culture and radical politics. For West, these alternatives were associated to a third historical event: the decolonization of the Third World. According to West, decolonization was born from consciousness-raising and the reconstruction of identities. In addition, it

brings with it new perspectives on that long festering underside of the Age of Europe (of which colonial domination represents the *costs* of 'progress,' 'order,' and 'culture'), as well as requiring new readings of the economic boom in the United States (wherein the Black, Brown, Yellow, Red, White, female, gay, lesbian, and elderly working class live the same *costs* as cheap labour at home as well as in U.S.-dominated Latin American and Pacific rim markets). (207)

Cornel West points out that these three historical events (the ambiguous legacies of the European Age, American preeminence, and decolonization) were the basis for the construction of identities, and still influence our "postmodern moment" and "crimes against" or "contributions to humanity" (209). Furthermore, he presents the Africans' situation in the New World as an example of this.

According to West, by 1914 the European empire had control of almost 72 million square kilometers of territory and over more than 560 million people. The colonial rule controlled Black diaspora people through enslavement and cultural degradation. More than 75 million Africans died during the colonization period, and the ones who survived were viewed as commodities. This Black diaspora condition offered no proper legal status, social standing, or public worth, producing what West calls the "modern Black diaspora problematic of invisibility and namelessness" (209). For West,

[w]hite supremacist practices -- enacted under the auspices of the prestigious cultural authorities of the churches, print media, and scientific academics -- promoted Black inferiority and constituted the European background against which Black diaspora struggles for identity, dignity (self-confidence, self-respect, self-esteem), and material resources took place. (209-10)

Thus, West understands the Black diaspora problematic as the imposition of degrading black stereotypes by white ideologies and the difficulties of blacks to construct themselves as complex human beings.

Many other critics, philosophers, and theoreticians have also discussed the question of the construction of black identity. One of them was Frantz Fanon. In his book *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon shows how the “idea” of blacks, as a colonized people and as an inferior race, was a construction of white colonizers. Although Fanon discusses the situation of a particular group of blacks, the Antilleans, some of the problems they face are similar to those faced by other groups of black people.

For Fanon, the colonizers had economic and political power to define blacks as “savage, brutes, illiterate” (117), in opposition to whites, who were considered rational, civilized, and good. However, Fanon also argues that “the fact of the juxtaposition of the white and black races has created a massive psychoexistential complex. I hope by analyzing it to destroy it” (12). Thus, he tries to free black men from their archetypes since they are not responsible for their “appearance.”

In order to do this, Fanon analyzes blacks’ attitudes in relation to white people. According to Eurídice Figueiredo, what we can see is a portrayal of black *divided* men, who undergo an identity crisis. For Figueiredo, before the first contact with white people, blacks did not feel inferior to any other race. Nevertheless, “[t]he whole identity crisis comes from the negation of human and cultural values imposed by the colonial process” (64). Prohibited from having their own values, black people have a negative image of themselves “not knowing what they are anymore” (66).

Moreover, the imposition of a white supremacy and of a stereotype of being black as being “bad” or “evil” leads black people to an inferiority complex. For Fanon, the

Negro is made inferior and, as a way to transcend this inferiority complex, he wants to become white. So, the Negro tries to “climb up” into society (which is white), through the mastery of the colonizer’s language.

However, Fanon points out that “[t]o speak means [...] above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization” (17-18). For Fanon, when blacks start managing the language of the colonizer, they are not only using the syntax or the grammar of that language, but they are incorporating all the concepts and viewpoints of that language. In this way, black people acquire a very different “frame” of viewing things, especially of who they are in the world. They also start an assimilationist identification with the white world. Through their education (based on a white model and on white concepts), blacks learn how to erase their roots. Thus, “[o]vernight the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has had to place himself. His metaphysics, or, less pretentiously, his customs and the sources on which they were based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him” (110).

Fanon also shows that, even though black people adopt the colonizer’s culture and try to lose the previous features of their native culture, they will never be considered part of the white society. Even having “free” access to white neighborhoods or to white countries, black people may hear the sentence that, for Fanon, gives blacks their body back: “Look, a Negro! [...] Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!” (112). Thus, the assimilated Negro would be neither part of the black community nor of the white, becoming a divided man, and suffering for “not belonging.” Because of this, Fanon asks in his text: “Where am I to be classified? Or, if you prefer, tucked away?” (113).

What Fanon realizes is that it does not matter what the achievements of black people are in society. They will always be considered “evil” people. He argues that blacks are slaves of their stereotypes: “I am the slave not of the ‘idea’ that others have of me but of my own appearance. [...] I am *fixed*” (116). In this way, black people have difficulties in breaking with this essentializing concept of the Negro as a savage or a “bad thing.” They even internalize this image and identify themselves with white heroes.

Fanon points out that “[i]t is normal for the Antillean to be anti-Negro. Through the collective unconscious the Antillean has taken over all the archetypes belonging to the European” (191). Opposite to Jung, who “locates the collective unconscious in the inherited cerebral matter” (188), Fanon defines it as something culturally acquired, as “the result of [...] the unreflected imposition of a culture” (191). Nevertheless, with his book, Fanon calls blacks’ attention to a better understanding of their “positioning” in the world.

Eurídice Figueiredo also points out that Fanon quotes, in his book, many poems written by Aimé Césaire, analyzing its significance to the Antilleans. According to her, until 1940, no Antillean could imagine him or herself as black. However, after the negritude movement (started by Césaire) and its valorization of black culture, it is possible to see a “re-valuing” of black identity.

Fanon acknowledges the importance of this movement for black people, since blacks start to give real value to their own selves, their traditions and cultures. Yet, Fanon points out the dangers of essentialist definitions of black culture, especially if these definitions are also racist ones. Euridice Figueiredo argues that Fanon reacts against these definitions because he fears “being confined to a second class humanity”

(74). Although he fears these essentialist concepts, Fanon understands that this is the first step for the resistance against whites' dehumanization of black people.

In his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon shows the anxiety of blacks to transform themselves from *things* that had been colonized into *men* (37). According to him, this happens because the settler is not satisfied with limiting physically the place of the native: “[a]s if to show the totalitarian character of colonial exploitation the settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence evil” (41). Thus, the colonizer dehumanizes the native, and “turns him into an animal” (42). For Fanon, this is even more explicit when the colonizer uses zoological terms to address black people. As a result of this, blacks start to value themselves and try to prove they are as good as whites.

Fanon also calls our attention to the fact that, with decolonization, natives are able to “break” with the history-making of the settler, and start constructing the history of their nation. This process will also lead black people to “rethink” their own identities, since they try to recover the pre-colonial history of their people. For Fanon, this valuing and search of a culture that existed before colonialism allows native people to be proud of their past and their history. Moreover, this is something very essential to the construction of a sense of identity since

[i]n the sphere of psycho-affective equilibrium it is responsible for an important change in the native. [...] Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it. [...] The effect consciously sought by colonialism was to drive into the native's heads the idea that if the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation, and bestiality. On the unconscious plane, [...] [t]he colonial mother protects her child from itself, from its ego, and from its physiology, its biology, and its own unhappiness which is its very essence. (210-11)

It is important to realize that Fanon shows this need black people feel to prove that a “Negro culture” exists as an answer to whites’ dehumanization of blacks. As “for the colonist, the Negro was neither an Angolan nor a Nigerian, for he simply spoke of ‘the Negro’” (211), Fanon also argues that blacks’ affirmation of a Negro culture is not a national but a continental effort (an affirmation of African culture instead of a national culture): “The unconditional affirmation of African culture has succeeded the unconditional affirmation of European culture” (212-13).

This racialization of thought, though being positive in the sense that it gives value to the past of black people, is a historical necessity that leads the men of African culture to a “blind alley” (214). According to Fanon, thousands of blacks were spread all over the American continent, and created particular groups and nations where they organized themselves and lived different experiences. Thus, creating a Negro culture would be the same thing as to “include the Negro dispersion” (215), which means erasing the differences and grouping just the similarities of black people around the world. Fanon acknowledges the need of blacks who live in the United States or in Central America to attach themselves to a cultural matrix. However, he points out that “[t]he Negroes of Chicago only resemble the Nigerians or the Tanganykans in so far as they were all defined in relation to whites. But once the first comparisons had been made and subjective feelings were assuaged, the American Negroes realized that the objective problems were fundamentally heterogeneous” (216).

For Fanon, this happens when black people do not take into consideration “the formation of the historical character of men” (216). The past is very important for the construction of a nation. Yet, Fanon points out that black people should pay attention to how history shaped the different experiences each group of people suffered. In doing

this, they will be able to construct a cultural and historical anchorage to support themselves.

In addition, Fanon calls our attention to the fact that even the anxiety to construct a national culture can lead to a false notion of identity, if it is related to an exotic representation of the nation. The intellectuals who start to give a high value to the customs and traditions of their people, only pay attention to their “outer garments,” which are “merely the reflection of a hidden life, teeming and perpetually in motion” (224). For Fanon, culture “has never the translucidity of custom; it abhors all simplification” (224). The culture of a people has its base on past traditions; however, it is also shaped by the transformations of history and its present realities. If the native intellectuals who want to create a national culture base themselves only on tradition, they will construct a notion of culture that is as stereotyped as the white’s view of black people. For Fanon, “[a] national culture is not a folklore, nor an abstract populism that believes it can discover the people’s true nature. [...] A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence” (233).

Fanon’s ideas about culture are very important here since, following Ngungi wa Thiong’o’s view, culture can be considered as a tool for self-definition in relationship to others. In this way, the construction of a people’s identity is not separated from the understanding of a people’s culture. If this culture is related to an exotic representation of a nation or of a group of people, it directly influences the identity formation of these people, which will be labeled and “fixed” according to exotic stereotypes.

Fanon seems to point out that black people should neither try assimilationist identifications with white people nor essentializing and “fixed” conceptualizations of “what a Negro is.” He shows the importance of an analysis of the colonial situation to the construction of black *identities*. For him, if stereotypes are not resisted, they will produce “individuals without an anchor, without a horizon, colorless, stateless, rootless -- a race of angels” (218).

In the same line of thought, the sociologist Stuart Hall also discusses the subject of cultural identity. In his article “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” he talks about what the Afro-Caribbean identity is, and reinforces Fanon’s idea that the concept of identity is not really as transparent as we understand it. For Hall, we should think about identity as a production always in process and constituted within representation.

Stuart Hall also points out, in his text, that there are at least two ways of thinking about cultural identity. The first one defines it “in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self,’ hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves,’ which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (393). Thus, this notion of identity points out the essence of a people who had common experiences and shared cultural codes. By this definition, the superficial differences of a people do not matter because identity is concerned with a “oneness,” with the truth of a people, their similarities and continuities.

For Hall, the search for this conception of cultural identity had an important role in all post-colonial struggles, and continues to be a powerful force for marginalised peoples’ representations. It is what Frantz Fanon called “a passionate research.” However, Stuart Hall questions the nature of this research. According to him, it is not only a matter of unearthing the hidden histories that had been buried by colonization,

but it is also grounded in the “re-telling” of the past. Although he questions its nature, Hall acknowledges the importance of this definition of identity, since the “loss of identity” (experienced by African slaves) “only begins to be healed when these forgotten connections are once more set in place” (394).

On the other hand, the second view of cultural identity “recognizes that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute ‘what we really are’; or rather – since history has intervened – ‘what we have become’” (394). By this definition, we can not have *one* identity based on *one* experience. History is always influencing the construction of identity, and it is always being transformed. Opposite to an eternally fixed identity, we have different *identities* according to the different positions we assume, or have imposed upon us, in the narratives of the past.

According to Hall, it is only through this second definition of identity that it will be possible to understand the colonial experience. Black people were positioned and represented as different and other, and also experienced themselves as *other*. It is exactly because they could start a process of deconstruction of this fixed representation that the notion of cultural identity has changed. It is not stable anymore,

[i]t has its histories – and histories have their real, material and symbolic effects. The past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us as a simple, ‘factual’ past [...] [i]t is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourse of history and culture. Not an essence but a *positioning*” (395).

Stuart Hall also points out that, as identity is not formed by a straight unbroken line, we should think of black identities as constructed through the relationship between two vectors: “the vector of similarity and continuity; and the vector of difference and rupture” (395). The first is responsible for black people’s connections with the past. The

second shows that the past shared by blacks is exactly the past of the experience of discontinuity, since it is the history of slavery, colonization, and migration (the past of an imposed unification of difference).

Nevertheless, it is through this notion of difference that Stuart Hall is able to rethink the Caribbean identity in terms of three “presences”: *Présence Africaine*, *Présence Européenne*, and *Présence Américaine*. The first positioning, *Présence Africaine*, is the repressed site. Although apparently silenced by slavery, Africa was always present in black peoples’ lives. For Hall, it “remains the unspoken unspeakable ‘presence’ in Caribbean culture” (398). Yet, to this Africa (which is a part of the Caribbean imaginary) blacks cannot go back as their home. *Présence Européenne* is, according to Hall, the presence of exclusion and imposition. Europe brings the notion of power and dominance and fixes black people in the place of the *other*. The third presence, *Présence Américaine*, is the presence of juncture, when many different cultures have to meet each other. It is a space of mixture, “the space where the creolisations and assimilations and syncretisms were negotiated” (401). Furthermore, it is a presence of displacement and, above all, it is what makes Afro-Caribbeans people of diaspora.

For Hall, the diaspora experience is not defined as purity, but as the recognition of diversity. In this way, he constructs a notion of identity through difference, which he calls diaspora identities. According to him, diaspora identities “are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (402). This is an important process of identification, since it is through it that we are able to recognize our different histories and find a place from which to speak.

Stuart Hall's ideas influenced Cornel West's understanding of the Black diaspora problematic discussed before. West agrees with Hall's argument that "Black" is a constructed category. He also realizes that this decolonization of black peoples' minds leads to new political possibilities and new cultural articulations today.

Another important point made by West is related to the importance of the black women's movement to the construction of a new cultural politics. For him, black diaspora women (and he quotes Toni Morrison as an example) are able to break with the notion of the "essential Black subject" and with the "Black male monopoly" on the construction of this subject (212). Since we are arguing here that the concept of identity is not homogeneous anymore, but historically and socially constructed, we can also argue that it is gender determined. For West, this current cultural awareness leads to the end of black innocence, and enables black people to look beyond the production of positive constructions of homogeneous communities. In West's words,

Black cultural workers must constitute and sustain discursive and institutional networks that deconstruct earlier modern Black strategies for identity formation, demystify power relations that incorporate class, patriarchal, and homophobic biases, and construct more multivalent and multidimensional responses that articulate the complexity and diversity of Black practices in the modern and postmodern world. (212)

Both Toni Morrison and Dionne Brand deal with these questions in the works analyzed here. It can be seen that these authors are concerned with showing the reader the complexities and ambivalent experiences diaspora people live in the New World. It is through these experiences that both authors are able to construct notions of identities which represent the "historical character" of black people.

Using the literary text to denounce and write about the black experience is not something new in Anglo-African writing. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., for example, has already portrayed the trajectory of Afro-American writing and criticism, and how black

people used the literary text to prove their value. He points out that, since the publication of the first book of black poetry, slaves and ex-slaves used writing as a commodity which they were forced to trade for their humanity.

However, after more than two centuries of Anglo-African writing, black writers are not concerned with proving they are valuable human beings anymore. They are much more concerned with recovering black history, black memories, black dispersion through the New World, and, more important, blacks' construction of identities. Furthermore, some of these concerns can be seen as strategies of "resistance" against racist ideologies that advocates whites' superiority (still present in contemporary society).

Although Toni Morrison and Dionne Brand write from different *loci* of enunciation, both are concerned with the role of memory and the part it plays in the reconstruction of the slavery experience. In the book *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy shows the importance of this "return to slavery." For him, it is through the understanding of the relationship between masters and slaves that it is possible to comprehend the position of blacks in the world today. Gilroy adds that the imaginative reconstruction of the slavery experience offers "Morrison and a number of other contemporary black writers a means to restage confrontations between rational, scientific, and enlightened Euro-American thought and the supposedly primitive outlook of prehistorical, cultureless, and bestial African slaves" (220).

It is exactly through this confrontation that black people are able to make sense of their histories and of the formation of Western ideas about blacks. Most of the criticism about *Beloved* and *At the Full and Change of the Moon* points out that these works deal with the reconstruction of the past, especially with the reconstruction of the slave

experience. Wilfred D. Samuels and Cleonora Hudson-Weems argue that *Beloved* is a modern slave narrative that shows to the reader the importance of the main character's act of "rememory" to her search for meaning and wholeness in slavery. In addition, some other critics, such as Linda Peach, discuss this revision of the past in *Beloved*, emphasizing its re-definitions of Western assumptions about blackness, especially those concerning black women slaves. Jan Furman, for example, discusses what being a black mother during slavery and freedom means in order to analyze black women's identity.

Many of the aspects analyzed in *Beloved* can be extended to *At the Full and Change of the Moon*. Despite the fact that there is not much criticism about Brand's novel, it is possible to follow Maureen Moynagh's ideas, which classify this novel as the construction of a cultural memory initiated by the need to build up an identity. She also points out that the treatment of this cultural memory in the book is in the context of the African diaspora, which means that the author tries to present how the Middle Passage or the plantation slavery system caused the dispersion of black people across the world.

In the next chapters, I will demonstrate how the act of "making sense" of history influences the construction of racial identity in *Beloved* and in *At the Full and Change of the Moon*. Moreover, I will analyze how these two authors, with different histories and different perspectives of the past, will construct the notions of identity of each racial community. It is important to remember that defining how black people construct their identities is not a simple task. The following discussions about the novels by Toni Morrison and Dionne Brand will try to demonstrate the strategies used by the authors to construct black identity, not in an essentializing way, but reflecting all the theoretical discussions in this chapter.

Notes

¹ As this book, as far as I know, does not have an English translation, all quotations from it were translated by me.

CHAPTER II

The Construction of Identity in *Beloved*

*I have but four, the treasures of my soul,
They lay like doves around my heart;
I tremble lest some cruel hand
Should tear my household wreaths apart.*
Frances E. W. Harper, 1857.

Beloved, published in 1987, is Toni Morrison's fifth novel and won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1988. In this novel, as in her previous works, she is able to portray the complexities and paradoxes of black people's lives through the depiction of her characters' routines, choices, needs, etc. According to Missy Kubitchek, this novel "continues the earlier novels' exploration of themes such as the black community, motherhood, and the relationship between a man and a woman. At the same time, it enlarges the scope of its investigation by exploring each theme in relation to slavery" (115). This is a very important aspect of Morrison's fiction, since, as we have already pointed out in the previous chapter, the "return to slavery," discussed by Paul Gilroy, enables the author to discuss serious points of black history which were neglected by other African-American writers.

It is possible to argue that *Beloved* reconstructs the slavery period and narrates the effects slavery had on black people's lives. This is due to the fact that Toni Morrison felt the necessity to deal with issues that are not easy to remember or discuss especially because it means having to cope with black people's suffering. For Ashraf H. A. Rushdy, in order to bring up these questions, she engages "into the field of revisionist historiography and fiction" (568) by rewriting the story of a historical character called

Margaret Garner. According to Rushdy, Garner was a slave who escaped from her owner in 1856, but who was pursued by him. Since she was not able to run away again, she cut the throat of her little daughter as a way not to be forced to return to slavery (569).

Garner's story is an example of the kinds of silences and sufferings that were "forgotten" by the official history of slavery. However, with *Beloved*, these silences are broken and a new light is thrown on black's history. Many critics have already argued that Toni Morrison tried to write on the limits of fact and fiction in order to make people aware of the deficiency of our knowledge about the past since we have been presented the colonizer's version of history. In this version, blacks were represented by whites and their voices were not heard. We have already discussed in the previous chapter that some critics, as Henry Louis Gates Jr., even argue that, as a result of being defined by others, the presence of blacks is not felt in Western discourse, which equates blackness with absence. However, as Rafael Pérez-Torres argues, Morrison's story transforms "an essential absence into a powerful presence" (689).

Through the narrative of a forgotten story, Morrison is able to build a sense of identity based on blacks' understanding of their experience as slaves. For Pérez-Torres, this experience "is premised on the absence of power, the absence of self-determination, the absence of a homeland, the absence of a language" (692). Nevertheless, he argues that Toni Morrison uses these absences in *Beloved* to examine "the logic that equates black with blank" (692), which enables the author to construct a black presence.

Thus, Western assumptions about blackness are deconstructed in the narrative, which is, for Linden Peach, "a point of intersection of many different discourses" (93). There are many episodes told by more than one person in the novel, calling the reader's

attention to the fact that there is not only one “correct” version of the same story. This characteristic has a special effect in the novel since it “explores how authoritative discourses – for example, historical, biblical, cultural, and political accounts – bury alternative interpretations, thus serving to silence other voices” (Peach 94).

So, through the black women’s voice, Toni Morrison retells another version of slavery, which directly affects black people’s lives since it carries a discussion about black identity. We have already discussed that Frantz Fanon was one of the first theoreticians to consider the question of black people’s search for identity. For him, the understanding of identity is completely dependent on a strict analysis of the colonial situation.

It is exactly this analysis that is portrayed in *Beloved*. Although it is a fictional work, this novel reconstructs black cultural identity through the lives of its main characters. Differently from Morrison’s previous novels, where the main characters “deny their black cultural identity through shame and self-hatred” (Peach 110), *Beloved* is a reclamation of blackness. Because of this, the discussion about blacks’ search for identity present in the book is not ignored in this analysis. On the contrary, in this chapter we discuss how the reconstruction of the past, specifically the slave past, affects the character’s construction of their identities.

Analyzing *Beloved* in *Toni Morrison - A Critical Companion*, Missy Dehn Kubitschek points out that the novel portrays the historical period after the Civil War and emancipation, a period known as Reconstruction (1870-90). According to her, it is an interesting fact since “[m]uch of the characters’ pain occurs as they reconstruct themselves, their families and their communities after the devastation of slavery” (115). It is through the reconstruction of the characters’ lives that we perceive Morrison’s search for blacks’ histories and identities.

The main character whose story is reconstructed in *Beloved* is Sethe, an ex-slave who lives in Cincinnati with her daughter Denver. They live in a house (referred to as 124 in the novel) where Sethe's mother-in-law, Baby Suggs, used to live. As an ex-slave, Sethe tries to rebuild her life, working in a restaurant in the white neighborhood and, although she is able to support her family and seems to have an ordinary life, since the first page of the novel we find out that Sethe's life is far from being calm. Her daughter and she are not "alone" in their house because it is haunted by the spirit of Sethe's daughter, who had been killed eighteen years earlier. Even being a baby ghost, it "throws a powerful spell" at 124 (*Beloved* 4). This ghost had already managed to banish Sethe's older sons from the house and, although Denver and Sethe try to make contact with it, they do not seem willing to fight against it or able to expel it from there. Moreover, nobody is courageous enough to enter their house, so they live completely isolated from the community.

This present situation has a strong connection with some past events that Sethe tries to forget, because they are too hard to remember. These events are related to her life as a slave at a plantation called Sweet Home, and to her struggle to become a free person. It is at this plantation that Sethe comprehends the burden of being a slave, since she feels dehumanized by her white master. Originally, Sweet Home is a plantation in Kentucky that belongs to a white couple: Mr. and Mrs. Garner. They have nine slaves working there, six of them are men named from Paul A to Paul F, one named Sixo, and there are also an old woman called Baby Suggs and her son, Halle. As Halle is able to buy her mother's freedom with his work on Sundays at the plantation, Sethe (a thirteen-year-old girl) arrives there to substitute Baby Suggs. Two years later, Sethe and Halle "get married" (but not officially) and have three children.

Although Halle and the other men are slaves at Sweet Home, Mr. Garner allows them to have some privileges, like having access to guns, giving opinions about the business, and not punishing them with beating or spanking. He even allows Sethe to choose with whom she would like to live. However, Mr. Garner dies and his brother-in-law, called Schoolteacher, arrives at Sweet Home to take care of the place. As he is really cruel toward the slaves and treats them as animals, they try a group escape. Although their plans are found out by Schoolteacher, Sethe manages to send her children to Baby Suggs' home, in Ohio, but she cannot find Halle. So, she decides to escape alone, even pregnant of her fourth child, to whom she gives birth during her journey.

Sethe is able to arrive at Baby Suggs' house with her new born daughter, Denver. Yet, after twenty-eight days of freedom, Schoolteacher manages to find her and wants to take her back. As she does not have enough time to run away again, the only thing she manages to do is to take her children to a woodshed and decides to kill them before killing herself. She chooses murder and suicide instead of going back to slavery. Nevertheless, she has time to kill only her two-year-old-daughter, who is in her arms when Schoolteacher and his nephews enter the woodshed. After this, Sethe goes to jail, but stays there for not too long. As Sethe does not agree she did something wrong, "she and her remaining three children receive a larger penalty from the black community – complete social isolation for the next eighteen years" (Kubitscek 117).

These are some "unspeakable" memories since "every mention of her past life hurt" (58), so Sethe locks them inside herself. As a way to prevent suffering, she does not talk about these past events to anyone, not even to her daughter. Because of this, Denver grows up without knowing anything about her story or about who she is. The only past event she knows and is really interested in is the story of her own birth.

Denver has already heard some comments related to her sister's death, but she is afraid of asking about it because she cannot bear the fact her mother has killed her own daughter. Once, when Denver was a child, she started to attend a school at Lady Jones' house. However, when the children asked her about her mother's act, she became deaf until the baby ghost started to haunt their house. After this, Denver does not leave 124 anymore and gets isolated there with her mother.

Sethe and Denver's story starts to change when Paul D, also an ex-slave who worked with Sethe at Sweet Home, arrives at Sethe's house after eighteen years without seeing one another, looking for Baby Suggs. Paul D is also a character who is tormented by memories of the past. Moreover, when he arrives at 124, some memories start to be released, especially because Sethe and he had a similar experience in the past. As they decide to help each other and divide their lives and memories, Paul D stays living there at 124. However, before this, he perceives the presence of the baby ghost in the house, and is able to expel the spirit from 124, thinking he is protecting Sethe and her daughter.

It is the spirit of the two-year-old baby, killed by Sethe, that Paul D expels from 124 when he arrives there. He does not know the truth about its death, though. Denver does not like Paul D's presence and hates the fact that he had expelled the baby ghost, especially because it was her only "friend." But she does not stay without her friend for too long. Some time after Paul D banished the ghost from the house, a nineteen-year-old girl called Beloved (the same word Sethe managed to engrave in her daughter's tomb) arrives at 124 asking for help. As Beloved says she came from the water and does not have anywhere to go, Sethe allows the girl to stay there living with them, thinking she had been abused by a white master. Beloved is a woman, but her attitudes are childish and she is as fragile as a baby. Moreover, although she seems to be a stranger in that

family, she asks Sethe about some private stories and secrets. Thus, many more memories about the past are released and rescued after Beloved's arrival. Only Denver is able to recognize this girl as the spirit of her sister resurrected. Beloved's arrival starts to change the life of their family as well. She disrupts every relationship at 124, especially Sethe and Paul D's relationship. Eventually, Paul D finds out the real story about the death of Sethe's daughter and, not being able to understand her choice, he leaves her.

After Paul D's leaving, Sethe perceives Beloved is her daughter that had come back to her. Thus, she decides to dedicate her life to please Beloved. On the other hand, Beloved wants her mother's attention all the time as a way to blame Sethe for her death. In this way, Beloved starts to gain more and more authority over Sethe, who does not control her life anymore and seems more a child than an adult. As neither Beloved nor Sethe pay attention to Denver, she is the one who realizes that there is something wrong in their story. Fearing that Beloved is going to kill her mother, Denver goes outside 124, and asks for the community's help. The women of the community decide to help Sethe since they perceive the past (represented by Beloved) is trying to possess Sethe's present life. So they help Denver to find a job and, some time later, they get together at the gate of Sethe's house to pray and expel the spirit from there. It is not really clear in the novel if it is the community's pray or Sethe's act of running towards Denver's white boss that makes Beloved disappear. However, she is gone and Sethe gets really sick, thinking she lost her daughter again. At this moment, Paul D reappears in Sethe's life, but this time, he does not judge her. On the contrary, he tries to help her understand that she is the best thing in her own life.

This brief summary of *Beloved's* narrative is meant to recall the background which underlines the central discussion of this chapter: the discussion about identity. It

can be seen that the main characters of this novel have problems with the interpretation of their past life. Both Sethe and Paul D try to keep memory at bay as a way to prevent suffering. Slavery is really a burden to them, and all the sad events related to it are remembered with a lot of pain. So, they are not able to construct or retell a coherent narrative of their lives since it involves a reconstruction of the slavery period. As a consequence, they cannot understand the meaning of their lives in slavery or in freedom, and their next generation, Denver, also does not have access to this past that could be a source for understanding of her present and future situations.

Through the narrative of *Beloved*, it is possible to realize that it is exactly this attempt to keep the past at bay that makes the character's lives so fragmented and disconnected. The narrative itself is constructed as a fragmentary text, emphasizing this impossibility of talking about the past in a clear and straightforward manner. Moreover, although the narrator gives hints about what has already happened in the story, the reader can only make sense of the main events in the narrative from the middle of the text on. Before this, the reader feels and shares the characters' anxiety and pain in every attempt to remember the past.

In the article "*Beloved* and the Problem of Mourning," Teresa Heffernan discusses the problems involved in recovering the past, emphasizing that Sethe's and Paul D's stories are difficult to be explained by language since they represent the fragmentation of slavery. Under a regime of cruelty and savagery, it was really difficult for African slaves to pass on their stories and keep their roots, since they were separated from their native families and were forced to speak a foreign language. Thus, Heffernan argues that:

... in the interests of sustaining the Master's myth that Africans had no culture and no history, there was an intentional destruction of the archive in the separation of Africans who spoke the same languages, who were of the same families, and who

practised the same traditions, making it difficult for slaves to communicate with one another, but also making it difficult for stories to be passed on and histories and names to be traced. (560)

Heffernan tries to point out that, in *Beloved*, this failure to narrate the past is also present in the stories of Sethe, Paul D, and Baby Suggs, for example. Thus, the past in the book is not “unveiled” according to the chronological or reasonable laws that govern the writing of history.

Even so, the understanding of the past is very important to the process of building identities. In addition, the novel points out that the “unveiling” of the past is necessary, since it is never totally forgotten. Although Sethe struggles to keep her past at bay, she recognizes that she cannot control her memory. Sometimes, the memory of the past is so strong that she can really feel it as if it were happening again. This is what Sethe describes as “rememory”:

“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. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it’s gone, but the place – the picture of it – stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don’t think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened.”

“Can other people see it?” asked Denver.

“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 when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else.” (35-36)

Sethe’s explanation about rememories shows that the past cannot be obliterated so easily in the novel. Although some characters are not able to talk about this past, it is still there, influencing their present life. Because of this, a great part of the criticism about *Beloved* is concerned with the role of the past in this novel, especially the role of rememories. As some of the main characters of the novel, such as Sethe, Paul D, and

Baby Suggs, emphasize their need to “beat up the past,” many critics have seen the importance of rememories as “the return of the repressed.”

In the article “Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*: Re-Membering the Body as Historical Text,” Mae G. Henderson argues that Morrison’s intention in this novel is to “*resurrect stories buried and express stories repressed*” (63). Although Henderson is referring here to the relation of *Beloved* to the slave narratives, which, to some extent, *buried* and *repressed* the horrors of slavery, her argument can be extended to her interpretation of the return of the past in Morrison’s novel. For her, as Sethe does not have a discourse of her own, since she is part of a white/male historical discourse, she is only able to have some images or “rememories” of the past. However, for Henderson, Sethe’s “task” in the novel is to transform these past images into a coherent narrative as a way to construct her own version of her story .

Rememories are seen by Henderson as interventions of the repressed past in the present, which are not meaningful to Sethe. With Paul D’s arrival and *Beloved*’s presence, Sethe starts to make sense of her story, reconstituting the past through personal narrative. According to Henderson, both Morrison and Sethe move from image to narrative. Furthermore, she points out that “[n]arrativization enables Sethe to construct a meaningful life-story from a cluster of images, to transform separate and disparate events into a whole and coherent story” (72). Thus, it can be perceived that Henderson interprets the novel as Sethe’s ability to move from remembering the past to narrating her story, changing the meaning of it. Imposing “sequence and meaning on the welter of images and memories” (75) makes her create “a counternarrative that reconstitutes her humanity” (79).

In the same line of thought, Emily Miller Budick also argues that *Beloved* is a story that emphasizes the importance of remembering. According to her, rememory is

the singular way presented in the novel to the act of remembering the past. Budick sees Sethe's "resurrected" daughter, Beloved, as a rememory shared by Sethe, Denver, and even Paul D, which represents not only these characters past, but also the past of an entire people.

For Budick, "it is clear that past losses weigh heavily on present desires" (119). The present lives of the characters are strongly influenced by the past, which even prevents the characters of constituting a meaningful present reality. Budick gives the example of Sethe and Paul D's present desire of forming a family, a desire which is influenced and quite destroyed by the presence of Beloved. So, Budick points out that

[t]he problem that *Beloved* poses to the family at 124 is how the family, which has suffered so much loss and devastation, might remember the past without literally re-membering it; how, in other words, the family, under the pressure of loss, might secure both a present and a future without either forgetting or becoming possessed by what came before. (120)

For Budick, *Beloved* seems to present an answer to this question since it suggests that the family depends on the process of creating a future without forgetting the past or reproducing it. Sethe's rememories are reproductions of the past, which, according to Budick, do not accept the losses and gaps of history. However, this act does not restore an order to lives which were interrupted for these losses. Budick argues that the way to deal with the past is acknowledging its existence through the speaking and listening of stories related to it, which will enable the constitution of a future. *Beloved* is an example of this since it "listens and speaks. The kind of remembering that it performs is neither rememory nor disremembering but, rather, commemoration: dearly beloved, we are gathered here today to remember, collectively, in words, the past, which we all accept as gone and buried" (135).

It can be perceived that, according to Henderson's and Budick's arguments, the main idea of *Beloved* is to find a way to construct a present and even a future without

being possessed by the past. Thus, for both critics, Sethe's memories are seen as dangerous acts of remembering the past since they possess Sethe's present life. The "solution" presented in the novel, for both Henderson and Budick, is to construct a narrative that acknowledges the presence of the past but which, at the same time, tries to forget it since it has already been told (Sethe's narrative of her story enables her to get rid of Beloved's ghost).

In opposition to these ideas, Robin Blyn's criticism about *Beloved* points out another interpretation for the past memories present in the book, which is really relevant here. Blyn also argues that the novel reconstructs black people's lives through "the desperate desire to remember history without becoming enslaved to it" (113). Realizing that blacks' history is reconstructed through memory in *Beloved*, Blyn analyzes the two kinds of memories he identifies in the novel. The first kind of memory is a re-presentation, which means that the past is experienced in the present without distortions of time or point of view. It can be presented as an image or a ghost (Sethe's memories are examples of re-presentations of the past). The second kind of memory is a constructivist representation, which means that the past is an imaginative reconstruction of the rememberer. Although Blyn recognizes that, in *Beloved*, the past is presented as the community's collective representation of it, he points out that "memory as imagistic re-presentation co-exists with memory as narrative representation of the past" (115).

This analysis is important here because Blyn brings a different perspective to the understanding of the past in *Beloved*. He criticizes Budick's and Henderson's arguments since they see the act of memory (a re-presentation of the past) as something that needs to be "cured" by the narrative representation of the past. According to him, in Budick's essay, "narrative reconstruction is a curative force" (116), and Henderson

points out Sethe's need to "develop a 'counternarrative' to the mimetic re-presentations of her rememory" (116). For Blyn, their analysis destroys the complexities and powers involved in the creation of images and ghosts in *Beloved*.

Even if the novel itself performs a reconstruction through the narrative of Sethe's story, the act of "rememory" is always there. It is because of her rememories that Sethe starts to narrate her past. However, this narrative is not a cure to the act of rememory. On the contrary, it is only through rememory that Sethe and the rest of the community can perceive their hidden histories, since "[i]t is the shared experiences of these images and ghosts that frames the community and constitutes its identity as a group" (120). Thus, narrative reconstruction depends on re-presentations of the past. Moreover, Blyn adds that, if it was not so, the appearance of *Beloved* would not be necessary in the novel, because Paul D's presence would be enough to Sethe's retelling of the past. However, *Beloved*'s resurrection provokes not only Sethe's or Paul D' past memories, but also the community's, which is also "forced into a process of memory reconstruction" (130).

Blyn's criticism of *Beloved* is very significant for my analysis of this novel because he demonstrates the importance of Sethe's rememories of the past. I agree with him that they are more than "the return of the repressed." Although I do not see them as *the cause* of the main characters' rethinking of their past, it can be perceived that these rememories acquire another significance after they are narrated by the rememberers. Sethe does not talk about these rememories with anybody until Paul D arrives at 124. It means that they were always there in the novel, but neither Sethe nor Denver could make sense of them. The reconstruction of the past that is provoked with Paul D's and *Beloved*'s presence gives meaning to these rememories. They are not "cured" or "transcended," they are still there, but now, making sense for the characters' lives.

Although this discussion about the past seems not directly related to the question of identity, in fact, it is really important here. The past re-constructed and reconstructed in *Beloved* is the slavery past. It is in this period that blacks acquired their first notions of identity in relation to whites, and it is at this time that all dehumanization of black people took place. This is why this slavery past is so difficult to remember in the novel. However, as Jan Furman argues, “[o]nly by remembering the past can there be liberation from its burden” (80).

We have already seen in the previous chapter that, according to Stuart Hall, identities are processes in constant transformation since they are subjected to historicization. So, for Hall, though identities

seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from,’ so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. (“Who Needs Identity” 4)

As, in *Beloved*, the main characters try to forget or deny the resources of their history, it becomes much more difficult to them to construct a sense of identity. In other words, avoiding the discussion of the past as a way not to suffer interrupts the identification process started by Sethe when she killed her daughter. This is why the memories are so important. They not only urge the characters to remember their past, but they also reinitiate processes of identification.

Most of Sethe’s memories are about her life as a slave at Sweet Home. It is through the remembering of Sethe’s life there that Toni Morrison is able to show how these processes of identification are in opposition to white people’s representation of blacks during the colonial period. She is even able to portray what Cornel West calls “the Black diaspora problematic,” because her characters struggle to construct images

of themselves as human beings, resisting white, imposed and degrading stereotypes. She also shows the difficulties involved in this identification process since slavery, according to Missy D. Kubitschek, destroyed a great part of African identity. In addition, Kubitschek argues that “[h]aving made African identity impossible, slavery also prevents Africans from developing tenable American identities” (126-27) due to the fact they are not allowed to have a family, have their sexuality controlled and are separated from their native groups.

In these conditions, it is really easy for blacks to accept the colonizers’ view of themselves as an inferior people because whites have much more economic and political power to define races and decide which one is better than the other. However, it can be said that Toni Morrison tries to analyze this inferiority complex imposed upon blacks during the colonial period, attempting to do what Fanon has already tried: free blacks from their stereotypes.

Slavery is an established system when Sethe and the other slaves work in the Sweet Home plantation. They were born under its laws and rules, so they know the horrors they can be subjected to under this system since they have no rights as citizens in that country. They know it because, as Baby Suggs always say, in their lives “men and women were moved around like checkers. 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” (23). So, as in Sweet Home these things do not happen so frequently, they think it is a good place to work in, especially because Mr. Garner, the owner, wants his blacks to be considered men, which makes the slaves even proud of being called “Sweet Home men.”

Despite all these facts, we start to perceive that this place “wasn’t sweet and it sure wasn’t home” (14). At the same time the narrator talks about the positive aspects

of Mr. Garner's plantation, there are some ironic descriptions of the ideology involved in the slavery system. Describing Sethe's arrival at Sweet Home, the narrator explains that Sethe is "a timely present for Mrs. Garner who had lost Baby Suggs to her husband's high principles" (10). But right after this descriptions, the narrator explains that Baby Suggs is bought by her son Halle "with five years of Sundays" (11), even though she is already an old woman (sixty-five years old) and has a hurt hip.

The episode of Sethe's desire to have a wedding ceremony also makes clear that even Mr. and Mrs. Garner do not consider slaves as citizens in the novel. Slaves do not have any rights of marrying officially (neither under the Law or religion). This kind of ceremony is not something "for them." This is narrated in a conversation between Sethe and Mrs. Garner at Sweet Home:

"Halle and me want to be married, Mrs. Garner."

"So I heard". She smiled. "He talked to Mr. Garner about it. Are you already expecting?"

"No, ma'am."

"Well, you will be. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Halle's nice, Sethe. He'll be good to you."

"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. (26)

As a consolation prize, Mrs. Garner gives Sethe a pair of crystal earrings as a wedding present. Although it is a good present for them since it is a valuable thing, it does not grant Sethe the dignity she expects.

The slave called Sixo is the only character who, since the beginning of the narrative, seems extremely conscious of what it really means to be a slave. He always tries to show to the other slaves they should do things according to their own desires. He used to go among trees at night "[f]or dancing, he said, to keep his bloodlines open"

(25). He does not accept the fact they have to have sex with animals. He is able to choose a partner (the Thirty-Mile Woman) and manages to meet her sometimes. He also “stopped speaking English because there was no future in it” (25). At first, the other slaves do not understand Sixo’s concerns and even laugh at him. But little by little they start to realize that they are not the same as whites, in the sense that they cannot control their lives.

As their lives are used to serve and please *the other* (white masters), slaves do not have enough time or space to have a *self*, to think about themselves or their own desires. Baby Suggs’s life seems to reflect this. Being a slave all her life, she realizes that she knows more about her children (who were taken away from her when kids) than she knows about herself, “having never had the map to discover what she was like” (140). She asks herself: “Could she sing? (Was it nice to hear when she did?) Was she pretty? Was she a good friend? Could she have been a loving mother? A faithful wife? Have I got a sister and does she favor me? If my mother knew me would she like me?” (140). All these questions reflect a life that did not happen, a life that was stolen from slaves and that is only constituted of hypothesis.

In this way, freedom for slaves means much more than having control of their labor force. It means slaves can reclaim the control not only of their lives but also of their own bodies. When Baby Suggs becomes a free woman, she thinks to herself that “there was nothing like it in this world” (141) because she is able to look at her hands and think: “These hands belong to me. These *my* hands” (141). And although she lived a good life at Sweet Home, as a free woman she can realize the burden of being a slave even there.

In spite of these facts, while Mr. Garner is controlling Sweet Home, the other slaves stay there without planning to run away or having a free life. It only happens

when Mr. Garner dies and his brother-in-law, called Schoolteacher, arrives there to take care of Sweet Home. It is when Schoolteacher is in the control of their lives that they feel the real dehumanization of slavery, provoking an identity crisis on them.

Schoolteacher is called so because he has book learning. He and the two boys he brings with him talk “soft and spit in handkerchiefs” (37). However, although he seems gentle, he acts very harshly towards the slaves. It is Schoolteacher who makes the slaves have another concept of themselves. Before his arrival, they considered themselves as men, they had the right to speak to the owner of the plantation and say what they thought, and they even could carry guns. Nevertheless, when Schoolteacher takes the control of the plantation, “everything they touched was looked on as stealing. Not just a rifle of corn, or two yard eggs the hen herself didn’t even remember, everything” (190).

Charles Scruggs, analyzing *Beloved*, argues that Schoolteacher is representative of the white law, which “identifies slavery with ‘civilization’” (105), since slavery prevents blacks from returning to their “cannibal” lives. Moreover, as a studied person, Schoolteacher tries to describe scientifically the lives and habits of black people as if they were not human beings. We are told in the narrative that he observes the slaves and takes notes in a book. He also measures the slaves’ heads, numbers their teeth, and asks them many questions. In Sethe’s opinion, he is “a fool” (191). However, she argues that he is “teaching [them] things [they] couldn’t learn” (191).

These things slaves could not learn are the imposed stereotypes whites force on blacks. As Rafael Pérez-Torres argues, Schoolteacher is the possessor of language, so he has the power to define and classify Sethe and the other slaves according to his own concepts (white ones). This is made clear in *Beloved* when Schoolteacher himself emphasizes to the slaves that “definitions belong to the definers – not to the defined” (190). For Frantz Fanon, white colonizers defined black people as evil and turned them

into animals as a way to demonstrate their power. It is exactly what happens at Sweet Home: Schoolteacher arrives there to show blacks they were not human beings, but animals.

The imposition of this forced identity on slaves is very difficult to them, and it is represented in *Beloved* through the episode when Sethe hears one of Schoolteacher's lessons to his pupils. This part of the story is narrated by Sethe and, according to her, she does not intend to hear their conversation, but as she hears her name, she pays attention and is able to listen to these words: "No, no. That's not the way. I told you to put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right. And don't forget to line them up" (193). She does not understand all the words he used to talk about her, but she can realize the horror of that definition because she says that, right after hearing those words, her "head itched like the devil. Like somebody was sticking fine needles in [her] scalp" (193).

Through this experience of being represented as something she is not, Sethe undergoes an identity crisis. This is due to the fact that she feels she is more than a slave of her white masters. According to Fanon, she feels she is a slave of her stereotype. In the previous chapter, we saw that Fanon uses the word *fixed* to describe how black people feel when described by whites. This is exactly what Sethe understands when she hears Schoolteacher teaching his nephews about her animal and human characteristics: that it does not matter who she really is or who she thinks she is because her white masters are fixing her as an animal.

Sethe's first step to the understanding of her identity is her recognition of something she is not. She sees herself as a black mother, a black wife, a black worker, not as an animal. Thus, she tries to fight against this white representation of herself, especially because she cannot imagine her children being dehumanized too. As the

other slaves also realize they are considered *things* and their masters' *property*, they decide to run away as a manner to resist white's domination. Although their plan do not work out, Sethe is able to send her children away on a train because, for her, more important than she be able to get free from Schoolteacher's definitions is to free her children from them. What really matters for her is: "No notebook for my babies and no measuring string neither" (198).

However, Schoolteacher's dehumanization process does not stop here. As he found out the slaves' plans to run away, he hunts them as quarries. He is able to catch Sixo, who is burnt alive, and Paul D, who is put a bit on his mouth. He and his pupils also get Sethe and milk her as a cow, since she is pregnant and has milk for her children. They knock her down, but as her concern with her children is really strong, she manages to run away from Sweet Home and get together with her children at Baby Sugg's house.

After arriving there she lives twenty-eight days of "heaven" since she is free and with her children. These are "[d]ays of healing, ease and real-talk" (95). At this time, Baby Suggs is a kind of preacher of the community, 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" (87). So, she reunites the black people of her community in a place in the woods called "the Clearing," where she preaches and offers an opportunity for blacks to try to get rid of their traumas. She tells them that "the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine. That if they could not see it, they would not have it" (88). In addition, her strongest preaching is related to love. She makes blacks understand that they are the ones who have to love themselves a lot, especially their body and flesh, which are despised by white people. She tells them:

Here [...] we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don't love your eyes; they'd just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face 'cause they don't love that either. *You* got to love it, *you!* (88)

When Sethe arrives at Baby Suggs' house, she is able to experience what it means to have a free life and, more important, she is able to experience Baby Suggs' preaching at the Clearing. The identity crisis she suffered with the recognition she was defined by white masters as a *dehumanized thing* is lightened by Baby Suggs' discourse about self-love. Through this discourse Sethe can perceive that the construction of her identity should be linked to her own representation of herself (to her own self-esteem and valuing of her black *human* body), not to the whites' representation. It can be said that the understanding of this discourse is Sethe's second step in her identification process.

Sethe's happiness in living freely with her children and being proud of being black does not last long. After twenty-eight days of freedom, Schoolteacher is able to find her at 124 and wants to lead Sethe and her children back to Sweet Home. Sethe knows what it means going back to the plantation, though. She knows she will again be controlled by Schoolteacher and its laws, and she will have no rights over her children. Thus, not having time to run away again, she takes Baby Suggs' preaching to an extreme and kills her two-year-old daughter with the intention to kill all her children in the name of her love for them. Lacking power to kill her enemy, the way she finds to resist white domination is not allowing her enemy to take possession of her body or her descendants' bodies again.

Sethe's act of killing her child marks the furthest step on her process of identification. She experiences herself as *other* (a dehumanized being) through the eyes

of white masters, she is able to run away from this “white look” and finds out freedom and self-esteem, and when Schoolteacher arrives there to take her back, she understands she will continue to be part of a terrible system that dehumanizes her. So, in order to break up with her master’s definitions, she inscribes in her child’s body her own identification, which is, according to Rafael Pérez-Torres, “the mark of a great refusal” (698). For Torres, “Sethe stakes her position in the world of the novel by using the only form of discourse she has at hand. The power to name is the power to mark, the power to locate and identify. This is the power Sethe assumes for herself in deciding the fate of her children” (698).

It can be said that the first thing she expresses when killing her daughter is “saying no” to an identity she assumes as not hers: she is not a thing, not a property, not an animal. In addition, she also demonstrates she understands Baby Suggs’ lessons about “[f]lesh that needs to be loved” (88), since she does not allow other people to take control of her children’s bodies and lives. Her love for her children is defined in the novel as “too thick” (164). Yet, for Sethe, “[l]ove is or it ain’t” (164). As her love “is,” her children are what really matter for her, and she will not allow white masters to destroy their lives, making them suffer.

The identification process portrayed in the book until now is an isolated one. The processes and changes Sethe undergoes are not shared by the black community, which does not recognize her as someone reflecting their own anxieties. Despite the fact that Sethe is able to interrupt Schoolteacher’s domination over her and her children with her act, the community does not accept it¹. The black people from Bluestone Road understand her suffering and why she did that but, according to Jan Furman, “they question her right to do so” (69). For them, Sethe’s act was full of pride and demonstrated she could not endure a “little mishandling.”

Nevertheless, these explanations can be considered excuses to the fact that they are not able to recognize her act as the representation of the whole community's aspiration: freedom. The community fears her attitude and rejects it because it is an extreme act that could have happened to them too. So, they even accept white ideology about bestiality, thinking Sethe dehumanized herself with her act. They also isolate her from the community and do not talk to her for the next eighteen years. Because of that, the identification process started by Sethe is interrupted and the whole community loses the opportunity to find out a way to define themselves as a group in opposition to white people's definitions of them.

In spite of that, Sethe does not agree with this rejection because "the loss of identity that Sethe fears at the pen of Schoolteacher is, in her mind, worse than death" (Heffernan 562). She understands her own reasons and does not question the validity of them, but she also interrupts her identification process since she refuses to talk to anyone about what happened to her. She does not even talk to Baby Suggs, who gets so disappointed with her and the community that, after helping Sethe to take care of her children while they grew up, she decides to spend her last years lying on a bed and thinking about colors. Sethe locks her past inside her and does not allow herself to tell its stories to her children. She does not try to explain anything to them, not even when the spirit of the baby ghost starts to haunt their house. It is because of this that her older sons, being afraid of the spirit and of their own mother, run away from home.

Denver is the only child who stays with Sethe. She knows some facts about her mother's life, but the only story Sethe tells her is the story of Denver's birth. Sethe does whatever she can to protect her child from past sufferings since, for her, "the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay" (42). Despite Sethe's efforts, the past is still there, waiting to be told to Denver. In addition, while this past is not unclosed for Sethe's

daughter, she is not able to make sense of her own story, does not have any notion of identity, and even misconstrues some meanings of her life. As an example of this, she is afraid of her mother because she has already heard some comments about the death of her sister. Moreover, as a white girl helped her mother to give birth to Denver, she thinks all whites are very nice people.

Since they are disconnected from the past and from an identification process which was interrupted, Sethe and Denver are experiencing another “loss of identity” in their present life, which start to be healed when Paul D arrives at 124, and some events about the past begin to be unveiled (but still not to Denver). As Sethe and Paul D share some past experiences, Sethe feels comfortable to divide some of her memories with him. He also encourages her to do this, “to go inside” (46), because he thinks he can help her to come back from the past. It can be seen that the connections with the past are once more established. However, these connections only enable Sethe and Paul D to identify themselves in terms of the first way to think about cultural identity defined by Stuart Hall. This means that their remembering of the past helps them to define themselves in terms of their shared culture, and their essence as a people who had similar experiences.

Nevertheless, both Sethe and Paul D still have past experiences they cannot talk about. Experiences they want to keep locked as a way not to suffer. Experiences which are remembered all the time, but which are not shared among them, preventing them from making sense of their lives and from positioning themselves in the world. These experiences they cannot talk about are exactly what is going to show the different histories and choices of their lives. It is through them that they will be able to understand “what they have become,” according to Stuart Hall’s definition of the second view of cultural identity. While they only remember their past in terms of *one*

experience, they are not able to understand the possibility of having different *points of identification* within the discourse of their history.

This situation starts to change with the arrival of Beloved, Sethe's resurrected daughter. When she arrives at 124, nobody knows who she is, except Denver, who has an idea about Beloved's identity. They allow her to live with them and, soon, it is possible to realize her interest on Sethe, "who was licked, tasted, eaten by Beloved's eyes" (57). Beloved's appearance in the novel is important since it is because of her that Sethe starts to narrate some stories about her past to Denver. It is said in the narrative that telling stories is a way to feed Beloved, but the most interesting thing is that it is Beloved who asks about the stories she wants to hear. Generally, she asks about private things about Sethe's life, which always have something to do with an experience Beloved had contact with or an experience related to motherhood. Moreover, these experiences molded Sethe's understanding of herself and indirectly influenced her to commit the act of killing her daughter.

These narrated experiences also start to show Denver a mother she does not know, a mother who has a past that can interest her even if it has nothing directly related to her. Beloved also asks Denver to tell her some stories. It is when Denver is telling her the story of her own birth that she can have a full picture of her mother's life:

Now, watching Beloved's alert and hungry face, how she took in every word, asking questions about the color of things and their size, her downright craving to know, Denver began to see what she was saying and not just to hear it: there is this nineteen-year-old slave girl – a year older than herself – walking through the dark woods to get to her children who are far away. She is tired, scared maybe, and maybe even lost. Most of all she is by herself and inside her is another baby she has to think about too. Behind her dogs, perhaps; guns probably; and certainly mossy teeth. She is not so afraid at night because she is the color of it, but in the day every sound is a shot or a tracker's quiet step. Denver was seeing it now and feeling it – through Beloved. Feeling how it must have felt to her mother. (77-78)

It is possible to perceive that Beloved's presence starts a process of narrating the past, which enables both Sethe and Denver to start making sense of who they are in the world. Sethe begins to recover the stories of her past that led her to commit the act of killing her daughter (even though the most important parts of this story she is still afraid of talking about). Denver also starts to become interested in the past as a source of understanding herself and her mother's story.

Another important aspect is related to Beloved's relationship with Paul D. Although Paul D is a strong man who had managed to control his past, Beloved moves him. His story is also narrated in the novel and we are told that "he could put Alfred, Georgia, Sixo, schoolteacher, Halle, his brothers, Sethe, Mister, the taste of iron, the sight of butter, the smell of hickory, notebook paper, one by one, into the tobacco tin lodged in his chest. By the time he got to 124 nothing in this world could pry it open" (113), nothing except Beloved.

Beloved's special interest is on Sethe, but as she perceives Paul D "shares" Sethe with her, and is a very strong man, she starts to move him from 124. It is when he is spending the nights at the cold house beside Sethe's house that Beloved goes there and asks him to touch her on the inside part and call her name. He tries to resist her, but he cannot. When he calls her name he does not "hear the whisper that the flakes of rust made either as they fell away from the seams of his tobacco tin. So when the lid gave he didn't know it. What he knew was that when he reached the inside part he was saying, 'Red heart. Read heart,' over and over again" (117). Thus, it can be seen that he does not only reach Beloved's inside part, but his own, too.

It is important to realize that the differences that constitute these characters' lives are brought by Beloved, who affects all the relationships at 124. As she is a "presence" of Sethe's past, it can be said that the most important experience she wants to recover is

her murder by her mother. Yet, it fully happens only when Paul D is finally out of 124, after having heard about Sethe's past. When he finds out about Sethe's act of killing her daughter, he judges her the same way the rest of the community had already done. Paul D considers she went "too far" in her act of resistance and also classifies it as a bestial act, saying: "You got two feet, Sethe, not four" (165). It can be seen that, until this part of the narrative, Sethe continues to be compared to an animal.

Only when Paul D is gone does Sethe realize who Beloved is and starts to do whatever she can to recover everything they lost during all those years they were separated. At the same time Beloved performs an important role in Sethe's and Denver's lives, since she makes them re-think and re-tell their past, she is also a threat to their lives, almost destroying them, though. Beloved is a past presence. Because of this, she wants the past back. She wants to have what she did not have because of her premature death. Although this is something good for Sethe since she has the chance to tell her life experience to Beloved and Denver, she is not able to make connections with her present life. On the contrary, she locks herself in the past, allowing Beloved to possess her life.

At first, the three of them experience this possession as something good, something that is widening their souls. They feel free from a burden and belonging to someone. However, after some time, Beloved becomes "wild game" (242). She starts to accuse Sethe for leaving her behind, and it does not matter what Sethe does to ask for forgiveness, Beloved does not stop being rude towards Sethe. Denver is the only one to notice this awful situation. She realizes her mother is being dominated by her sister's presence, she sees that Sethe's eyes are "bright but dead" (242), and that both Sethe and Beloved are "locked in a love that wore everybody out" (243). Thus, she decides to ask somebody for help.

It is important to perceive that Denver has the ability to experience the past, but at the same time, she also realizes the importance of her present life too. She is the one who starts to make connections in order to build up a sense of “who she has become” in the world and why. As a representation of this experience, Denver decides to go out from 124 and face the world around it. In addition, her ability to connect past and present is described in her “conversation” with Baby Suggs’ spirit when she is leaving 124:

... then Baby Suggs laughed, clear as anything. “You mean I never told you about Carolina? About your daddy? You don’t remember nothing about how come I walk the way I do and about your mother’s feet, not to speak of her back? I never told you all that? Is that why you can’t walk down the steps? My Jesus my.”

But you said there was no defense.

“There ain’t.”

Then what do I do?

“Know it, and go on out the yard. Go on.” (244)

Baby Suggs’ words summarize the main idea of their story when she says *know it*. This is exactly what differs Denver from her mother at this point of the novel. Denver is able to *know* her history as a requirement to go out of her house and make sense of her life. Because she is able to do so, she is the character who is going to establish a connection between 124 and the community, a connection which had been broken eighteen years ago. It is because of Denver’s courage to ask for help that the community will re-think about Sethe’s story.

Denver is able to find a job at Mr. and Miss Bodwin’s house, and it is there that she tells another black girl about her mother and Beloved. Soon the news is spread around Bluestone Road and a black woman from their community, called Ella, is the person who convinces the others they have to do something because, for her, the past is “something to leave behind. And if it didn’t stay behind, well, you might have to stomp it out” (256). Thus, the community understands that, even if Sethe did not have the right

to do what she did with her daughter, she should not be possessed by her sin. Furthermore, although Sethe had a different life experience, it is because of her possession by Beloved that the community recognizes Sethe as someone similar to them, since everyone in the community had ghosts from the past they should learn to deal with. For Charles Scruggs, the community gets united “when it accepts Sethe not as different but as the same, and when it rejects an identification of ‘right’ with law or convention” (105). It happens only because the community understands that all of them share an experience of discontinuity.

In this way, the identification process is once more established, now in terms of a group identity, since the group tries to rescue Sethe to make part of it again. So, thirty women get together at the gate of 124 to banish Beloved from there, since she represents a past full of “burden,” which possesses not only Sethe’s life but the whole community’s. At the same time the women are there in the gate, Mr. Bodwin is also coming to 124 to take Denver to work. When the black women from Bluestone Road start singing and praying, Sethe (with an ice pick in hand) and Beloved go out from 124. Then, the women recognize Sethe and get surprised by their absence of fear of the “devil-child,” since “[i]t had taken the shape of a pregnant woman, naked and smiling in the heat of the afternoon sun” (261). Right after this, Sethe sees Mr. Bodwin approaching the house and, as she is living in the past, she thinks she is seeing Schoolteacher again. This time she tries to beat *him*, not her children, but she is prevented from doing this by the black women. When Beloved sees her mother running away from her, she feels alone and disappears. Later on some people say she “exploded right before their eyes” (263).

Even free from Beloved (the incarnation of her past), Sethe is still possessed by it. She cannot bear the idea that Beloved is gone. So, she does the same thing Baby Suggs

had already done: she lies on a bed with expressionless eyes fixed on the window. She is in this position when Paul D arrives there to visit her, after deciding he had been a fool judging Sethe. He tries to help her, showing he comprehends her life experiences. However, Sethe only thinks about Beloved. She even says that: "She was my best thing" (272). Sethe is still not able to separate her present life from her past, her children from herself.

Although Paul D feels he also has a fragmented life to make sense of, he understands they have to make sense of their future: "'Sethe', he says, 'me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow'" (273). His most important act on coming back to Sethe's life is showing her that *she* is *her* best thing. It is only through Sethe's understanding that she did not only lose a daughter but also gained power to position herself in the world that she will be able to construct a future. Missy Kubitschek also argues that Sethe's future depends on her capacity to "develop a new self-definition that honors motherhood but doesn't make it the only measure of her worth" (123-24). This is also what Stuart Hall calls "diaspora identities," a renewing of the understanding of who we are in the world according to the different experiences of the past.

It is not clear in the novel if Sethe will really be able to re-think and re-construct her life and her identity(ies). Her last words in the novel are: "Me? Me?" (273). The question marks represent the ambiguity of her understanding, but, at the same time, she is able to pronounce words about herself. In addition, in the last chapter of the novel, it is said that Beloved was forgotten, although "it took longer to who had spoken to her, lived with her, fallen in love with her, to forget" (274). But they did since "[r]emembering seemed unwise" (274). Because of this, it is possible to think that Sethe may have reconstructed her life after being able to leave the past behind. However, this

final “message” in the book is also ambiguous since forgetting is not a “wise” solution in these characters’ lives (as seen before). Maybe, Toni Morrison’s idea here is to show what still happens to the memory of a people after “they made up their tales” (274). They try to forget, but the presence is always there, it is circular, as the name which titles the book and which is also its last word: *Beloved*.

Through the narrative of *Beloved* we are able to perceive that identities are constructed concepts we create or which are imposed on us. These two processes act on Sethe’s life during the narrative. As both Stuart Hall and Cornel West put it, identities are constructed categories and the concept “Black” is also understood in terms of its Western signification. Reading about Sethe’s life, it is not difficult to perceive these ideas. She is defined, she fights against this definition, she tries to define herself, and she has difficulties on finding out who she is. Although, on a superficial reading, resisting stereotypes and having problems to construct an identity may seem her own disability, *Beloved* shows exactly the opposite: it was the slavery system which destroyed or damaged black people’s sense of self.

For Linden Peach, “[o]ne of the most damning weapons of white, colonial power structures was the representation and stigmatising of Africans and African-Americans as beasts. This is a stereotype which *Beloved* specifically inverts whilst exposing it as the product of white cultural hegemony” (106). For me, this is what makes this book a major literary work: its ability of deconstructing and unmasking white definitions of black identities, since it shows how far white people could go in *their* inhumanity. And, according to Baby Suggs, whites

could prowl at will, change from one mind to another, and even when they thought they were behaving, it was a far cry from what real humans did.

“They got me out of jail,” Sethe once told Baby Suggs.

“They also put you in it,” she answered.

“They drove you ‘cross the river.”

“On my son’s back.”
 “They gave you this house.”
 “Nobody *gave* me nothing.”
 “I got a job from them.”
 “He got a cook from them, girl.”
 “Oh, some of them do all right by us.”
 “And every time it’s a surprise, ain’t it?” (244)

Because of *Beloved*’s characteristic of showing to the reader how far whites could go in dehumanizing black people, we are able to perceive how the identification process of blacks took place in the novel, especially Sethe’s process. It starts as an individual struggle, but is rescued by the community as its own anxiety. This process is felt in the novel through Sethe’s recognition of a white definition of herself as something she is not (a bestial thing), through her understanding of self-love (being proud of being black), and through her act of resistance (the killing of her daughter) against white ideology. However, these three steps in her identification process only make sense to her and to other black people when the diasporic characteristics of their community (their different positionings in the world) stop being a barrier to the understanding of their group identity, that is, when the community recognizes Sethe’s possession by the past as their own possession.

Moreover, we can perceive that, at the end of the novel, Sethe’s act led the community to an emancipatory strategy of survival, making black people recover their dignity and their sense of “who they are” in the world. Although their diasporic experiences prevented them from forming a coherent “unity” at the time Sethe committed her act, they were able to overcome this and construct a communal sense of identity as an “anchor”: something to count on to resist stereotypes.

However, this is not a reality for all groups of black people who were brought from Africa to the Americas during the colonial period. For some groups, the diasporic experiences from colonization reach the twentieth century, becoming a major barrier to

the construction of black identities. In the next chapter, we will discuss how this situation is portrayed in the novel *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, by the Caribbean-Canadian writer Dionne Brand.

Notes

¹ It is important to point out here that Sethe is made victorious only in the novel. According to some written records from the period of the real story, more specifically according to Samuel J. May's *The Fugitive Law and Its Victims*, from 1856, Margaret Garner's act was not a barrier to her owner reclaim her back. After Margaret had been judged and imprisoned for some time, her owner, Mr. Gaines, was able to take her out of jail and send her to the New Orleans slave market. Samuel J. May writes that "after so terrible a struggle, so bloody a sacrifice, so near to deliverance once, twice, and even a third time, to be, by the villainy and lying of her 'respectable' white owner again engulfed in the abyss of Slavery!" ("Margaret Garner" 34). The reasons that led Toni Morrison to write a different version of this story are difficult to be traced. However, making Sethe stays in the black community after having committed her act may be a sign of her interest in describing the importance of this act to the community's fate.

CHAPTER III

At the Full and Change of the Moon: The Construction of "Un-identity"

*I was reading a book the other day about the nineteenth century
and it seemed like reading about now.*
Dionne Brand

As with Toni Morrison, Dionne Brand is a writer concerned with history, politics, and black identity. In her works, she also deals with the daily life of people in order to portray black experiences in the past and in the present. Carmen Lassotta describes Brand's work as "[t]he ability to make history concrete by capturing the small, ordinary things of life along with a sense of broader historical actions" (1). Moreover, Dionne Brand does this as a way to represent black peoples' lives, which were not present in the books she used to read as a young student. Brand herself confirms that: "[W]hen I was in elementary and high schools, none of the books we studied were about Black people's lives; they were about Europeans, mostly the British. But I felt that Black people's experiences were as important and as valuable, and needed to be written down and read about. This is why I became a writer" (qtd. in Lassota 1).

Being an Afro-Caribbean Canadian writer, Dionne Brand reflects in her work her "multiple displacements" (Lassota 1). Because of this, issues of personal or national identity as well as diasporic experiences are significant in her work. In addition, the past is also an important aspect brought up by Brand through her use of memory. Since the re-telling of the past can be used as a way to resist whites' writing of history, stories told by writers as Brand "continue this tradition of resistance [...] 'spitting salt laden bullets' at the page and into the air" (Gadsby 146).

Through the reading of Dionne Brand's works, it is possible to perceive that she writes about what she sees in the world, about her own history, and the history of black people. Analyzing some of Brand's poems from a linguistic viewpoint, Maria Casas argues that "the social can be central to an understanding of the way in which both literary and non-literary texts make meaning" (54). Although some literary critics think the social context should not be considered an important aspect to the analysis of literary texts, for me it is what makes a text really concrete and valuable. We always speak from a specific place in our society and this is directly reflected in the text. What makes Brand's works so interesting is her ability to write about history, sociology, and politics, without losing her poetic and literary language.

Using a metaphor by Trinh T. Minh-Ha, Kathleen J. Renk argues that Brand's words are like fire because, at the same time, they destroy and enlighten. This is due to the fact that they "refashion worlds disfigured by colonialism and neo-colonialism" (98) since she "makes the past and present touch as she conjures up stories that destroy and illumine colonial discourses, while rebuilding a vision of the postcolonial world" (100). For Renk, Brand is able to recreate the past through the recovering of a collective memory, which makes the reader "unlearn" the discourses of the official history.

This is exactly what happens in *At the Full and Change of the Moon*. In this work, written in 1999, Brand re-constructs the history of Trinidad, through the narrative of the story of an Afro-Caribbean family saga, re-telling histories about slavery, colonialism and prejudice. Different from Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, which narrates the history of slaves in the nineteenth century, Brand's book brings the story telling to the twentieth century, portraying the lives of slaves and free black people. Nevertheless, both books deal with the portrayal of slavery experiences and the authors' attempts to reconstruct the past. Because of this, in the present chapter, we are going to analyze how *At the Full*

and Change of the Moon presents black people's past experiences and in what ways these experiences influence their construction of identity, still based on the previous theoretical discussions.

Marie Ursule is the first character whose story is told in the novel. She is a slave who, in the nineteenth century, works in a cane plantation and organizes a collective suicide with the other slaves of the farm. Yet, she is not able to kill her only daughter, Bola, who is taken away by her father. Bola survives and has many children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, whose stories are also told in the novel. With the narratives of this "family-saga," Brand is able to show how the slavery experience of the past influences the lives of blacks even today. However, Dionne Brand does not do this in a simple way. She shows the characters' attempts to understand the meaning of their lives and their identities, since they are tormented people who are "dispersed" around the world and who almost forgot whence they came in the past.

Reviewing *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, Maureen Moynagh poses the following question: "How does a culture seeking to become independent of imperialism imagine its own past?" (1). For Moynagh, this is a question that resonates in Brand's book. According to her, Brand reconstructs the past in order to show its importance to the understanding of the present. As the characters in the book are diasporic people dispersed all over the Americas and in Europe, Brand tries to show the role memory plays in their lives.

It is this ability to "open the past" again to the present that calls the reader's attention when reading Brand's novel. All the characters' lives are related to this slavery past, and there is no way of escaping or "erasing" it from their history. In addition, this book also shows that the characters' understanding of "who they are" depends on their knowledge of the slavery experience.

As in *Beloved*, memory is really important in Brand's book. Its importance is shown in the narrative through the difficulties the characters have to remember their past because of either "genealogical gaps" or "memories too painful to remember" (Moynagh 2). In this narrative, past connections are only felt through the silences present on these characters' lives. It is not difficult to perceive that Brand's book echoes similar aspects from Morrison's work, but although they deal with similar questions, their stories are developed very differently.

As it was argued in the previous chapters, Frantz Fanon analyzed the colonial situation in order to understand blacks' inferiority complex. According to him, the difficulties and the problems blacks had and still have in constructing their own identity are related to a "forced" identity whites obliged them to adopt, prohibiting them of having their own human and cultural values. In addition, slavery *dehumanized* black people, transforming them into *things* and *property* of white masters. For Fanon, because of these facts, blacks have found two alternatives to escape from this dehumanizing condition: either they have tried to resist white domination fighting against white colonizers, or they have tried to transcend their inferiority complex by "assimilating" white ideology.

These two alternatives are portrayed in *At the Full and Change of the Moon* and the act of classifying the strategies the writer used in constructing her characters leads us to an understanding of the processes involved in blacks' search for identity. It can also be said that the acts of resistance and fighting against white masters are found in the first chapter of the book, when the narrator tells the story of Marie Ursule and some other black slaves. On the other hand, when the narrator starts to describe the lives of Bola's descendants, we perceive that these characters use an assimilationist strategy of survival, almost as if they were losing their identity (or constructing an un-identity).

As it was said before, the first story told in the narrative is Marie Ursule's. She is a slave who, in 1824, works in a cane plantation called Mon Chagrin, in Trinidad, for de Lambert, the owner of the place. Since the beginning of the novel, she is described as "the queen of rebels" because she has already tried to organize some uprisings against slave owners. This is due to the fact that Marie Ursule does not accept her conditions as a slave, her condition of being *owned* by someone else. During all her life, things have always been the same:

She was owned by M. de Lambert, and before that by the Ursuline nuns who had moved from place to place, from Guadeloupe to Martinique and then here, Trinidad, this last island before Venezuela. They and she had run out of islands. Her ears' tips had been cut off for rebellion there in Guadeloupe and many charges laid against her for insolence.

She had come to the Ursulines under false pretence. M. Rochard, her owner before the nuns [...] wanted to be rid of her. (9-10)

Thus, it can be seen that she is a rebel. She had even "lost an ear and been shackled to a ten-pound iron for two years after the rebellion of 1819" (5), but she does not give up her intentions of resisting the slavery system. She knows that under this system black people are dehumanized by white masters who control everything, including their body. She used to say that "[b]reathing in sleep was the only time you owned the movement of your chest" (4). So, the novel begins with an act of resistance against slavery since Marie Ursule is preparing a collective suicide with the other slaves of the farm.

For this, she collects poison in the woods "the way one gathers flowers, the way one gathers scents or small fishes and fondnesses" (1). The Caribs, or "those of them left alive on the island after their own great and long devastation by the Europeans" (2), had taught her about *woorara*, a kind of poison. Using this venom, she and the other slaves of the plantation could cause de Lambert's ruin. Each one of them takes the venom, but Marie Ursule. She is alive when de Lambert finds them because she wants

to show him who is responsible for that act. Also, after being spanked and almost dying, she says: “This is but a drink of water to what I have already suffered” (21).

Differently from Sethe (*Beloved*'s main character), who kills her child to protect her from white domination, Marie Ursule is not able to kill her only daughter, Bola, who is described in the novel as her only vanity. So, she arranges with the father's child, Kamena, to return to Mon Chagrin in order to save Bola. Marie Ursule “would try to send her to the secret hills, to the secret places even beyond those secret hills, to those places where she, Marie Ursule, could not go herself because of her limp. And even more because of her heart, so skilled now, so full of wrath” (6). She does not know exactly why she wants to save Bola's life, but she had already seen the future in her eyes.

Even knowing that “centuries are forgetful places” (18) and that her descendants will probably not remember her or her insubordination act, she does not give up the idea of the collective suicide with the slaves of the farm because she sees it as the only way to ruin her white master. The way to resist the institution of slavery is fighting with her own body, killing it, as she understands it means money at the hands of de Lambert.

Nevertheless, she understands that her child's body does not belong to her, but to the future. Even when the child was born, after Marie Ursule “had washed out many [babies] from between her legs” (8), Bola seemed to say: “I'm coming, Marie Ursule. Don't lay a harmful hand on me” (8). Marie Ursule sees her as a continuation of herself which has its own desires, a continuation which is curious to understand the world and “learn” it. So, she lets her child go, thinking “she'd sent whatever wasn't spoiled, with no hope of gratitude or remembrance. If her descendants might emerge, sore and disturbed, in another century – well, it reflected only a moment in her mind, a little

passion which she indulged herself in, and Bola would add the rest, all beginnings, all catastrophes, like lust" (22).

If we compare and contrast these two slave mother presence in *Beloved* and *At the Full and Change of the Moon* (Sethe and Marie Ursule), we see they have two opposite attitudes in relation to their children. Sethe sees death as the only way to escape the horrors of slavery. Moreover, she understands the act of killing her daughter as a way to take possession of her child's fate and body. The power of motherhood and her concern with her child's suffering is more important than anything. She is not only defying her masters, but reclaiming possession of herself. On the other hand, Marie Ursule's act of organizing a collective suicide is not only an act of reclamation of herself as a human being, but more important, it is an act of insubordination. It is a social act of resistance, more linked with revolution. To take possession of her child's body is not so important for her, since she understands life will continue after her death. She wants her child far away from whites, hidden from them, but alive. She understands the continuation of life as something much bigger than herself.

Both Sethe and Marie Ursule think about death as the only way to resist slavery. They do not have enough power to destroy their masters directly, but destroying their own bodies is a way to affect their masters' lives. In addition, their acts of killing people in the name of freedom show their understanding of an identification process which does not define them as *things* or *property*, but as human beings. The major difference between these two mothers is in relation to their sense of motherhood. For Sethe, a mother is able to take possession of her children's lives, and her act of killing her child demonstrates this. Conversely, for Marie Ursule, her child's life is bigger than her desire to die. She does not see her child as belonging to herself, but belonging to the future since she saw, in the middle of Bola's eyes,

skyscrapers and trains and machines and streets, she saw winters and summers and leaves falling in muddy roadways and on pavements, dams bursting and giving way and boats and pirogues crashed on shores and steamers on water far off and aeroplanes way up in the sky and she felt a lifting she would never know. [...] [S]he knew that if it was the future she was looking at, then she was keeping this crazy child from it if she took her along. (45)

So, even though Kamena had already escaped from Mon Chagrin, Marie Ursule arranged with him to take her child to one of these maroon places, where run-away slaves could find a hidden refuge for themselves, far from whites. Kamena had already been living in one of these places, called Terre Bouillante. Through his point of view we have a description of what a maroonage was:

Terre Bouillante was desolate. A clearing cleared by streams and fissures of hot water bursting as if in fright. A constant hiss and hiss, which nevertheless Kamena learned to read quiet in, utter quiet. [...]

On the edges of the clearing, the Maroons tried to plant a few roots, wild tania and yams which came up poor and stunted. They hunted agouti and iguana and managed a half-starved living. In the flat heat of days they languored on the edge of the clearing, on the edge of life itself. Terre Bouillante was desolate and better, better than Mon Chagrin [...] or any other estate they had fled. Terre Bouillante was peace. (31)

It can be perceived that these places, although being desolate, offer run-away slaves a place where they could rest from the agony of slavery. They lived there in a community, working for themselves, not being *ordered* anything. *Slave-things* arrived there and became *human beings* again. These were places of resistance from white domination. However, as in “Kamena’s time there no one who left returned” (31), after rescuing her daughter from Mon Chagrin, he is not able to find the maroonage anymore.

Following Marie Ursule’s dreams, and protected by her spell, Kamena takes his child to Culebra Bay, a place where the convent of the two Ursuline nuns who had once owned Marie used to be. This place is abandoned because of rumors it is infected by leprosy. As people are afraid of this place, Kamena and Bola stay there alone, protected from whites. Furthermore, Marie Ursule’s spell “re-creates” the place again for her

child, calling back the ghosts of the two Ursuline nuns to take care of Bola. An interesting fact about this story is that, although Marie Ursule tried to send her child to live in a community with her father, it is not possible since Kamena cannot find Terre Bouillante. So, they have to live in a “maroonage of two,” isolated from the rest of the world, and losing contact with other black people.

Kamena does not give up his search for Terre Bouillante, but he does not find it anymore. Bola grows up in this place surrounded by the sea, and she loves observing the ocean (especially the whales) and the mainland across the water. After some years, in 1834, slavery is abolished, and black people start to look for free work. Due to this fact, cities start to get bigger and “the world fought its way in more and more” (63) towards Culebra Bay. Bola realizes that people are arriving there “looking for a way out, looking for a life away from the estates and the years of indentureship that they were locked into even after slavery ended” (63). Nobody questions why Bola is there alone in Culebra Bay, but they think it is a good sign since she has knowledge about the sea. Thus, Bola stays there and, as she knows the ocean better than anyone else, her “job” is to observe it for fishermen.

She is also described as a person who had a big “lust for anything she saw” (67), including men. Because of this, she has many children, but only a few of them stay with her. The others she spreads around the world, “depending on a whim. Depending on which one had something written in her face that said *cloth* or *iron*, depending on what first came out of their mouths, sighs or grunts or singing, depending on how fast they walked she let them go about their business because every child wasn’t a child but had its own life and its own way and its own age” (69). Bola understands every one of her children has a different destiny, so she does not interfere in their lives. However, her concern with the continuation of their lives is so strong that she “spread her children

around so that all would never be gathered in the same place to come to the same harm” (198). It can be seen that the sense of forming a community is not present in her survival strategy.

After the presentation of Bola’s life, the book starts to narrate some stories of Bola’s descendants (from her sons’ and daughters’ stories to her great-great-grandchildren’s). Among them there are soldiers, business owners, housewives, industrial workers, drug dealers, clerks, etc. Each one of them has a different life experience, which has no clear connections with the histories of their relatives or even descendants. Most of the characters do not know who Marie Ursule was or what is the history of their family. And even if they know something about it, they do not make connections with their own lives.

Although the reader can find, on the first page of the book, Marie Ursule’s family tree, it is easy to perceive that these family connections are not clear to the characters. This is due to the fact that past memories are not discussed by them, who generally try to avoid the past as a way to hide their origins and “forget” their roots. Nevertheless, an interesting aspect in the novel is that, even if they do not know where they came from or if they try to “forget” it, all these characters are related and come from the same root: the root of an Afro-Caribbean slave woman.

Despite the importance of this fact, the characters in the book do not analyze their colonial past and their present situation, which is, according to Frantz Fanon, a barrier to the understanding of black identities. However, Dionne Brand tries to recover a lost history in the book, showing that this attitude is not caused by a flaw in the characters but is a result of colonial domination. According to Maureen Moynagh, Brand presents how the Middle Passage or the plantation slavery system caused the dispersion of black people across the world and prohibited slaves from forming strong group or family

connections and from developing their own cultural values. This dispersion or diaspora is represented in the book by the action of Bola, who consciously spreads her children all over the world instead of forming a single community. This act is influenced by her missing family/group identification caused by colonialism and it also represents a strategy of survival, since it enables her descendants to survive in different places, not undergoing the same kinds of suffering.

Because of this, Bola's descendants carry with them a similar past, but they are not together anymore, in a community. They are dispersed all over the world, having different life experiences. In addition, as Bola does not pass to them the knowledge about their past and the past of their family, they lose connections with their history. Even though they try to live a "good" life, most of the characters, at some time in their lives, realize that something is wrong with them. They find out that there is something missing, something they cannot understand, something in their lives they cannot make sense of.

It can be said that Bola's descendants reflect what Cornel West defines as the "modern Black diaspora problematic of invisibility and namelessness" (209). This is because they are a divided people, struggling to survive in a colonized world, where being white means having power and success, and being black means being inferior. Moreover, according to Fanon this situation leads to an assimilationist identification process with the white world, which makes blacks try to adopt the colonizer's culture (not only because of their "weakness," but because whites "drove into blacks' heads" the idea they were barbarian, evil, and stupid).

This assimilationist process is much bigger than a people's desire to become something they are not. It is an ideological process of identification which deals with the distortion of previous concepts and values black people had that were destroyed or

eliminated by white masters as a way to control their lives and, more important, their “minds.” Many stories about Bola’s descendants reflect these ideas, and it is important to analyze some of them here as a way to understand how blacks are led to a process of un-identity. This is due to the fact that they try to hide or erase their natural features and roots as a way to survive in a colonized world.

One of the first characters whose story is told is Samuel Gordon Sones, Bola’s grandson, born in 1898. His mother, Augusta, made him believe that even a black man could rise above what blacks thought they could be in those years. So, in 1917, when he was 20, he served the “mother country,” Great Britain, at the war because the Colonial Office accepted men “who were young and strong and of intelligence no matter their skin” (76) to form the Second West India Regiment. He had seen a white friend he adored in uniform, and he wanted to be him. He wanted to go to England and “disappear into the English countryside with a milk-white woman. To stand like a man who was on the edge of a book page, overlooking a field and a milk-white woman” (86).

However, things were not as he had thought when he arrived there. In England, he “had seen no milk-white woman [...] and no countryside. He had only heard men barking in another language and all he was aware of were his ears trying to understand” (86). In addition, even being a soldier, in the Great War, he was discriminated by white superiors: “Anyone with less color than they could spit and they would have to clean it up” (87). Even his white “friend” from home would treat him like this. Yet, one day, he knocked his white friend down (who was his superior) and was sent home, at 21, for misconduct.

It was just when he returned home that he could understand what had happened to him. He asked himself: “You is a English man?” (78). And after understanding the

answer, he considered himself a “criminal” and decided to punish himself for being so naïve, believing he was someone different from himself. He was not able to blame white people for his disgrace, not even his white superior. Samuel even thought about “killing him many times in the years since. But in the end of every plot he made, he ended up with himself to blame. He ended up with that stinging moment of recognition of his colour and his dreams” (90). So he punished himself, putting on his black English suit and walking “the length and breadth of Culebra Bay, beginning at precisely eleven-fifty and ending at one-thirty back at the tree. He chose the time when the sun is most fierce; only this could burn away his shame and loathing” (79). He was a “man inviting ridicule and determined not to have comfort” (85).

Samuel Gordon Sones’ story is very significant here to our understanding of Brand’s point in the novel. Through his life, the author is showing a very common process of assimilation blacks undergo in the colonies. For Samuel and his mother, being black means being inferior. Despite this fact, they believe that if he did well, he could “find a place” in the world, “become someone,” which means being recognized as “a man” by white people. For this, he becomes a soldier and goes to Europe, expecting white masters will recognize him as a superior man. Nevertheless, his journey to Great Britain only proves that his attitudes, his education, or his fidelity to whites do not matter: he will always be considered an “evil thing” since he is black. He is, according to Fanon, *fixed* by his stereotype.

An interesting point is that he is able to realize this situation and recognizes himself as a black man who has nothing to do with white wars and white masters. Yet, the white ideology which defines him as a stupid person is so strong that it blocks his reactions against it. Although he wants to beat his superiors or fight against that system, he is only able to blame *himself* for *his* “misunderstanding” of *his* “place” in the world.

We are told in the narrative that he even thought about “nationalist ideas and speeches toward independence from Britain, the lowering of the Union Jack and the lifting of the blood and the earth” (96). Nevertheless, his only action is to punish himself. His anger is directed towards his own body and his own life. Differently from Marie Ursule’s action, who destroyed her body as a way of ruining her masters, Samuel destroys his body and his life as a way of punishing himself since he does not recognize white masters as the “guilty part” in his fate. It can be said that he has not learnt anything from his own history and the history of his family.

This concern with the body also affects the next story told in the novel, which is Cordelia Rojas’ story. She is Bola’s great-granddaughter and she is married to Emmanuel Greaves, “a quiet, decent and devoted man. Her second cousin twice removed and two landfalls, though neither of them knew it, because of a great-great-grandmother named Marie Ursule” (99). Cordelia came from a family of traders who lived in Venezuela, and Emmanuel was from Bonaire where his family lived on fishing. Both of them had come to Culebra Bay in order to have a better life. After they got married, they went to live in Abyssinia, where Emmanuel started to work in the oil fields.

Since the beginning of the narrative about her life we understand Cordelia was a very conservative woman who had a rigorous life routine and who “had grown children who came visit with pitying in their eyes” (101). It is also told in the narrative that *she* had married Emmanuel because he was *steady* and because she knew that “this man would rise in the mornings, take his food carrier from her hand and run to the lorry for the oilfields and every woman around would say in their minds, ‘Cordelia girl, you have a man’” (102). In short, she had married him because she could control their lives and she could live as she wanted them to live. As she knew that, at that time (the 1920’s), “a

woman could not by herself take over the world or act as if she had her own will, Cordelia would find Emmanuel Greaves and he would be her hand in the world” (109).

Cordelia was proud of herself. She knew that Emmanuel would like to stay with her because of the “uplifting that a woman of her colour would bring him” (108). She is described as a red woman who “strapped her hair back with clips and grease and water to show off and hide her origins all at once. The red in her from her great-grandfather, the black from Bola” (108). So, she managed her life with Emmanuel, controlling their routines (even their sexual routine), controlling her own desires, and giving him three children when she thought was the right moment. Cordelia wanted to have a decent life, having everything she had always dreamt about as :

a piano in her living room with a photograph atop it of her children and her husband standing and her seated in the centre. She imagined other photographs of her children in different stages of their childhood, in their best clothes, their hair greased back like hers. Their confirmations with prayer books in their hands. Their graduations, their marriages. She imagined tea sets put away in glass cabinets and doilies on the back of her velvet sofa and chairs, she imagined armchairs varnished and polished and a large wooden dining table where she would sit at the head. She imagined white lace curtains and stone steps coming up to her mahogany wood front door. (109)

Although these desires had nothing to do with a Caribbean woman’s life, her mind was already made up to have “white dreams.” She did everything she could to reach them. She took care of her husband and her children as a way to construct a steady and good life, being able to have or buy whatever she wanted to. Even her children she was able to send to England after finishing school in Trinidad.

However, when she was fifty years old, “a sudden and big lust” (99) overtook her. Although she had been strong enough to control her memories and desires, to take care of the house and the children, she “was greedy for everything she had not had” (121). It is clear in the narrative that the thing she missed the most was “the enjoyment of her body clear and free” (121). She felt the need for her body, which she had always tried to

forget. She felt the need to awake to her body, to feel the hints and scents of her black skin. She felt the need to love her body and be loved as she had never been. She wanted

her palm kissed, then her inner elbow, kissed, then the fat of her inner arm. Her appetite startled her when she passed a mirror and looked at her eyes and looked at her figure. She saw a woman who wasn't finished with the taste of her body as she was supposed to be. She lingered there at the mirror, seeing a woman who must have been planning for many years against her own plans. (99)

So, she turned this love for her body towards sexual love, and started to desire other bodies, too. She desired the black body of the man who fixed ice-cream freezers, as well as she desired Yvonne, the seamstress. She is even able to establish contact with these people and satisfy her own body touching other black bodies, and we are told that "[e]ven decency could not dampen Cordelia Roja's greediness" (127). Her husband wrote to his children in England talking about this situation, arguing Cordelia was shaming the family. Their children came intending to lead her to a madhouse, but they were not able to do this. "Cordelia's still imperious face" (127) destroyed their intentions, and all they could do was to take their old father with them to London.

Although it seems an unbelievable story, we can say that Cordelia's act resembles Baby Suggs' preaching in *Beloved*, since she starts loving her own body with all her strength. Moreover, Cordelia's story is pretty much connected to our discussions about identity. She is one more example of a black person who internalizes a colonial way of life and tries to do whatever is possible to fulfill dreams of "becoming" white. Not only does she try to live according to white standards of life, but she even tries to hide natural features of her black body, as strapping her hair back with clips and grease.

These attitudes can be considered part of an assimilationist identification process which has already been discussed by Frantz Fanon. According to him, this process is a survival strategy blacks assume to "climb up" into society. It is difficult for blacks to

question this positioning because they are embedded in white ideology. Fanon also argues that white models and concepts teach blacks how to erase their roots.

This is exactly what happens to Cordelia. Her desire to “climb up” in society is so strong that she does not even question the kinds of dreams she has. Although she does not dream about going to England, as Samuel Sones, she aspires white, (and we can also say) colonial ideals (like having a piano or a tea set in her living room). Nevertheless, Fanon also argues that, sooner or later, blacks “are given their body back,” which is also true in Cordelia’s story.

Cordelia was given her body back through a desire for it she had always tried to control. She was not able to hide her own black body from herself anymore because she “had gone to her window with a sudden remembrance of pink shells and Culebra Bay. She had not meant to remember” (121), but she did. As “[e]verything depends on memory” (115), when she remembered her origins she remembered her body, and decided to have everything she did not have before. It is clear that the way Cordelia becomes aware of her body is related to an extreme desire, which almost seems fantastic. Opposite to Samuel, who decides to punish his body for being naïve believing he was somebody different from who he really was, Cordelia decides to give love (in the form of pleasure) to her body as a way to recover what she had lost in her life: her black identity.

Samuel Sones was not the only person of this family who thought that going to a first world country would be the solution for problems. Many characters did the same, including Carlyle, born in 1940. He was Bola’s great-grandson and was originally from Terre Bouillante, “a quiet place [...] where strangers remained strangers for decades until the last person who knew them as strangers died” (140). The past of Terre Bouillante as a refuge to runaway slaves make it dislike modernity.

Carlyle did not want to be “enveloped” in this city where everybody was ashamed of everything. He wanted to break with this “enveloping sense of shame wrapped around them all, and there was no cause he could point to for all this shame, and he didn’t understand it and he didn’t want it” (139). His way of breaking with this was walking into the only gas station of the city, threatening the manager with a pen-knife and asking for money. The police found out about it and went to his house. When his mother knew about the crime, she slapped his face, which “astonished him” (138). For Carlyle, she had betrayed him. Her mother talked about shame, but, for him, he should not be ashamed of anything: “If only his mother knew that it was a relief that he felt, relief at not having to appear good to anybody” (139).

Thus, he went out from home and started to live in a bench as an outlaw. However, once, the police caught him and beat him “until his face was swollen” (143). After this, he went home and his mother helped him. Some days later, “he woke up in a kind of bright light with someone murmuring prayers to him. It was his own lips” (143). He felt heaven on him and thought that the beating and his sickness had happened to show him his true mission in life. For months after this, he lived in faith. He went to an Easter revival and, after listening to the messages from the preachers, he decided to travel around the island with them. All this time, his family “heard rumours of him becoming a boy priest with the revivalists” (145).

Nevertheless, the revivals were over and the preachers went home to America without taking him with them as they had promised. So, Carlyle came back to his bench. His old friends started to call him Priest and he said to them: “It have a lotta money in that. [...] A lotta money I was going to make if I did only get to go to America” (146).

After this, he decided to go to the United States to make money. Since the only way to be legal in that country was picking oranges in Florida, he decided to stay there illegally. He went to New York to look for a friend who had promised some work for him and he loved the city because “no one looked at him, no one knew him, but more, no one looked at anyone, or if they looked he could not see. It was a different kind of look, different from the one in his town. Quicker, slipping over his face, measuring him up in just that quick moving look” (158).

Because of his friend, he entered the illegal drug market, and described his life as the act of selling “everything [...] watches and coats and soaps and cheese and boots [...] women [...] smack [...] ecstasy [...] magic mushrooms [...] themselves as mules with loads of cocaine running down America and back” (165). Of course he also had problems with the police and he even had to run away from an immigration detention camp because of his illegal immigrant state.

Yet, he did not mind about his life and he really thought that a good life was not for him. He loved to change roles in his life, to multiply and divide himself as much as he could, and he did not bother himself trying to understand what his life meant. He felt really well living in the “dark side of America” because, for him, it “was the heart of the world” (173), where you did not have to think, just feel with your instincts. He felt powerful there.

Power is the most important word in his story. Since the beginning we are told that he did not want to be ashamed of anything. Maybe, be “ashamed” for him, was to live a humble life in Terre Bouillante. There, people lived a simple life, still afraid of the past, the slavery past. Priest did not want to live oppressed by that “fear.” The way he found out to survive was to have power to control his own life, either being an outlaw, a priest, or an illegal immigrant in the United States.

However, even controlling his life, he is assimilated by the colonial power, since he accepted the seduction of its domination. He is seduced by the grandiosity of "America," he "loved walking into a Denny's in Atlanta for a burger and fries, he loved the fat of it all, the hustlers in New York who came up behind you and opened their coat full of treasures, gold and diamonds..." (173). But he does not question why he has to be an outlaw at home or in America to feel powerful.

At one point, he was asked by a distant cousin who worked with him "what it all meant. Why did they have to live like this, why was it only either this or the life his own father, Dovett, had lived, a life of fighting bosses in the oil refinery in Curaçao" (172). Priest did not understand that, he changed subjects, he did not want to think about what his cousin meant, but this understanding is linked with colonial domination. Cornel West has shown that white ideology tries to show that colonialism is "the costs" of progress, culture, social uplifting, etc. Moreover, he has argued that ethnic minorities live the same "costs" of colonialism undergoing cheap or marginal labor in the United States or in other U. S. dominated countries in order to have a "better" life. This is a very serious question which is not discussed by most of the characters in Brand's book. Priest's cousin wants to understand this situation, but nobody talks to him about it.

The answer for his question is all that really matters in the life of these characters, since it is directly related to the understanding of their own identities. All of them, even the ones who stayed in their original countries, tried to live a "good" life, assimilating the way-of-life imposed on them since colonialism. However, none of them could answer this question, no one could understand why they felt guilty about their lives.

There is just one character who seems to point out an answer for that question: Eula, Priest's sister, who had been living in Toronto for many years, working in a post office. Almost all of Eula's older sisters and brothers had gone to Europe or to the

United States and Canada in order to try a better life. Her fate was not different from theirs. After many years living in Canada, she decided to write a letter to her mother who used to live in Terre Bouillante, even knowing that she had already died. Eula knew that this letter would never arrive at her mother's hands, but the act of writing it was Eula's way to try to make sense of her life.

Through this letter, she tried to explain why she did not write to her mother before. She argued that she did not want to bother her mother with the rows she had with an older sister who also lived there. She said her sister did not understand her way of trying to enjoy life, considering her a whore, especially after she had gotten pregnant. Moreover, after both sisters had argued, they did not talk to each other anymore, which would certainly upset their mother. Another aspect pointed out by Eula in the letter is that she was afraid of disappointing her mother telling her about her life in Toronto. Although she had a reasonable job, she felt she could not "fit in" that place. She even tried to go to the university, but she "felt that everyone was staring at [her]" (238). She was shy and afraid of the things she could say. She did not describe herself as a sad person, though. She only thought that there was something wrong with her life.

She also wrote about some digressions related to her past and how she became what she is. It is at this moment that she seems to "touch" the question of identity. She said in the letter: "History opens and closes, Mama. [...] I think we forget who we were. Nothing is changing, it is just that we are forgetting. All the centuries past may be one long sleep. We are either put to sleep or we choose to sleep. Nothing is changing, we are just forgetting" (234).

Since the beginning of the book, with the slave collective suicide organized by Marie Ursule, the author shows us the disruption of her family connections and, at the same time, she shows the importance of these connections to the understanding of the

characters' lives. However, only Eula realizes that her people are forgetting where they came from. She is able to express a diasporic anxiety of not having a history she can make sense of. When writing to her mother, Eula also says:

I would like one single line of ancestry, Mama. One line from you to me and farther back, but a line that I can trace. I don't know why I thought that or ask you. One line like the one in your palm with all the places where something happened and is remembered. I would like one line full of people who have no reason to forget anything, or forgetting would not help them or matter because the line would be constant, unchangeable. A line that I can reach for in my brain when I feel off kilter. Something to pull me back. I want a village and a seashore and a rock out in the ocean and the certainty that when the moon is in full the sea will rise and for that whole time I will be watching what all of my ancestry have watched for, for all ages. (246-47)

Eula realizes they suffer now for being scattered all over the world. She understands that everything they did during their lives was in order to live a better life because they wanted to prevent suffering, to forget the sadness and shame they felt because of their past. Yet, she perceives that alone they do not have enough power to fight back sadness and shame. She classifies them as a "tragedy," as a "whole broken-up tragedy, standing in the middle of the world cracking" (258). She even states: "I felt as if we had been scattered out with a violent randomness" (258). It is exactly what happened to them. Marie Ursule's family was violently scattered all over the world. However, it is important to realize that this was not their "fault," but it was due to a strong force they could not control.

From the colonial period on, blacks are subjugated to a white domination, being forced to assimilate a way of life different from that they had in the past. For Stuart Hall, this positioning of blacks inside a white cultural domination made them feel and believe they were "others" in order to form a regime of power. For him, accepting this situation "cripples and deforms. If its silences are not resisted, they produce, in Fanon's

vivid phrase, ‘individuals without an anchor, without horizon, colourless, stateless, rootless -- a race of angels’” (395).

Bola’s descendants can be defined as this “race of angels.” As they are spread all over the world, they are individuals without a remembered past (an anchor) on which they could fall back and base their lives. They do not have even a horizon since their hopes in the future were destroyed by oppressive conditions based on exploitation and prejudice. They are also rootless individuals, since their sense of belonging to the black community was destroyed by colonial power, which also destroyed cultural values that rooted their understanding of who they are. In short, they are individuals who were led to a process of un-identity, suffering all the consequences of living separate from their equals and losing the connections with their past.

Dionne Brand understands this as a contemporary reality for black people all over the world. Having a diasporic experience herself (a Caribbean immigrated to Canada), she does not only write about what she sees around her, but also about what she lives. Because of this, it would not be wrong to argue that Eula’s voice is her own, trying to explain or denounce to the reader that, more than one hundred years after the abolition of slavery, the slavery experience still influences black people’s lives. Blacks still suffer from an identity crisis that started in the Middle Passage and that continues today through the exploitation and migration of black people in the world.

At the Full and Change of the Moon deals with these questions. It shows the lives of individuals who struggle to survive in a colonized world, trying to assimilate the way of life imposed on them by white colonizers. Moreover, although these individuals try to live according to colonial standards and rules, at some point of their lives they feel that there is something wrong with them. They feel they do not “fit” in that world, and

that they do not know who they are anymore. This is due to the fact that they loose the connections with their ancestors, with their roots, their history.

As we have already discussed, Stuart Hall argues that cultural identities are constantly producing and reproducing themselves according to the life experiences of individuals. However, these identities are also produced through the discourse of history, through a common and shared past that will influence the understanding of what a people has become. The characters Brand portrays in her book were not able to have a coherent knowledge about their past. They were spread around the world and their past archives were destroyed by colonial domination. This is why it is so difficult for them to make sense of who they are.

Dionne Brand finishes her book bringing back Bola's story and her emphasis to her children that "[l]ife will continue no matter what it seems" (297). I agree with this statement. Yet, I do not think that Brand's book gives the idea that life will stay the way it is. For me, in *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, Brand re-writes the past of black people in the Americas and in Europe to make us aware of what happened to her people. It is not the narrative of a story which leads blacks to more self-loathing and victimization. On the contrary, it is a story narrated by a descendant of African slaves who does what Fanon has already urged people to do: "The colonized man who writes for his people ought to use the past with the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and a basis for hope" (232). It is exactly what Brand does since she re-writes a part of black history so black people will *know* it, will recognize colonial mistakes, and will go out in the world re-constructing their dignity and their cultural identities.

CONCLUSION

In this work, I analyzed how the re-construction of the past, made by both Toni Morrison and Dionne Brand, affects the construction of identity portrayed in *Beloved* and *At the Full and Change of the Moon*. To do this analysis, I started Chapter I discussing some notions about black identity, especially the concepts described by Frantz Fanon, Cornel West, and Stuart Hall. According to these theoreticians, "black" is a constructed category which acquired its meanings through the imposition of stereotypes created by white colonizers, who had the power to "define" races and to decide which one was better than the other.

For Fanon, blacks were *fixed* by whites who made them become slaves of their stereotypes. Moreover, since whites defined blacks as "evil things," and had power to control blacks' lives and education, they were able to spread this idea among the black communities, creating a massive inferiority complex. Due to this fact, according to Fanon, blacks found two alternatives to transcend this inferiority complex: they could either try to resist white domination, fighting against it, or they could try to assimilate white ideology, intending to "become white." Nevertheless, he points out that, in order to resist white domination, blacks need to understand and analyze the colonial situation and their slavery past.

Stuart Hall also points out the importance of the past and its histories to the understanding of identity. For him, identity should be seen as a construction always in process, modified and renewed according to the different life experiences of a people. He also argues that there is no *one fixed* identity, but *multiple* ones, according to the positions we assume in the world. It is exactly because of this that black people are able, today, to reconstruct the representations of themselves. In the same line of

thought, Cornel West points out the difficulties blacks have in reconstructing their identities, because of what he calls the “modern black diaspora problematic of invisibility and namelessness” (209). As black inferiority was promoted by white ideology, black people still struggle for dignity, respect, and freedom. Yet, West shows that there is a current cultural awareness leading black people to re-think their strategies of identity formation.

Toni Morrison and Dionne Brand are examples of this awareness. With the analysis of their works, it was possible to perceive how they reflect these theoreticians’ discussions, especially their notions that black identity is not a “fixed essence,” but should be re-constructed by blacks through the understanding of their history. In order to re-construct history, both authors re-tell stories about the slavery period, which is very significant for the discussion about identity, since it was during this period that stereotypes started to be created and imposed on black people.

As I have shown in Chapter II, *Beloved* is a re-construction of the story of Sethe, a run-away slave who, in the nineteenth-century United States, decides to kill her child as a way to resist slavery. Through the analysis of Sethe’s story, I recognized some of the theoretical points described previously in this work. It was seen that Sethe suffered an identity crisis when she discovered she had been *fixed* by her white master, in the sense that he had defined her as something she was not: an animal. From this point of the novel on, Sethe took three steps towards the construction of her identity. The first was the recognition and refusal to being identified as an animal, which led her to run away with her children. The second step was Sethe’s discovery of another way of viewing herself, learning to value her own body through Baby Suggs’ preaching. Finally, the third and furthest step in her identification process was the killing of her daughter,

which was not only an act of resistance, but also a refusal to being considered somebody else's *property*.

Until her child's death, Sethe's identification process was an individual one. The rest of the black community where Baby Suggs lived rejected her act, not understanding it was an extreme expression of the whole community's anxiety: the desire for freedom. The community isolated her from the group for eighteen years. This situation only changed when the women of the community found out Sethe's life was possessed by the presence of her resurrected daughter, Beloved, who came to bring the past back. Thus, they identified themselves with Sethe's story, understanding that the only experience they shared was exactly the experience of a "burden past," which all of them tried to deal with. In short, the identification process in *Beloved* started as an individual struggle to resist whites' definitions of blacks, but was eventually recovered by the rest of the black community, since it was an anxiety shared by all of them.

Differently from *Beloved*, in *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, Dionne Brand re-constructs the story of an Afro-Caribbean family from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. It was seen, in Chapter III, that this re-construction allowed the author to discuss how past experiences influenced the process of identity-formation of the characters portrayed in her work. Brand narrates the story of Marie Ursule, a slave who planned a collective suicide in 1824, but who saved her little daughter's life. This child, Bola, survived and had many children, whom she spread around the world as a strategy of survival, and as a way to prevent them from undergoing the same kinds of sufferings.

Bola's act of spreading her children was considered a representation of the diasporic condition slaves have suffered since the Middle Passage. Bola did not have the experience of belonging to a group or community, because her own mother sent her away to guarantee her survival. Her act reflects this. It was also noticed that, although

Bola's descendants had a similar past, they were a dispersed people, without a clear notion of their history. Moreover, they were led to an assimilationist identification process since they internalized the colonized view that being black meant being inferior (differently from Sethe, who never accepted being classified as an inferior being). Because of this, at some period of their lives, they realized that there was something wrong with their stories, something they could not make sense of. As Brand's characters failed to "assimilate," the book seems to suggest that this "assimilationist" strategy of survival also failed.

It can be seen that although both books deal with the question of the construction of black identity, each one presents a different strategy for the identification process. In *Beloved*, identity is constructed through Sethe's anxiety to become a free person, able to define herself according to her black values, an anxiety which is recovered by the black community where she lives. Thus, it is seen that, in this book, black identity is constructed as a way to resist white stereotypes, moving Sethe towards the black community, separate from whites. On the other hand, in *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, black identity is disintegrated, since black people are not together in a single community, but dispersed all over the world. This diasporic condition, forced upon them, makes them lose their power and move towards the white community, accepting an assimilationist strategy of survival.

These identification and un-identification processes reflect the characters' different reasons for committing their acts. Sethe is led to kill her daughter as a way to achieve freedom: she wants to be free from an oppressive system that does not view blacks as human beings. Conversely, Bola does not aspire freedom, but survival. Her strategy of spreading her children around is the alternative she finds to guarantee that some of them will be able to survive. Bola's concern (also Marie Ursule's) is with the

continuation of her family, her descendants, hoping that, in the future, things would be better for them. While Marie Ursule and Bola “send their children to the future,” Sethe interrupts the future of her children, killing one of them and “locking” the others from their present lives.

The analysis I have done in this work is not supposed to be a judgmental one (having to choose between “good” and “bad”), but a descriptive one. Nevertheless, it is important to enforce what was achieved by each strategy portrayed in the books. In Sethe’s case, although the community rejects her act at first, they finally rescue her from being possessed by the past, saving not only her life, but the whole community’s. In addition, Sethe’s daughter Denver also moves towards the communal life, being able to make sense of her past as a way to construct her present life. Thus, at the end of the novel, it can be seen that the process of construction of identity is recovered by the group, which views black identity as an “anchor,” something to rely upon to resist white stereotypes and domination.

Bola’s strategy, on the contrary, does not allow her descendants to have a sense of group identification. All of them are able to “survive” in the world, either in Trinidad or elsewhere. However, since they do not belong to a group or community, they lose contact with their history, no longer knowing who they are. Because of this, it is much easier for them to accept white stereotypes, leading them to try to assimilate their colonizers’ way of life. There is not a single story of Bola’s descendants that portrays a “successful” life. All of them are forced to live at the margins of white society, feeling increasingly rootless. It can be perceived that their race un-identification leads them to defeat, since they are isolated in the world and thus without enough power to resist white domination.

It is important to notice that the strategy which offers some hope in the future is the one portrayed in *Beloved*. Sethe's rescue by the community enables her to make sense of the past and construct a future. That is what makes the difference in the story. Through their group identification, blacks have more power to resist white domination and to reconstruct a representation of themselves which will beat up the stereotypes imposed on them. Stokely Carmichael, in his fights for civil rights and black power in the 1960's, already argued that blacks are oppressed because they are a group, and thus, they have to find a way to fight back as a group. He argued that

the question of whether or not we are individually suppressed is nonsensical and is a downright lie. We are oppressed as a group because we are black, not because we are lazy, not because we're apathetic, not because we're stupid, not because we smell, not because we eat watermelon and have good rhythm. We are oppressed because we are black and in order to get out of that oppression, one must feel the group power that one has. (193)

It is exactly this group power that Dionne Brand's characters are unable to feel. Since each of them is more concerned with his/her individual life, they get lost and assimilated by the dominant white ideology. It should be perceived, though, that they were led to this process because of the many diasporic experiences they had to undergo since the Middle Passage. Brand's underlying message seems to be to call black people's attention to the fact that they have been living like that since colonization, but that it is time to take a turn and start to re-think their own histories.

In conclusion, to my understanding, both Toni Morrison and Dionne Brand try to show the importance of the understanding of the past for the construction of black identities, especially to the construction of group identifications. Even if their characters show difficulties in starting to deal with their identification processes, their books powerfully denounce that this is due to the fact that whites always tried to dominate their lives and minds. The stereotypes whites always wanted to impose on

blacks reflected more about whites' own fears and their need to dominate the *others* than about what black people really were. That is clear for *Beloved's* Stamp Paid.

According to him,

[w]hitepeople believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle. Swift unnavigable waters, swinging screaming baboons, sleeping snakes, red gums ready for their sweet white blood. In a way [...] they were right. The more coloredpeople spent their strength trying to convince them how gentle they were, how clever and loving, how human, the more they used themselves up to persuade whites of something Negroes believed could not be questioned, the deeper and more tangled the jungle grew inside. But it wasn't the jungle blacks brought with them to this place from the other (livable) place. It was the jungle whitefolks planted in them. And it grew. It spread. In, through and after life, it spread, until it invaded the whites who had made it. Touched them every one. Changed and altered them. Made them bloody, silly, worse than even they wanted to be, so scared were they of the jungle they had made. The screaming baboon lived under their own white skin; the red gums were their own. (198-99)

This unmasking situation is very important to our understanding of some stereotypes we continue to impose not only on blacks but also on other groups, like homosexuals, Jews, Christians, Indians, Latin/South/North Americans, and many other groups we find to be different from us. I hope that this work has contributed to our awareness of some questions related to the identification process and that, after reading it, we will be willing to repeat Fanon's brilliant sentence: "O my body, make of me always [someone] who questions!" (*Black Skin* 232).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Blyn, Robin. "Memory Under Reconstruction: *Beloved* and the Fugitive Past." *Arizona Quarterly* 54.4 (1998): 111-140.
- Brand, Dionne. *At the Full and Change of the Moon*. Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 1999.
- . *Bread Out of Stone*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1994.
- . Interview. *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions*. Ed. Linda Hutcheon and Marion Richmond. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1990. 271-77.
- Budick, Emily Miller. "Absence, Loss, and the Space of History in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*." *Arizona Quarterly* 48.2 (1992): 117-138.
- Carmichael, Stokely. "Black Power." *A History of our Time*. Eds. William H. Chafe and Harvard Sitkoff. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Casas, Maria. "Codes as Identity: The Bilingual Representation of a Fragmented Literary Subject." *Language and Discourse* 2 (1994): 54-61.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 1967.
- . *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 1963.
- Fernandes, Alessandra Coutinho. *Mother-Daughter Relationships and the Search for Identity in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye, Sula and Beloved*. Diss. Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina. Florianópolis: privately printed, 1996.
- Figueiredo, Eurídice. *Construção de Identidades Pós-coloniais na Literatura Antilhana*. Niterói: Editora da UFF, 1998.
- FitzGerald, Jennifer. "Selfhood and Community: Psychoanalysis and Discourse in *Beloved*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 39 (1993): 689-707.

- Furman, Jan. *Toni Morrison's Fiction*. Charleston: University of South Carolina Press, 1996.
- Gadsby, Meredith M.. "‘I Suck Coarse Salt’: Caribbean Women Writers in Canada and the Politics of Transcendence." *Modern Fiction Studies* 44 (1998): 144-163.
- Gates, Jr., Henry Louis. *Figures in Black – Words, Signs, and the “Racial” Self*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- - -, Ed. Introduction. "Race," *Writing, and Difference*. By Gates, Jr. Chicago: The University Of Chicago Press, 1986.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Giraud, José Eduardo Fernandes. "This is a Story to Pass on": *Memory, History and Poetics in Toni Morrison's Beloved*. Diss. Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul. Porto Alegre: privately printed, 1993.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory - A Reader*. Eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993.
- - -. "Who Needs Identity." *Questions of Cultural Identity*. Eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay. London: SAGE Publications, 1996. 1-17.
- - -. *A Identidade Cultural na Pós-Modernidade*. Trans. Tomaz Tadeu da Silva and Guacira Lopes Louro. Rio de Janeiro: DP&A, 1999.
- Heffernan, Teresa. "Beloved and the Problem of Mourning." *Studies in the Novel* 30 (1998): 558-573.

- Henderson, Mae G. "Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Re-Membering the Body as Historical Text." *Comparative American Identities – Race, Sex, and Nationality in the Modern Text*. Ed. Hortense J. Spillers. New York: Routledge, 1991. 62-86.
- hooks, bell. "Postmodern Blackness." *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory - A Reader*. Eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993.
- Horvitz, Deborah. "Nameless Ghosts: Possession and Dispossession in *Beloved*." *Studies in American Fiction* (1989): 157-167.
- House, Elisabeth B. "Toni Morrison's Ghost: The Beloved Who Is Not Beloved." *Studies in American Fiction* (1990): 17-26.
- Krumholz, Linda. "The Ghosts of Slavery." *Toni Morrison's Beloved – A Casebook*. Eds. William L. Andrews and Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Kubitschek, Missy Dehn. *Toni Morrison – A Critical Companion*. London: Greenwood Press, 1998.
- Lassotta, Carmen. *Dionne Brand Page*. 27 March 2000 <<http://www.nwpassages.com/bios/brand.asp>>.
- Lawrence, David. "Fleshly Ghosts and Ghostly Flesh: The Word and the Body in *Beloved*." *Studies in American Fiction* (1991): 189-201.
- Matus, Jill. *Toni Morrison*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998.
- May, Samuel J. "Margaret Garner and Seven Others." *Toni Morrison's Beloved – A Casebook*. Eds. William L. Andrews and Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Miller, Marilyn and Marian Faux, eds. *The New York Public Library American History Desk Reference*. New York: Stonesong Press, 1997.

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. London: Picador, 1988.

- - -. *Lecture and Speech of Acceptance, upon the Award of the Nobel Prize for Literature, Delivered in Stockholm on the Seventh of December, Nineteen Hundred and Ninety-Three*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1994.

- - -. "Unspeakable Things, Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature." *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28 (1989): 1-34.

- - -. "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation." *Black Women Writers (1950-1980)*. Ed. Main Evans. New York: Anchor Press, 1984.

Moynagh, Maureen. *Review*. 27 March 2000 <http://www.cdn.lit.ubc.ca/reviews/1999/moynagh_0899.html&1Brand>

Parrish, Timothy. "Imagining Slavery: Toni Morrison and Charles Johnson." *Studies in American Fiction* 25 (1997): 81-100.

Peach, Linden. *Toni Morrison*. London: Macmillan, 1995.

Pérez-Torres, Rafael. "Knitting and Knotting the Narrative Thread – *Beloved* as Postmodern Novel." *Modern Fiction Studies* 39 (1993): 689-707.

Peterson, Nancy J. "'Say Make Me, Remake Me': Toni Morrison and the Reconstruction of African-American History." *Toni Morrison – Critical and Theoretical Approaches*. Ed. Nancy Peterson. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

Renk, Kathleen J. "'Her Words are Like Fire': The Storytelling Magic of Dionne Brand." *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 27:4 (1996): 97-111.

- Rushdy, Ashraf H. A. "Daughters Signifyin(g) History: The Example of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*." *American Literature* 64 (1992): 567-597.
- Samuels, Wilfred D. and Cleonora Hudson-Wemms. *Toni Morrison*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990.
- Scruggs, Charles. "The Invisible City in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*." *Arizona Quarterly* 48.3 (1992): 95-132.
- Thiong'o, Ngugi wa. "The Language of African Literature." *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory - A Reader*. Eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993.
- West, Cornel. "The New Cultural Politics of Difference." *The Cultural Studies Reader*. Ed. Simon During. New York, London: Routledge, 1993.
- Zinn, Howard. *A People's History of the United States*. New York: Harper & Row, 1980.