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BODY MARKS OF THE PAST IN TONI MORRISON'S *A MERCY* AND *HOME*

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Abstract: Toni Morrison's project of reimagining individual memories of the African American past has been immortalized by the image of the chokecherry tree of scar tissue on Sethe's back in *Beloved*. Invisible and dumb for Sethe, the scars have to be faced and interpreted with the help of others in order to process traumatic memories of the slave past. The image questions a presumed opposition between objects of memory as separate from subjects of memory, as the wound, the supposed object is located *in* the body of the subject, Sethe. Body marks of the past also appear in Morrison's novels after 2003, which are generally considered sparse compared to her previous texts. Relying on Marianne Hirsch's method of reading how body marks create a "sense memory" of traumatic experience, the paper explores the webs of meaning invoked by bodily wounds and other extended objects of memory in Morrison's late novels. The paper claims that although these novels continue to rely on the representation and processing of sense memories, they represent a truncated version compared to earlier novels, in which wounds figure not so much as metaphoric nodes of interaction, but rather as themes.
Key words: Toni Morrison, Marianne Hirsch, objects of memory, sense memory, body marks, processing the racial past.

Introduction

Toni Morrison's fictional explorations of the African American past have foregrounded questions at the intersection of memory studies and African American studies since the 1970s. Morrison's texts started to fill in some of the unchartered territories of

American national memory, as she wrote about how the stories of individual African Americans cast new light on specific periods in US history. Her poetic, musical, polyphonic, elaborate, and often extensive fictional narratives focused specifically on how African American women experience their blackness, how they remember slavery and its legacies, racism, and colourism. Morrison's writings explored the problematics of remembering an undocumented or underdocumented African American past. In particular, her notion of 'rememory' emerged as a key term that referred to communal memories of the African American past. In a posthumous essay, Morrison refers to it as "recollecting and remembering as in reassembling the members of the body, the family, the population of the past" (Morrison 2019; Raynaud 69). Morrison's fictional explorations into the African American past showcase the interrelations of personal memory and communal history, and thereby contest established narratives of the past.

After 2003, Morrison's novels have become sparse, the plots simpler than before, but critics continue to study how memory, loss, and sacrifice are represented in them (Tally 2015). *Love* (2005) explores the long history of interconnected family betrayals and love between the 1920s and 1970s from the perspective of women in the 1990s who have all been impacted (Smith 110). Slavery is shown to be part of the American origins narrative in *A Mercy* (Babb 148), in which personal bodily memories conflict with communal memory in the construction of a new community (Scheiber 2015, 82). Quan finds three media of memory, architecture, writing, and body combined in it (2019, 558-9). Parallel traumas of a mostly forgotten Korean war and the racially divided world of the 1950s are verbalized in the testimonies of *Home* (Scheiber 2020, 724), while *God Save the Child* (2015) explores the afterlife of childhood trauma (Kovács 2019) in the corporate present.

The theoretical context of Morrison's fictional investigations, memory studies, have reconceptualised the notion of memory in the past two decades. Positing a murkier boundary between human and non-human than before, the social potential of objects has been highlighted across diverse disciplines. Objects of study have been problematized as having lives of their own, not so much possessing a social meaning but rather capable of social acts (Ireland and Lydon 3). At the same time, the importance of emotions and affect in social meaning-making performances have been discussed (6). In the wake of the sweeping redefinition of the human, memory studies have reacted by reconceptualising memory itself less as an "object" of research, and more as "part of larger networks and 'media ecologies' subject to boundless variations

and remediations" (Knittel and Driscoll 2017, 381). As memory studies imagine memory less as an isolated object and more as a network, objects of memory are also thought of in a more extended way. As Ann Rigney puts it, the focus on the study of discrete objects practiced in memory studies so far needs to be extended to "the interactions between the symbolic, the material, and the human within the broader ecology in which they operate" (Rigney 475). Also, the study of human affects and sense memories have developed (Radstone and Hodgkin 13); for instance, Jill Bennett examined the role of sense memories in the memory of traumatic experience (Bennett 28). Bennet's work represents a general combined interest in the cultural and the biological, "the idea that memory is in the first place a physical process" (Groes 6). In 2012, Marianne Hirsch builds her study of how the visual input of body wounds can trigger sense memories of the Holocaust (Hirsch 2012, 80) on Bennett's work.

Given the connection between Morrison's texts and memory studies, it seems timely to ask how Morrison's focus on 'rememory' can be considered in the context of recent reconceptualizations in the field of memory studies. The paper examines the role of objects and affect in mapping the memories of the African American past in Toni Morrison's novels. Moreover, it looks into how this problematization remains valid both for Morrison's highly canonized texts from the 1980s and the ones published after 2001. The paper argues that in Morrison's later texts, objects of memory constitute less pervasive social networks of meaning than those before 2001.

This paper sets out to address the problem of objects of memory and discuss some of the convergences between *Beloved* (1987) and two of her later texts, *A Mercy* (2008) and *Home* (2012), from the perspective of how objects of memory operate in them to form a broader ecology of the material, the human, and the symbolic. In particular, the paper relies on Marianne Hirsch's concept of "sense memory" to investigate the sensual elements invoked by body marks of past suffering in the ecology of the novels.

1. Morrison's notion of 'rememory' and objects of memory

In her critical writings, Toni Morrison often discusses diverse linguistic performances of race. There are two interconnected areas of this interest in language and race: one is the focus on the phenomenon of 'race talk' in language performance, while the other is the continued engagement with the historical and literary representations of race relations often referred to by her notion of 'rememory.' The act of rememory in

language use, however, poses the question of the relations among the subject of memory (the one who remembers), the object of memory (that triggers this process), and the medium that is used for representing the act of memory.

Morrison's notion of 'race talk' refers to the way everyday languages of mastery rely on established hierarchies of race. In general, the practiced writer's role is to draw attention to the way power is exerted in language, Morrison claims in her Nobel Lecture. Be it "[s]exist language, racist language, theistic language – all are typical of the policing languages of mastery, and cannot, do not permit new knowledge or encourage the mutual exchange of ideas," she writes (Morrison 1993b), indicating that languages of mastery are dead. In contrast, a writer's living language "shifts attention away from assertions of power to the instrument through which that power is exercised" (Morrison 1993b) by also offering a chance to revise assertions of power. For Morrison, race talk is one type of dead language use that refuses dialogue and muffles dissent. In practice, it means "the explicit insertion into everyday life of racial signs and symbols that have no meaning other than pressing African Americans to the lowest level of the racial hierarchy," Morrison writes (Morrison 1993a). The role of the novelist in relation to race talk is to point out and criticize linguistic assertions of power embedded in it.

Morrison's essays and novels testify to her engagement with the literary representations of race relations, with a focus on the history and the legacy of slavery. In her article "The Site of Memory," Morrison claims that she does not trust existing accounts of the history of slavery, accounts that may come from white authors or authors of colour with a limited perspective. Accounts from whites disregarded the stories of Africans, whereas African American slaves themselves wrote carefully censored accounts. As Morrison puts it, "popular taste discouraged writers from dwelling too long or too carefully on the more sordid details of their experience" (Morrison 1995, 90). Too terrible details were usually shrouded in silence or misrepresented. A case in point is Linda Brent's story of sexual abuse where the white editor, Lydia Maria Child, takes responsibility for revealing the delicate subject and its monstrous nature (91). Morrison claims there is no mention of the interior life of slaves in slave narratives, either. As a novelist, she would like to reconstruct the world on the basis of existing textual remains, the images in existing narratives. She wishes to fill in

the blanks indicated by these images or pictures in the existing narratives[1] (Morrison 1995, 92).

Morrison's term 'rememory' indicates the performative nature of the act of memory in her thinking. The term is used in her novel *Beloved* to refer to the protagonist Sethe's engagement with her slave past and the infanticide her slave past involved:

> [w]hat I remember is a picture floating out there outside my head. [...] Right in the place where it happened. [...] if you go there–you who never was there–if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you (Morrison 1988, 38).

Although Sethe would like to forget the events of the past and blots out any conscious attempt to recall the past, she cannot change eighteen years following her release from slavery. The objects in her house, her house itself, her surviving child, her whole community provide her with constant reminders of her past deed. When Paul D, an ex-slave from her plantation suddenly arrives and stirs her repressed memories, the process of rememory is set loose. It even takes the form of a materialized ghost that almost kills her.

As a case in point, let us refer to the act of rememory the novel *Beloved* performed for Morrison herself. It is well known that *Beloved* itself was written as a response to an actual article that gives a white minister's eye-witness account of Margaret Garner, a slave woman in jail, who had murdered her child.[2] Yet, the later events of Garner's actual story bear no relation to the events narrated in *Beloved,* as the novel stages the different ways in which characters remember and process the wounds of slavery, as each character reformulates his or her reading of the case. The

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[1] In her "Memory, Creation, Writing" Morrison explains the nature of this retelling as a confrontation with the received reality of the West. "My compact with the reader is not to reveal an already established reality. . . . In the Third World cosmology as I perceive it, reality is not already constituted by my literary predecessors in Western culture." She adds: "[my work] must centralize and animate information discredited by the West . . . as lore or gossip or magic or sentiment" (Morrison 1984, 388). Also, to reflect traditions of African American culture faithfully, her work "must make conscious use of the characteristics of its art forms: antiphony, the group nature of art, functionality, improvisational nature, its relation to performance, the critical voice in it" (389). Music is a basic source for her, a kind of key to Afro-American artistic practices, she told Paul Gilroy (Gilroy 1993, 181) and the role of African music in *Beloved* has been discussed widely (Eckstein 2006, Kovács 2016, 42).

[2] The brief article, "A Visit to a Slave Mother Who Killed Her Child" was written by a minister, P. S. Bassett, and published on February 12, 1856 in *The American Baptist*. That article had been republished in *The Black Book* of documents on black history edited by Morrison in 1974 (Harris 10).

original newspaper article, the "clipping" acquires a life of its own in Morrison's hand, and then among the characters, as she writes the novel.

2. Sense memory and body marks in Morrison's *Beloved*

In her book, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*, Marianne Hirsch examines the difference between Morrison's "rememory" and her own term "postmemory." Postmemory for Hirsch means a state of "mediation" and processing of trauma in contrast to the regressive wounding of "rememory" (Hirsch 82-3). Hirsch employs the complex cross-generational relationship between mothers and daughters to best illustrate the workings of postmemory, closely investigating how daughters of Holocaust survivors 'inherit' the painful experiences of their mothers through both rememory, the repetition of pain through subconscious self-inflicted re-enactment, and postmemory, the artistic remediation of the cross-generational trauma.

Hirsch is interested in how bodily marks of trauma represent the past and can be transmitted through generations. She distinguishes the body mark as a visual form of transmitting memory from the verbal form of transmitting it through literary language. Although several theorists like Shoshana Felman and Geoffrey Hartman have seen literary language as especially suitable for transmitting trauma,[3] Hirsch insists on the importance of the body mark in the transfer of memory (Hirsch 80). She relies on Jill Bennett and Charlotte Delbo's concept of "sense memory" that focuses on ruptured skin and wounds that break the surface of the skin and thereby impress others. These ruptures of the skin are markers of the past as "sensation rather than representation" (80.). Hirsch's inquiry focuses on how intergenerational transmissions of trauma, especially between traumatized mothers and their daughters, can take the form of sense memory and become remediation, postmemory, instead of re-enactment, rememory.

As an introduction, Hirsch analyses the role of slave mark in *Beloved* as a case of visual form of transmitting memory. Sethe's mother shows the slave mark under her left breast to Sethe as a way to identify her body, and the daughter both wishes to have a mark like that of her own and is afraid of having to have one. Sethe "fears having

[3] Moreover, Hirsch sees authors like Hannah Arendt, Shoshana Felman and Cathy Caruth as her theoretical predecessors in exploring the workings of memory not Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora, and Michel Foucault (Hirsch 2012, 16).

to repeat her mother's story and longs for the recognition that ensures her identity as her mother's daughter" (81), a synchronous desire and hesitation to repeat the parent's bodily mark of suffering. In Hirsch's reading, the young Sethe's ambiguous desire to re-enact the parent's suffering does not involve remediation.

I argue that the notion of sense memory can be applied for the effect of another wound created in the novel as well. The older Sethe's story of learning to remediate the sufferings of her own past actually begins with a sense memory evoked by a healed wound. I am referring to the widely-known image of the chokecherry tree of scar tissue on Sethe's back in the book that evokes the sense memory of her sufferings to Paul D. He, a former slave from the same plantation, is moved beyond words by stroking the tree on her bare back with his lips:

> And when the top of her dress was around her hips and he saw the sculpture her back had become, like the decorative work of an ironsmith too passionate for display, he could think but not say, "Aw, Lord, girl." And he would tolerate no peace until he had touched every ridge and leaf of it with his mouth, none of which Sethe could feel because her back skin had been dead for years. What she knew was that the responsibility for her breasts, at last, was in somebody else's hands (Morrison 1987, 18).

Sethe never sees the wound, she cannot even feel it because of the dead skin, but Paul D's emotional and physical reaction to it makes Sethe wonder if she could for once "[t]rust things and remember things because the last of the Sweet Home men was there to catch her if she sank?" (Morrison 1987, 18). Paul D's reaction to seeing the wound she herself never confronted initiates their joint remembering of the past. The materialized ghost of her dead daughter Beloved appears after this, and the painful work of mediating memories of the past begins.

The metaphorical chokecherry tree of wounds is part of Sethe's body but is at the same time an object of memory to be remembered by Sethe, the subject of memory. A clear distinction between the subject and object of memory is impossible, as both belong to the same body. Furthermore, it is not Sethe who interprets the wound, but Paul D, and it is his reaction, in turn, that penetrates Sethe's eighteen-year-old defence mechanisms of fending of memories of the past. The effect of the wound is rooted in sense memory that bridges the gap between Sethe's past and present through the mediation of Paul D.

Another widely known object of memory in *Beloved* is problematic not because it is part of somebody's physical body, but because it is an object which seems to have a will of its own. House 124 is the prototypical haunted gothic house setting for the novel. The ghosts that animate the place resist the actions of the inhabitants and scare away Sethe's boys. Paul D's entry into the house meets a fierce reaction on the part of the house, as he is actually forced to fight his way in. The unvoiced stories of the past that Sethe does not want to face are stirring though the ghosts invoked into existence by Paul D's entrance and will culminate in the appearance of Beloved herself. Beloved as a character poses yet another question from the perspective of objects of memory. Her appearance is normally regarded as an embodiment of Sethe's memories, a ghostly projection of repressed memories that has taken a bodily form and that initiates a change in the life of the whole community. The character Beloved, then, displays divergent traits: on the one hand, she is the representation of the subject of memory's repressed emotions, while on the other hand she has a materiality, some independent actions of her own, and definitely a marked effect on others. However, she is Sethe's *daughter*, is derived from her mother's body. Also, her materiality and actions are not accompanied by an independent reflexive consciousness, as Beloved does not talk much. It is her presence and acts that change the life of the others who interact with her.

Morrison's project of reimagining and voicing individual memories of the African American past has been immortalized by the image of the chokecherry tree of scars on Sethe's back. The image relies on the workings of sense memory when it represents the ongoing wounds of slavery and initiates the work of communal remediation that eventually ends the repetitive reenactment of the pains of the slave past. The book also relies on objects of memory like Sethe's house and Beloved's character that link the past to the present. These objects however, as we have seen, construct lives of their own for different characters in the story.

3. Objects of memory and body marks of the past in Morrison's late novels

In the final part of the article, I discuss the role of objects of memory in two of Morrison's novels *A Mercy (2008) and Home (2012)*. Morrison's novels after 2003 are generally considered to be sparse compared to her previous texts, but they retain an interest in young African American female characters who grow up with a ruptured relation to their mothers, a psychological wound from their pasts to be relived and

processed. The similarity of this theme to Morrison's project of rememory poses a question about objects of memory: what role do sense memories or transitional objects of memory play in these later texts? In this section I would like to show how a problematic mother-daughter relationship is still central to these late stories but is not represented fully. Body marks of the past do not transfer memories of an earlier generation or, if they do, this remains unspecified. Instead of transgenerational transference, sense memories of the past activated through others and transitional objects work within a given generation.

A Mercy is an American 'origins narrative' (Babb 147) as it retells the familiar story of colonial beginnings of the US, but with a focus on the emerging institution of slavery. The novel tells a microhistory of how slavery spread and was connected to race through the story of Florens, a young black slave sold up North at a plantation in Virginia. A coloured slave mother gives up her 8-year-old daughter, Florens, to a Protestant Dutch-English new master, Jacob Vaark, to save her from the rape and abuse she can expect at the hands of her previous owner, a Catholic Portuguese one. The daughter, who knows nothing about her mother's reasons for giving her up, feels utterly betrayed and abandoned and jealous of her small brother. Up North, Florens becomes the only black slave in the Vaark household that holds three female slaves and two male indentured workers. The next black person she sees is a free young blacksmith who forges the iron rails of the new house Vaark builds. Florens falls in love with the free black man immediately, only to be abandoned by him later because she hurt his adopted young son. The repeated scenes of abandonment and rejection are written by Florens, who carves her letters into the floorboards and walls of the newly built farmhouse not used by her newly widowed mistress.

Florens's ruptured relation to her mother is rooted in her mother's physical abuse by slave masters but there is no body mark of her mother's past Florens could identify with or process. She never learns about her mother's background or about her fears for Florens, either. As Florens grows up, she begins to read the signs of the world (letters, weather, plants, animals) and falls for and is rejected by her lover, the blacksmith. Disappointment and a powerful sense of rejection make her want to make sense of her own story by writing it down. Besides recording her own psychological transformations in writing, her body also gets transformed: Florens's unusually tender soles become hard as stone. While living with her mother, she wears shoes discarded by the Portuguese mistress instead of being barefoot, something that keeps her feet

soft. In the North, her Native American slave foster mother, Lina, prepares her deerskin moccasins. When Florens is sent on her journey to fetch the blacksmith to the farm, she is given her dead master's shoes. When she flees from the blacksmith, she has to leave the shoes, is finally barefoot and by the time she gets home as a transformed person, her soles are also calloused. Therefore, Florens's transformation is marked both by her hardened soles and her sprawling writing on the wall of the new house.

Florens's change is also motivated by seeing positive female role models, primarily her slave foster mother Lina. Lina's village died out because of a smallpox infection taking place when she was six. She was adopted by a white family and was required to learn the ways of the Caucasians; Vaark bought her at 14, Christianized, speaking English, beaten. Yet, she made an effort to remember the ordered ways of her life at her Native village, the tales, cures, beliefs of her mother, and mingled these elements with her education at the farm. She bathed, slept, and paid attention to nature as was expected according to the Native way, while she performed all her chores at the household and kept the two sides in balance. This mixed heritage made her a self-reliant survivor figure for Florens to learn from.

Another story of survival Florens was acquainted with was that of Daughter Jane, whom her religious community wanted to condemn for her cross-eye, which they considered to be the mark of the devil. Jane's legs had to be whipped regularly by her mother in order to show she could bleed; therefore, she could not be a demon. Jane's life is in danger in the community, only her wounds save her temporarily. Florens's arrival occasioned the need to reconsider the severity of Jane's condition: the elders saw Florens's black skin as an even worse mark of the devil than Jane's cross-eye and decided to detain her and check whether she was a serpent. Jane comprehends the situation and she hobbles along with Florens on her ruined legs into the woods in order to show her an escape. Florens thinks of Lina and Jane as she considers her past and future in her writing: she wishes to heal and begins to etch sentences into the panelling of Jacob Vaark's house.

The third house Jabob Vaark builds on his farm becomes an object of memory as it acquires different uses for the surviving characters who relate to it. Vaark wants to build it to create a symbol of his material advancement in the world, taking his cue from the Portuguese slaveholder's pompous house he saw in Virginia. Although there is no need to build a new house on the farm, he and his wife Rebekka both enjoy the

hustle and bustle of construction, the creation of the wrought iron fence decorated by serpents. When Vaark contracts smallpox, the house is not yet fully finished, but he orders his women to carry him into the empty edifice to die. Rebekka falls ill as well, but survives and sees in this a sign of God's mercy, that in turn requires her to shun all godless acts from her life. For her, the new house where her husband died becomes a major mark of their previous sins, so she never goes near the house again. For Florens, whose calloused soles and soul need solace, the house provides a peaceful place for reflection and also a reminder of her ex-lover. The wood floor and panels of the abandoned rooms eventually become the paper on which she can tell about her own transformation.

A Mercy traces the emergence of the institution of slavery in seventeenth-century colonial America through the microhistories of its interacting characters and their memories. Its protagonist, Florens, suffers from being abandoned by her slave mother but there is no transgenerational body mark that would indicate the presence of sense memories she inherited from her mother. Florens's sense of abandonment is contained through the example of fellow female survivors who show her how to stand up for herself. Simultaneously, Florens's own body hardens as a result of her own emotional experiences, as she becomes more self-reliant and reflective. As a central object of memory in the text, the new colonial house on the farm becomes a reason for reflection for different characters who draw their various morals from seeing and using it.

Morrison's *Home* (2012) relates the story of two African American siblings' return to live in the Southern village of their childhood whose objectified memories they learn to reconcile with. Their memories of a neglected pre-WWII childhood mingle with their present strife in the 1950s: the experience of the Korean war overseas and Southern racial bias on the home front. On the one hand, Frank, the brother, is a Korean war veteran who suffers from post-war visions and bouts of inertia. On the other hand, Ycidra, his sister, barely survives medical experiments her employer, a Southern white gynaecologist, performs in her womb. Childhood memories of humiliation and fear mingle with repeated war memories and present experiences in the book mainly in the form of sense memories of wounds. The image of the country house appears fleetingly as another transitional object of memory. The primary act of memory in the novel is the reburial of the remains of a dead man the siblings saw buried alive when they were children.

Memories of an unhappy childhood and experiences of a segregated present are interposed in *Home*. The family arrive at the village in Georgia suddenly after they have to flee from their home town because of a race riot in Texas. With their mother and father essentially absent, the kids are taken care of by their foster grandmother, who resents their presence and very existence. Ycinda has to endure daily humiliations, as this is the way her grandma takes her revenge on the family that invaded her house:

> The girl was hopeless and had to be corrected every minute. The circumstances of her birth did not bode well. There was probably a medical word for her awkwardness, for a memory so short even a switching could not help her remember to close the chicken coop at night, or not to spill food on her clothes every single day" (Morrison 2012, 88).

> Branded early as an unlovable, barely tolerated "gutter child" by Lenore, the only one whose opinion mattered to her parents, exactly like Miss Ethel said, she had agreed with the label and believed herself worthless (Morrison 2012, 128-9).

It is only Frank who shields Ycindra a little with his presence. In addition, the two experience a frightening event together: they are left to wander around and they sneak into a nearby farm to watch horses when they witness the quick disposal of the body of a black man into the ground, a leg still jerking. They are paralyzed by fear and fear for their own lives should they be noticed, so the brother covers her sister's eyes and calms her by his arms to stop her trembling, to make her stay quiet, and later they manage to escape. The memory of this scene opens the book and it is revoked by brother and sister alike later on. It is both a covert reason why they both felt they had to leave the village very young, and also a trace of the bond between them.

In the present, Frank finds it difficult to process his experience of war. He was happy to leave his futureless home with his friends as a soldier. However, he witnessed the death of both of his friends, and saw and made many others die, and visual memories of these instances revisit him repeatedly:

> So, as was often the case when he was alone and sober, whatever the surroundings, he saw a boy pushing his entrails back in, holding them in his palms like a fortune-teller's globe shattering with bad news; or he heard a boy with only the bottom half of his face intact, the lips calling mama. … They never went away, these pictures (20).

He also remembers how he killed a young Korean girl scavenging for food and providing sexual service by shooting off her face. The colourful images of wounded and torn bodies haunt him, so he keeps drifting to get rid of them. It is only a desperate call for help from Georgia that makes him return. He finds his sister half dead, and instinctively he takes her to their village for treatment.

Not unlike her brother, Ycidra escaped the village and her grandma early on, but the brand of awkwardness sticks to her. She gets married at 14 to go to town, where she realizes her husband married her for her grandma's car, which he quickly disappears with. Alone again, Ycidra earns her living as a servant, then as a maid for the white doctor whose experiments render her barren and almost kill her. It is the women of their old village who heal her by their communal care. She understands that these women, although they have as little schooling as she does, are skilled in ways she is not:

> Some of them had to have Bible verses read to them because they could not decipher print themselves, so they had sharpened the skills of the illiterate. Perfect memory, photographic minds, keen senses of smell and hearing. And they knew how to repair what an educated bandit doctor had plundered (128).

The weeks she spends in the household of Miss Ethel change Ycidra. She educates her altogether into "a Cee who would never again need [Frank's] hand over her eyes or his arms to stop her murmuring bones" (128). The healing that takes place is not only physical: it is a homecoming and healing that for Cee includes learning the skills of the local women, a caring way of sewing, singing, gardening, cooking, but also a sense of valuing herself. As Ethel puts it: "You young and a woman and there's serious limitation in both, but you a person too. Don't let Lenore or some trifling boyfriend and certainly no devil doctor decide who you are. That's slavery. Somewhere inside you is that free person I am talking about." (126). Ycidra agrees, and as her womb heals, so does the girl's self-esteem.

Frank understands Cee's change and his modified role as brother. He also feels more useful in performing local roles than when he was a boy. As an acknowledgement of their changing attitudes to the place and themselves, they dig up the body of the man they saw dumped when they were kids. They bury his remains shrouded in Ycidra's first quilt and in this manner mark the place for remembrance. They both have

certainly come a long way to redeem the childhood scene of fear by putting the unknown man to rest. They create a visible mark of his suffering in place of the unmarked grave in order to process it.

Another object from their shared past is the house Frank and Cee return to, it is the rented home of their childhood. Frank makes it inhabitable during Cee's convalescence, and then Cee transforms it into a home with the help of the women of the community as she performs her newly acquired domestic and general skills. This house was never the site of a proper family, nor is it likely to become the site of one with the two survivors living in it, but it becomes a place where the siblings can start to reassess their experiences and come closest to contentment with their lives.

Home interweaves sense memories of the past into the present that limit the functioning of its two protagonists. Sense memories of their own childhood are accompanied by Frank's panic reactions to mental pictures of war wounds and an actual almost lethal wound inflicted on Ycindra's womb. The story of homecoming traces how all these sense memories of the past are processed and healed by the skills of local women, and ultimately by the burial of the dead man.

Conclusion

In the context of posthumanism, a new interest in the materiality and affects of memory has been stimulated in the field of memory studies in the past two decades. This interest offers the chance of reassessing well-mapped areas of memory studies from the perspectives of the crumbling distinction between subjects and objects of memory, the materiality of memory, and the emotional performances of memory. In this paper, Toni Morrison's interventions into telling the history of African American women have been considered with reference to recent conceptualizations of objects of memory.

The paper started out with a hypothetical opposition between Morrison's concept of rememory and Hirsch's concept of postmemory, a reenactment and remediation, respectively, to argue that rememory in Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) involves not only reenactment of transgenerational memories but also the reworking and remediation of transgenerational sense memories. The paper argued that objects of memory like Sethe's house or even Beloved the ghost are difficult to locate as distinct from humans: as objects without will or lives of their own. In comparison, two of the author's later books, *A Mercy* (2008) and *Home* (2012), focus on memories in the lives

of given characters rather than on transgenerational memories. The paper has shown that body marks and their sense memoires recur, but that their presence remains less pervasive in *A Mercy* and *Home* than in *Beloved*. The body marks exert their work within the lives of the characters, cause hurt and threaten lives, but are ultimately easily eliminated. The paper has shown that an overpowering sense of healing dominates the ending of *A Mercy* and *Home*, but processing and remediation through sense memories are only implied in them.

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