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Historiography, Communal Identity and Feminine *Jouissance* —On Toni Morrison's *Paradise* *

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Abstract

Toni Morrison's *Paradise* (1998) exposes the hazard of forming a communal historiography as an ideological narrative founded on racial purity. In light of Lacanian psychoanalysis and its application to the critique of ideology, this paper aims to explore how the communal identity is hinged on the ideological historiography and how a non-historical kernel that resists historicization is displaced onto the fantasmatic "Out There," a constitutive outside that simultaneously constitutes and destabilizes the socio-symbolic system of the all-black community. "Out There" is also embodied by the Convent women, who stand for the Other whose self-sufficiency is demonized as debauchery in Ruby's patriarchal fantasy. Moreover, Morrison renders "Out There" a place where healing and redemption reside. The constitutive outside which the town's self-enclosing patriarchal socio-symbolic system expels is precisely the locus where its hope for change is located; to put it in light

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of the Lacanian concept of sexuation, this constitutive outside is none other than the domain of the feminine logic, where Lacanian psychoanalysis considers being the chance for cultural change. The magic-realistic rendition of the disappearance of the bodies of the Convent women insinuates a possibility of salvation figured by the vision of a door and a window leading to a place “out there”—a feminine, non-historical domain where a traumatic encounter occurs to redeem historical failures. In contrast with the fantasmatic earthly “paradise” always founded on exclusion, this domain, symbolized by Piedade’s songs, is the home and paradise Morrison has in mind.

Key Words: ideological historiography, communal identity, constitutive outside, non-historical kernel of historicity, feminine *jouissance*