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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*

Let no foreigner who has bound himself to the LORD say,  
 “The Lord will surely exclude me from his people.” And  
 let not any eunuch complain, “I am only a dry tree.”  
 (*Isaiah*, 56: 3)<sup>1</sup>

*Paradise*, the last of Morrison’s historical trilogy,<sup>2</sup> rewrites African American history from 1877, the year when the Exoduster movement began, to 1976, even though the novel is set between 1965 and 1976. Historical events like World War II and the civil rights movement are readdressed in the narrative from an African-American perspective. In terms of J. Brooks Bouson, *Paradise*, tracing the African-American experiences from Reconstruction, Exoduster movement to civil rights movement, “complete[s] the historical survey of African-American life that [Morrison] began in *Beloved*’s depiction of slavery and its aftermaths, and in *Jazz*’s focus on the post-Civil War era and the black migration to northern cities” (2000: 192). Resembling the previous two works, i.e. *Beloved* and *Jazz*, this novel reveals the author’s persistent concerns with history, communal identity and gender, albeit with much more complexity and difficulty; as Phillip Page has observed, the difficulty of the novel is “a persistent theme” in its early reviews (2001: 637). The dialectic between amnesia and memory prevails in Morrison’s oeuvre. As Nancy J. Peterson remarks, while the novel intends to “restore historical memory,” it also reveals the “deadly effects” resulting from “obsessive and insistent historicizing” (2001: 91). However, in this novel, that which has drawn her critics’ attention is not an anxiety over amnesia; unlike her previous novels, *Paradise* seems to issue a warning against the horrific repercussion of obsession with

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible* (New International Version).

<sup>2</sup> Critics like Krumholz (2002), Bouson (2000), Davidson (2001), Peterson (2001) and Widdowson (2001) all regard Morrison’s *Beloved*, *Jazz* and *Paradise* as a historical trilogy that revise the official history to come to terms with the traumatic past of the African Americans, while Gauthier terms it a “trilogy of excessive love” (2005: 396).

memory. Jill Matus thereby points out that this novel “explores the excesses of commemoration as a symptom of enduring trauma” (1998: 154). To put it more precisely, instead of anxiety over the exclusion from the American official historiography, the novel unveils and criticizes the formation of African-American historiography as selected communal memories upon which the communal identity can be hinged. Communal history assumes such an important role that Rob Davidson even argues that the real protagonist of the novel is the community of Ruby (2001: 356).

The novel starts with the sentence “They shoot the white girl first,” which turns out to be one of the novel’s textual ruptures. The identity of the white girl and the disappearance of the bodies of the Convent women remain mysterious even at the end of the novel. These two enigmas, both pertaining to the massacre in the Convent, serve as a traumatic kernel inaccessible to symbolization/narration. As Todd McGowan indicates, followed by no further explication, the initial sentence of the novel is like “an act that occurs outside of any symbolic frame, standing on its own” (2004: 106). Besides, the narrative structure is arranged by episodes focusing on different female characters, starting and ending with the account of the massacre of the Convent women—a traumatic event that haunts the whole narrative process. Though the narration of the novel seems less “postmodern” than *Jazz* (Duvall, 2000: 131; Matus 1998: 156), Morrison’s postmodern thinking is once again made explicit in this resistance against totalization. The multi-voiced narrative mode of the novel, as Katrine Dalsgård observes, works “against the notion of a totalizing master narrative” and the ending even manifests a “postmodern skepticism” toward paradisiacal wholeness (2001: 238, 244). Page also maintains that with the “nonlinear, polyvocal, multistranded” narrative style, the questions the narrative induces serve to generate the reader’s “hermeneutic concentration” (2001: 637, 638; Davidson, 2001: 362). However, I would argue that it is the textual enigmas or ruptures that function as a maneuver adopted to prevent the narrative from forming a totalizing conception in the

hermeneutic process. The ambiguity or the multiplicity of significance derived from these textual ruptures has to do with the author's objection to a totalizing view of historiography and her revelation of the inclination of the trauma to resist symbolization/historicization.

## I. Historiography as an Ideological Narrative

The master narrative in this novel is the communal storytelling<sup>3</sup> of "Disallowing," an event that occurred during the black's migration to the west in the 1870s, known as the Exoduster Movement.<sup>4</sup> The traumatic and humiliating experience of being rejected by people of the same race is constantly repeated and thereby forms a collective memory in an all-black town built by the descendents of the leaders of the migration. The commemoration of Disallowing forms an official history in which the event and the establishment of the African-American community are fabricated as a mythological account serving to suture the wound of racial discrimination.

After Reconstruction, during which the blacks obtained the rights of full citizenship, dispossessed ex-slaves migrated from Mississippi and Louisiana to Oklahoma to escape the menace of racism. Led by Zechariah Morgan, alias Coffee, nine families, consisting of 158 ex-slaves, embarked on a long, strenuous journey to find a "haven" that they assumed would shelter them from the blizzard of racial discrimination. All the way from Mississippi to Louisiana they were "[t]urned away by rich Choctaw and poor whites, chased by yard dogs, jeered at by camp prostitutes and their children" (Morrison, 1998: 13); however, to paraphrase Morrison's own words, what really left them with "a burn whose

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<sup>3</sup> As Davidson points out, in Morrison's novels, storytelling is historiography (2001: 355).

<sup>4</sup> The migration in the novel is actually ten years later than the Exoduster Movement dated in history (Flint, 2006: 587).

scar tissue was never numbed” is the “contemptuous dismissal” by the Negro towns (Morrison, 1998: 14). They were renounced by Negroes with lighter skin; this rejection dawned on them as a new kind of racism they had never expected and understood—“light-skinned against black”(Morrison 1998: 194). Zechariah and his people called this intra-racial discrimination “Disallowing,” which became a controlling story repetitively recited through generations in their community.

Making their way further west, these Exodusters founded their own all-black town called Haven in 1890, the prosperity of which, nevertheless, declined in 1934 and vanished in 1949. Then, the twin patriarchs of the town, Deacon and Steward Morgan, following in their grandfather’s footsteps, urged the townspeople, totaling fifteen families, to migrate deeper into Oklahoma. They built a new black town named after their sister, Ruby, who died in the waiting room of a hospital since “no colored people were allowed in the wards” (Morrison, 1998: 113). This new town is built in memory of this “disallowing” which also left a “burn” in the patriarchs’ memories. The engraved communal memories of the humiliating experiences of the exodus and “the shame of seeing one’s pregnant wife or sister or daughter refused shelter” (Morrison, 1998: 95) gradually developed into isolationism.

The historicization of the exodus and the founding of the all-black town is a discourse serving to come to terms with the “burn” still gnawing the eight-rockers. Their historiography is fabricated with the rendition of Afro-Christianity, i.e. the amalgamation of Christianity and African religious beliefs, which recurs in Morrison’s oeuvre as African Americans’ identification with the Biblical messages of liberation and love while holding onto superstitions in African religions (Jesse, 2006: 136-137). Besides, the historiography of the founding of this black national community is full of rhetoric of American exceptionalism in combination with allusions to the biblical Exodus narrative (Dalsgård, 2001: 234-235; Romero, 2005: 422). The eight-rockers (re)articulated their exodus in exceptionalist language, rendering

themselves God's chosen people. As Bouson points out, the master narrative of the exodus led by Zechariah is "cast as a biblical story of the hardships and struggles endured by God's chosen people" (2000: 195). After being "disallowed" by the "Fairly," the light-skinned, Zechariah and his followers headed northwest; one night, he took his son Rector into the piney wood and knelt down to pray, saying "My Father, Zechariah here." Then, he began to hum a prayer until they heard thundering footsteps coming from a small man in a black suit with a satchel in his left hand. Zechariah and his folks followed the mysterious "walking man" all the way until he stopped to rummage in his satchel, took out some items and vanished. Zechariah decided to build their own town on very the spot where the walking man left a depression in the grass. In this account, with his new name alluding to the father of John the Baptist and the prophet in the Old Testament, Zechariah sanctifies himself as God's spokesman. Just as Zechariah in the Old Testament is the chosen one who warned the Israelis of God's wrath aroused by their disobedience, so Zechariah, aka Big Papa,<sup>5</sup> set a motto at the base of the mouth of the communal oven to caution his people: "Beware the Furrow of His Brow."

Recalling the Exodus in the Old Testament, the migration of the eight-rockers also echoes with the Puritans. Zechariah and the other eight-rockers who founded Haven are venerated as the Old Fathers and their descendents who established Ruby are addressed as the New Fathers. The new patriarchs, led by Deacon and Steward, revere the Old Fathers to such an extent that when they migrated deeper into Oklahoma, they even tore down every brick of the Oven and rebuilt it in Ruby—"So, like the ex-slaves who knew what came first, the ex-soldiers broke up the Oven and loaded it into two trucks even before they took apart their own beds" (Morrison, 1998: 16). Zechariah initiates the historical

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<sup>5</sup> Flint points out that Zechariah, aka Big Papa, may be modeled after the leader of the Exoduster movement, Benjamin "Pap" Singleton, who called himself the father of this movement (2006: 586).

narrative of the Disallowing and set the motto on the communal Oven as a symbolic mandate. The nickname “Big Papa” has already implied Zechariah’s role as a symbolic Father (McGowan, 2004: 111). In Ruby’s socio-symbolic network, Zechariah’s position functions as the symbolic father who posited the Law—“Beware the Furrow of His Brow,” demanding the reverence of the Father/Big Papa. Also embedded in the town’s exceptionalist historiography is the phallic law of “continuance and multiplication,” a blood rule that leads to the self-enclosure of this community.

Traumatized by Disallowing, including Ruby’s death and Disallowing Part II they experienced in World War II, the patriarchs of Ruby found the town on isolationism and a rigid “blood rule.” In her renowned article “Unspeakable Things Unspoken,” Morrison indicates that “race” is a “virtually unspeakable thing” (1989: 3). In this town, the blood rule is never openly spoken of (Morrison, 1998: 195). The rule of racial purity is only made explicit in the elites’ consensus to isolate or expel the “racially impure.” Only the “blue black,” whom Patricia Best calls “eight-rock,” a term derived from “a deep deep level in the coal mines” (Morrison, 1998: 193), have access to power and authority. Racial purity, an “indicator” of the citizen’s position in the town, is observed as an unacknowledged sacred Law: “The generations had to be not only racially untampered with, but free of adultery too. ‘God bless the pure and holy’ indeed. That was their purity. That was their holiness. That was the ideal Zechariah had made during his humming prayer” (Morrison, 1998: 217). Having learnt of his twin brother’s affair with Consolata, a “racially impure” outsider, Steward frets about the possibility of having a “mixed-up child” and “seethed at the thought of that barely averted betrayal of all they owed and promised the Old Fathers” (Morrison, 1998: 279). His anxiety reveals the underlying linkage between the Law of the Father and racial purity—racial inconsistency signifies a “treason against *the fathers’ law, the law of continuance and multiplication*” (Morrison, 1998: 279; emphasis added). The phallic law of

multiplication insinuates a command to reproduce eight-rock blood; in this way, the eight-rock color functions in the socio-symbolic bloc of the black community as the phallus—the master signifier of desire and masculine power.<sup>6</sup> As Andrew Read contends, in Ruby, the blue black skin is an “external symbol” whereby its male inhabitants construct their identity and which “masks [men’s] inner emptiness and defines their self-proclaimed superior masculinity” (2005: 534). In Lacanian terms, this blue-blackness, functioning as the phallus, shields the male black subjects from the castration and feminization embodied by the past negritude. With the blue black skin color, the eight-rockers are undoubtedly those who have claim to the phallus and meaning—they are thereby entitled to address as well as readdress history. Blue black skin color or eight-rockness thereby becomes a hallmark of the communal identity. In addition, attributing the phantasmatic immortality, peacefulness and harmony to the self-enclosed, racially pure status of the town, the ideological narrative further renders racial purity a moral standard and a token of superiority, conflating light skin color with moral corruption and social disorder.

Reversing the white socio-symbolic system, the socio-symbolic formation of Ruby is ironically the counterpart of the white one. The founding fathers, Big Papa and the other eight-rockers, are also reminiscent of the Puritan founding fathers of the United States. As Marni Gauthier also observes, “Ruby’s Old Fathers are

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<sup>6</sup> In a white socio-symbolic edifice, whiteness is elevated to the position of the phallus, signifying desire and meaning, whereas the black slave “has no claim or clear relation to the phallus” (Bergner, 1998: 248). Proclaiming that the black is not a man and the Negro is the genital, Fanon points out that the black, like the woman, *is* the phallus while the white is the one who possesses the phallus (Boyarin, 1998: 223-224). That is, in a socio-symbolic system where the white man adopts the position of the Father *qua* the paternal symbolic law, whiteness is taken as the indicator of masculine identity; while the symbolic law endows the white with the position of “having the phallus” and the accessibility to meaning, the black is “barred from any meaningful relation to the symbolic order” (Bergner, 1998: 257).

avatars of none other than the founding fathers of the United States” (2005: 397). It is also a microcosm of any society that founds its stability on homogeneity and the exclusion of the Other, be it women or a different race. The patriarchs of Ruby reproduce the white racist society they defy with an ideological discourse underlying their master historical narrative which mythologizes the exodus of their forefathers. It is evident that Morrison intends to reveal that the victim can act like the victimizer by reproducing the latter’s ideological narrative; moreover, she manifests that when dislocation erupts and endangers the racist/sexist socio-symbolic bloc, the attempts of the ideological discursive formation to cope with this crisis ironically point to that which is primordially repressed<sup>7</sup>—the fundamental antagonism and the non-historical kernel that the historical-ideological narrative attempts to veil.

## II. The Non-historical Kernel

When the novel begins, Ruby has already lapsed into a state of dislocation, which reflects the social changes of the 60s (Schur, 2004: 283). Despite Ruby’s self-enclosure and homogeneity, its *innate* fundamental antagonism is especially unveiled by the interpretations of the motto forged on the Oven. The term “fundamental antagonism” indicated here does not refer to social conflicts but to what Ernesto Laclau suggests as the “constitutive outside” that simultaneously constitutes and destabilizes the “identity inside” (Torfing, 1999: 129). In terms of Lacanian analysis of ideology, ideology functions to eliminate the existence of fundamental antagonism, which is the *real* situation of what Laclau phrases as “Society does not exist,” echoing Lacan’s renowned dictum “the Woman does not exist.” That is to say, it is the Lacanian real that impedes the social-symbolic operation and

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<sup>7</sup> That which the spectre of ideology attempts to conceal is the “primordially repressed” of reality given that reality *per se* is a symbolic fiction (Žižek, 1999: 74).

renders a full identity and unified community impossible to achieve. The communal identity of this all-black patriarchal society is founded on an unsymbolizable antagonism that is manifested by the definition of “eight-rockness.” The eight-rockness constitutes the communal identity; yet, there is always something not “eight-rock” enough that destabilizes this identity and the self-sameness epitomized by the twin patriarchs Deacon and Steward and their wives Soane and Dovey, two sisters whose names repeat the initial letters of the Morgan twins’. As Page contends, in the community’s monologic ideology, divisions keep emerging, even inclusive of the division within the privileged groups (2001: 644). The disputations over the inscription of the motto lay bare the divergence underlying in the social/racial imaginary.

One of the important legacies of the Old Fathers is the communal Oven, which is “a symbol of achieved community and independence” (Read, 2005: 532). In Haven, it is a public area where people congregate to cook the kill, to baptize newborn babies, to tell and retell “unembellished stories” at sunset (Morrison, 1998: 14). In Ruby, even after electric stoves have become common household appliances, its real value remains—the utility is turned into a shrine (Morrison, 1998: 103). The communal Oven epitomizes what this African-American community means to its inhabitants. As Peter R. Kearly points out, the Oven, with a capital O, becomes “a totem invested with the history of suffering at the hands of whites and with the hope and utopian anticipation for a community forever safe from persecution/ lynching” (2000: 11). Suffice it to say the Oven is an emblem of their “nationhood” onto which the symbolic identity is hinged. For Ruby’s men, not only does this communal emblem stand for the Father but it also symbolizes the Ruby men’s masculine pride: “[T]hey believed the rape of women who worked in white kitchens was if not a certainty a distinct possibility—neither of which they could bear to contemplate. . . . It was that thinking that made a community ‘kitchen’ so agreeable”

(Morrison, 1998: 99). For both the Old Fathers and the New Fathers, it stands for their ability to protect their women and maintain the intactness of their masculine identity. In the level of political identification, the Oven, occupying the locus of the national Thing,<sup>8</sup> stands for a sublime object of ideology, while the motto forged on the plaque functions as the symbolic inscription of their communal identity. Describing the Oven as “[r]ound as a head, deep as desire” (Morrison, 1998: 6), Morrison suggests that this emblem of “nationhood” and symbolic masculine identity dominates Ruby men’s desire. It is, so to speak, a fantasy object of desire.

To adhere to the mandate of the Old Fathers as a nodal point of identification, the New Fathers dogmatize the motto, the meaning of which must be taken as absolute in order to maintain the stability of both the identity and community. The fixation on the history of the Old Fathers’ exodus is a way to stabilize the symbolic identity of the Rubyites. According to Renata Salecl, who manifests the linkage between memory and identity, “[t]he subject . . . forms memory in order to obtain certainty, to *fashion a story that grants him or her a perception of wholeness—his or her identity*. But it can also be said that *one remembers so that the social symbolic structure stays fully in its place*” (2000a: 87; emphasis added). The Rubyites’ telling and retelling the forefather’s exodus enables them to fashion a *history* that renders the subjects perceive themselves as *whole* and keeps the social symbolic structure of the all-black town intact. Witnessing the decline and evaporation of the other colored towns, the New Fathers reassure themselves of their rigid adherence to the law of

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<sup>8</sup> Nation is one of the representations of the maternal Thing, i.e. the empty locus in the psychic structure that points to the lost plenitude represented by the symbiosis with the mother. Given that the establishment of the community is mythologized and its founding fathers are sanctified, the history of the African-American community, inclusive of both Haven and Ruby, is none other than a nationalist myth, which “always concerned with the possession of the national Thing” (Torfing, 1999: 194).

the Old Fathers: “Except for a crack here, a chink there everything in Ruby was intact. There was no need to wonder if moving the Oven had been a mistake . . . . No. No, Big Papa. No, Big Daddy. We did right” (Morrison, 1998: 112). The withering of the other all-black towns deepens their conviction that the enhancement of their collective memory would protect the communal symbolic system, which provides a *point de capiton*, i.e. nodal point,<sup>9</sup> for their identification.

Since the first word of the motto was lost on their way from Haven to Ruby, the meaning of the inscription becomes a controversy--the older generation insists that the motto be “Beware the Furrow of His Brow,” whereas the younger generation, influenced by the activist and civil right movements, asserts that it should read “Be the Furrow of His Brow,” with an attempt to form a new discourse by rewriting the paternal mandate as a divine “calling” for an activist strike. The disputation is not so much an argument over the interpretations of the motto as a struggle for the entitlement to (re)articulate the history of Ruby as an ideological discourse. As Davidson remarks, the disputation “exposes competing concepts of communal historiography” (2001: 358). The word “be” enables the young residents of Ruby to identify with God, in contrast with the word “beware,” which insinuates compliance with God as a master (McGowan, 2004: 112). That is, the former interpretation allows the speaker to identify himself as a powerful “master,” while the latter recalls the black’s past submission to a master. The idea of being the voice of God or being *the* power is dismissed by the heirs of the Old Fathers as “blasphemy” for only the Father (Big Papa) can be the voice of

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<sup>9</sup> The term “*point de capiton*,” derived from Lacanian theory, means a nodal or quilting point in a signifying chain whereby the signification is fixated (Stavrakakis, 1999: 60). This term is appropriated in the Lacanian analysis of ideology. Žižek defines it as a word which “unifies a given field, constitutes its identity” (1989: 95). Without a signified, this word is an empty, pure signifier which simply “facilitates [its] structural role of unifying a discursive terrain” (1999: 98-99).

God (Morrison, 1998: 86). For the elders of Ruby, who simply wants to maintain the status quo, the new interpretation means a challenge to the “official” historiography, not to mention their authority. Therefore, Deacon refutes the activist interpretation by claiming, “*That Oven already has a history. It doesn’t need you to fix it*” (Morrison, 1998: 86; emphasis added). Suffice it to say that the disputation is not merely a struggle over “the control of meaning,” as Krumholz remarks (2002: 25), but one over the “national Thing.” As the descendents and the legitimate heir of the founding fathers, the elders believe they are endowed with the privilege to claim that they possess the “national Thing”—the community, along with its history and symbol, belongs to no one but them alone.

The disputation over the Oven induces the discourse of jeremiad (Dalsgård, 2001: 234) and manifests the younger generation’s identity crisis in the community. The town “used to be tight as a wax” but now the young residents address the townspeople as “they” not “we” (Morrison, 1998: 207). Identity is never a full identity. At the socio-symbolic level, it is the fundamental antagonism *qua* the real that causes the failure, not the clash between the two generations. Being “reified and canonized” as a shrine, the Oven turns out to be a “signifier emptied of content” (Dalsgård, 2001: 239). The motto induces ambiguity and multiplicity of meanings in that the missing word serves as an empty signifier which can signify “the absent communitarian fullness” only via hegemony (Torfing, 1999: 176). The blank space on the plaque, in other words, already testifies to the impossibility of this fullness and the latent social antagonism that resist symbolization.<sup>10</sup> This unsymbolizable antagonism is also manifested as the erased, an ink blot, in the communal historiography.

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<sup>10</sup> According to Torfing, social antagonism “involves a loss of meaning, which cannot be symbolized” (1999: 44). That is, it is the real that resists symbolization.

The dislocation, in consequence, intensifies the need to solidify communal identification in the communal historiography. When this historiography becomes permeated with ideology, the process of historicization erases that which is heterogeneous to the exceptionalist, patriarchal symbolic text. Tea's name, for instance, is erased from the Morgan family tree as the "dung" that the eight-rockers intend to leave behind. During their migration, when some white men forced Coffee and his twin brother Tea to dance, Coffee got shot in his foot, whereas Tea "quite reasonably, accommodated the whites" (Morrison, 1998: 302). Seeing in Tea the abject part, i.e. the "dung," that had been within him all the time, Zechariah disowned his twin brother and even had his name erased not only from the family Bible but also from the community's official history—his name became "the heavy ink blot hid next to Zechariah's name in the Morgan Bible" (Morrison, 1998: 188). Irritated by his twin brother's ruthlessness during the massacre, Deacon finally realizes that his grandfather "saw something shamed him" in his twin brother, something that he could not bear "[n]ot because he was ashamed of his twin, but because the shame was in himself" (Morrison, 1998: 303). Erasing the name amounts to annihilating the shame- or anxiety-ridden psychic state to maintain the phantasmatic consistency of the self.

The underlying inconsistency of the orthodox historiography of the sanctified eight-rock families is further exposed by the town's annual Christmas play and an underground genealogical project—both disclose the erased in the official historiography and manifest that the fixation on memory is a way to veil the trauma. According to Stavrakakis, "all ideological formations . . . aspire to eliminate anxiety and loss, to defeat dislocation, in order to achieve a state of fullness" (1999: 82). The Christmas play manifests this aspiration. On Christmas, the Rubyites re-enact the history of Disallowing in the performance of Nativity. In the town's rendition the mysterious walking man becomes a wise man who comes to pay his reverence to the nine "holy" eight-rock families sanctified as nine Marys and Josephs. Besides, the whole

play culminates in these holy families' being "disallowed" by the innkeepers who wear yellow and white masks. This Christmas play is none other than an annual historicization/symbolization of the trauma of the Disallowing and a rite for the Rubyites to collectively vent their fury: As the holy families "chant" to the light-skinned innkeepers, "God will crumble you. God will crumble you," the audience "hums agreement": "Yes He will. Yes He will" (Morrison, 1998: 211). The chanting and humming help to solidify the Rubyites' identification. As Krumholz has observed, this play "makes Ruby's history a sacred text of community martyrdom" (2002: 29). However, in the present time of the novel, i.e. the time of dislocation, the number of the sacred families is silently reduced from nine to seven, with two families secretly erased from the communal history because of racial "adulteration." Evidently, the script of the Christmas play, in other words, serves as a discourse that attempts to suture the rift caused by the dislocation.

An underground historian, Patricia Best explores the communal history and ends up disclosing the names having been erased from the family trees of the eight-rock elites. Her project, like Morrison's fiction, serves as a "counternarrative" or "counterhistoriography" against the totalizing historiography endorsed by Ruby's patriarchs (Gauthier, 2005: 399, 400). Her genealogy of the nine families unveils the gaps in the master narrative—"[s]he alone would figure out why a line was drawn through Ethan Blackhorse's name in the Blackhorse Bible and what the heavy ink blot hid next to Zechariah's name in the Morgan Bible" and she alone maps stories which are silenced and names which are crossed out (Morrison, 1998: 188). Analogous to the violence done to the black in American history, the historiography of the eight-rockers obliterates the bloodlines of those whose marriage would bring about racial impurity. The erasure, therefore, is a means to guarantee the phantasmatic reality constructed as a symbolic fiction. As Gauthier contends, Patricia's genealogy disintegrates "the mythical unified ancestry of the Old Fathers, and discredits the myth of community fidelity" (2005: 410). Like a

detective, she uncovers that which is hidden in church records and family Bibles or half-revealed in remembrances; this is why Morrison is considered most closely aligned with Patricia despite the author's confession that she most identifies with Misner (Gauthier, 2005: 410).

With Patricia's version of historiography, the novel displays itself as a multi-voiced historical discourse. Aligning with Page and Pérez-Torres, both of whom regard Morrison's literary technique as postmodern, Davidson suggests that the Patricia section especially displays a postmodern strategy of pastiche (2001: 362). In so doing, Morrison reveals the impossibility for a single version of historiography to represent the holistic picture of the past—there is always a “remainder” that fails to be historicized. Patricia's project only serves to partly unveil the absence in history. Even though the project is a counterhistoriography, Morrison has Patricia burn all her documents. Page contends that Patricia's project is doomed to failure because it is “based on a quest for facts, for closed answers” (2001: 641). I would argue that what Patricia means to present through her nonlinear genealogy is not, as Page argues, “closed answers” (2001: 641) but the absences, i.e. the unspeakable, in Ruby's history. She destroys the project not simply because her genealogy has served its purpose but also because this genealogy itself is part of “the unspeakable,” the inherent limitation of the patriarchal historiography. Criticizing Patricia's genealogical project as a quest for “deterministic answers that Morrison withholds,” Page also remarks that her abandonment of the project demonstrates its “inherent limitation” (2001: 641). However, this inherent limitation exists not merely in Patricia's project but also in any kind of historiography since historicization *per se* contains an unsymbolizable core that marks its limitation.

The diverse accounts of the massacre are examples illustrating the inherent limitation or non-historical core that historicization involves. Apropos of what happen during the raid in the Convent, there are two versions of the official stories:

One, that nine men had gone to talk to and persuade the Convent women to leave or mend their ways; there had been a fight; the women took other shapes and disappeared into thin air. And two (the Fleetwood-Jury version), that five men had gone to evict the women that four others—the authors—had gone to restrain or stop them; these four were attacked by the women but had succeeded in driving them out and they took off in their Cadillac; but unfortunately, some of the five had lost their heads and killed the old woman. (Morrison, 1998: 297)

As Lone comments on this diversion, “people were changing [the story] to make themselves *look good*” (Morrison, 1998: 297; emphasis added). The missing bodies make it more impossible to achieve the consistency of the story even though historiography *per se* has its innate limitation which allows for competing discourses.<sup>11</sup> Patricia has her own version of the raid: “nine 8-rocks murdered five harmless women” not only because these women are racially and morally impure but also because these men *can* (Morrison, 1998: 297). She gives Misner, out of town when the attack occurs, two version of the official story, none of which Misner believes (Morrison, 1998: 296). Neither Cary nor Pulliam, whom Misner inquires, can “formulate a credible, sermonizable account of it” (Morrison, 1998: 296). The variance of the accounts makes it explicit that the massacre is a traumatic kernel resisting historicization/symbolization. The missing bodies, a missing link that makes it impossible to formulate any consistent historiography, stand for the traumatic kernel which resists historicization or symbolization but which also propels the proliferation of historical discourses to come to terms with this kernel. Instead of nailing down a fixed meaning or an authorized version of the

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<sup>11</sup> As Žižek indicates in *Sublime Object of Ideology*, historiography is especially characteristic of its reference to “an empty place,” which is “a non-historical kernel around which the symbolic network is articulated” but which “cannot be symbolized, although it is retroactively produced by the symbolization itself” (1989: 135).

historiography, Morrison's narration displays an open space for polyvocal interpretations. Therefore, it is the unsymbolizable traumatic kernel that Morrison intends to draw our attention to, not the historicization.

The erasure Patricia unfolds manifests the fact that the historiography of the community serves as an ideological narrative which eliminates heterogeneous elements inclusive of racial inconsistency. The Christmas play, as Krumholz indicates, is "an artistic representation [which] is meant to foreclose historical knowledge and relations of power" (2002: 29). In fact, that which is "foreclosed" is the real that resists symbolization—the non-historical kernel of historicity, which is also the fundamental antagonism that propels the (de)construction of the social-symbolic edifice of the community. At the core of Ruby's ideological/historical discourse is racial purity; however, that which is repressed and veiled by ideology is the impossibility of this purity. As Kearly has observed, its historiography represses "the reality that there has never been nor can there ever be a pure black and a pure white race" (2000: 11). To put it more precisely in Lacanian terms, race *per se*, like sexual difference, belongs to the level of the real "not in the sense that it refers to prelinguistic *reality*, but because it exceeds our symbolic grasp" (Shepherdson, 1998: 46). The conception of racial purity implied in Ruby's historical narrative works as a spectre of ideology that veils the primordially repressed, which is beyond the symbolic grasp. Inducing competing discourses to suture the dislocation and fortify identification, the primordially repressed, i.e. the non-historical kernel or fundamental antagonism, is embodied by the conceptual "Out There."

### III. The Convent as "Out There"

"Out There," conceptualized in Ruby's ideological narrative as a devious, menacing outside world, stands for the radical Other,

later on represented by the Convent women, onto which the Rubyites project the “dung” that is within them. In its ideological text, this African-American community is fantasized as a safe haven separated from the abyss of the outside world. The social fantasy of malevolent “Out There” and that of their own town as a precious object in need of protection support the ideological narrative and veils the lack *qua* the real indicative of the inconsistency of the subject and the fundamental antagonism.

Underlying in the narrative of the historiography is a utopian fantasy of a safe all-black harbor free of corruption and violence prevalent in the white world. In the collective masculine fantasy of the Rubyites, the all-black community is a haven where a sleepless woman can walk safely at midnight. At the beginning of the novel, this utopian vision is revealed through the interior monologue of one of the attackers searching the Convent:

Unique and isolated, his [town] was a town justifiably pleased with itself. It neither had nor needed a jail. No criminals had ever come from his town. And the one or two people who acted up, humiliated their families or threatened the town’s view of itself were taken good care of. [. . .] From the beginning its people were free and protected. *A sleepless woman could always rise from her bed, wrap a shawl around her shoulders and sit on the steps in the moonlight. And if she felt like it she could walk out the yard and on down the road.* (Morrison, 1998: 8; emphasis added)<sup>12</sup>

This fantasy of a haven for sleepless walking women is soon undermined in the novel by the depiction of a crying woman walking in the middle of the night. The irony that undercuts this ideological fiction also lies in Lone’s remarks that only women,

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<sup>12</sup> Both in *Paradise* and her later essay “Home,” Morrison mentions an utopian vision of “out of doors safty where a sleepless woman could always rise from her bed . . . . Nothing for miles around thought she was prey” (quoted in Mckee, 2003: 197-198).

dragging their sorrows, walk the road between Ruby and the Convent (Morrison, 1998: 270). In drawing on the convention of small-town fiction (Peach, 1995: 163, 164), Morrison displays the inhabitant's fantasy of a harmonious community as a corporate body.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, she also shows that this phantasmatic view of a harmonious community must be defined by a space "out there" that is ferocious and even threatening to its social order.<sup>14</sup> That which resides outside the safe haven is fantasized as "a void where random and organized evil erupted when and where it chose" (Morrison 1998: 16). The imagined community of this all-black town is, in other words, constituted by excluding what the inhabitants assume to be "Out There":

Out There where your children were sport, your women quarry, and where your very person could be annulled; where congregations carried arms to church and ropes coiled in every saddle. Out There where every cluster of whitemen looked like a posse, being alone was been dead. But lessons had been learned and relearned in the last three generations about how to protect a town. (Morrison, 1998: 16)

Accordingly, the social reality of this all-black community is grounded on the exclusion of "Out There," whereby the consistency of the socio-symbolic edifice is formed.<sup>15</sup> Out There, the black could be overthrown from the subject position and

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<sup>13</sup> As Stavrakakis indicates in light of Lacanian psychoanalysis, it is fantasy that contributes to the subject's visualization of society as a "well-structured whole" (1999: 62).

<sup>14</sup> The beatific aspect of fantasy, i.e. the fantasy of a utopian society, is always complimented with its paranoiac aspect which accounts for the failure of such a society (Stavrakakis, 1999: 152, n.7).

<sup>15</sup> Lacanian analysis of ideology takes social reality as "always-already symbolized, constituted, structured by symbolic mechanisms" (Žižek, 1999: 73); as such, just as desiring subject is in a way constituted by that which is expelled in the process of symbolization, so social reality is formed by an "outside" *qua* the real that not only induces symbolization but also causes it to fail.

reduced to the object position of a “sport” or “quarry,” which is none other than the status of a slave. Patricia McKee rightfully points out, nothing in the space out there owns a “reliable identity” (2003: 200). To maintain the integrity of their subjectivity, the patriarchs displace the castration fear onto that which resides out there. That is why when Rev. Misner tells Patricia that he is an outsider, not an enemy, her answer is: “But in this town those two words mean the same thing” (Morrison, 1998: 212).

The innate fundamental antagonism, i.e. the constitutive outside of the Ruby community, is firstly displaced onto Out There and then embodied by the Convent. As Shirley A. Stave remarks, the Convent exists outside the symbolic order and “ruptures” this order (2006: 219). Moreover, it resides both inside and outside the socio-symbolic edifice of the all-black community and its white counterparts. Geographically, the Convent is a stone house “in the middle of nothing” (Morrison, 1998: 169). Symbolically, it stands for the “nothingness” in Ruby’s social imaginary. Morrison has already marked its marginality by locating it in the periphery of the town but that which makes it a constitutive outside is not this geographical periphery. As Widdowson indicates, the Convent partly represents “Out There” (2001: 329). Incarnating the moral failure and corruption that the community wants to keep at bay, the Convent used to be an embezzler’s mansion. After the embezzler was arrested, the mansion was altered to a Catholic boarding school for Indian girls and was informally called “Convent.” Despite the alteration, the traces of the old owner’s debauchery and profligate spending still remain in the mansion. A grotesque combination of sanctity and blasphemy, the Convent is characteristic of “indefinability” not simply because of the slippery connection between the name and the referent or the signified and the signifier, as Dalsgård contends (2001: 243), but also because it is inhabited by women of indefinite racial identities, classes and social backgrounds.

In contrast with Ruby’s fetishization of racial purity are the multi-ethnicities in the Convent. Moreover, race is the least

significant thing there. The opening sentence “They shoot the white girl first” indicates that one of the Convent women is white; yet, as in her short story “Recitatif,” throughout the novel Morrison never specifies who the white girl is. Morrison maintains that “[r]ace is the least reliable information you can have about someone. It’s real information, but it tells you next to nothing” (quoted in Bouson, 2000: 205). In her interview in Oprah Winfrey Show, she stated that her description of the Convent women was “to write race and to unwrite it at the same time” (quoted in Bouson, 2000: 205). The white skin color is mentioned at the outset but the whiteness becomes an absence in the narration; it is this absence of specific racial identity that characterizes the Convent as a constitutive outside. Its indefinability constitutes Ruby’s definability—the Convent is what Ruby is *not*.

This fantasy of a utopian all-black community can be sustained only by attributing the disorders to an “alien intruder” or “the Other who somehow stole [*jouissance*] from us” (Stavrakakis 1999: 65, 80). Hence, the Ruby men consider the Convent women a threat to their community precisely because boarding the domain “Out There,” these women, all being social outcasts with broken hearts and deplorable pasts, stages in the communal fantasy as the “alien intruders” and the Other who possesses illegitimate *jouissance*. The conversation between Soane and Dovey, when they know these women’s lives are at stake, partly reveal the reason:

“People talk about them all the time, though. Like they were . . . slime.”  
 “They’re different is all.”  
 “I know, but that’s been enough before.”  
 “These are women, Dovey. Just women.”  
 “*Whores, though, and strange too.*”  
 “Dovey!”  
 “That’s what Steward says, and if he believes it—”  
 (Morrison, 1998: 288; emphasis added)

Influenced by her husband, Dovey points out the role the Convent

women assume in their fantasy. The Rubyites associate the Convent women with adultery, especially because of their “strangeness,” a word marking their heterogeneity or otherness in the way they *enjoy*. In Ruby, being an outsider is already a sufficient condition for a woman to be stigmatized as a whore since morality is conflated with residency there. These women’s presence in K.D.’s wedding demonstrates their incongruity in the eye of the residents: “[the tenants of the Convent] piled out of the car looking like go-go girls: pink shorts, skimpy tops, see-through skirts; painted eyes, no lipstick; obviously no underwear, no stockings” (Morrison, 1998: 156). Their grin and rocking bodies seem to the Rubyites to bespeak a life of depravity. Pulliam and his wife take the scene of those women dancing in the wedding as “signs of already advanced decay,” believing “[s]oon the whole country would be awash in toys, tone-deaf from raucous music and hollow laughter” but they would definitely prohibit this excessive enjoyment (*jouissance*) in Ruby (Morrison, 1998: 157). As McGowan observes, these women “display their unrestrained enjoyment without any concern for an authority in the town that would prohibit it” (2004: 116). However, what is at issue here is that the fantasy that underlies a fascist-ideological ideology already recounts the theft of enjoyment by a conceptual Other (Žižek, 1989: 96-97, 114-115). On the one hand, the subject fantasizes about an Other who has stolen enjoyment from the subject; on the other, although this enjoyment is actually the subject’s own, the subject experiences it as foreign and threatening to him or her (McGowan, 2004: 117; Zupančič, 2000: 225). The fascist-racist discourse embedded in the historiography already posits the existence of an enjoying Other who is responsible for the deterioration of the status quo. This role is at first assumed by the racially impure and then by the Convent women. Given the luxuries and debauchery decoration inside, the Convent itself already testifies to illegitimate, excessive enjoyment, not to mention that its original owner is called an “embezzler.” As if regarded as the owner’s inheritor, the Convent women are

fantasized as the embezzler of superfluous enjoyment. For instance, Arnett claims that these women *stole* her baby. During the raid, the murderers “scan dusty mason jars and what is left of last year’s canning: tomatoes, green beans, peaches. Slack, they think. August just around the corner and these women have not even sorted, let alone washed, the jars” (Morrison, 1998: 5). The slackness insinuates their *enjoying* a kind of life that the townspeople consider immoral and unreligious. The motive of the raid, according to one of the unidentified murderers, is to make sure that “*nothing inside or out rots the one all-black town*” (Morrison, 1998: 5; emphasis added). To put it more precisely, these women are accused of stealing the “National Thing.”<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the obscenity that the Convent and its female boarders stand for in Rubyites’ social fantasy, that which makes the Ruby men feel threatened is, as McGowan indicates, “the *femme fatale*’s self-sufficient enjoyment” (2004: 116). According to Žižek, the idea that “the *femme fatale* gives body to the fear of the emacipated femininity perceived as a threat to male identity” misses the point since “the very features . . . also account for the irresistible charm of this figure” (1998: 51). The feature of adultery and adulteration, albeit depicted as repulsive in the ideological narrative, captivates at least two eight-rock men. Gigi lures K.D., who is engaged with Arnett, soon after she arrives in Ruby; she *enjoys* “his availability and adoration” to such an extent that he finally realizes “his craving for her had poisoned him, rendered him diabetic, stupid, helpless” (Morrison, 1998: 147). Consolata, having an affair with Deacon years ago, is also characterized as a fatal woman when she bit his lips and sucked his blood: at that moment she turned into “[an] *uncontrollable, gnawing* woman who had bitten his lip just to lap the blood it shed; a beautiful, golden-skinned, *outside* woman with moss-green eyes that tried to

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<sup>16</sup> This suspicion of the contamination in a community is especially apparent in a nationalist discourse since “enemies of the nation are generally accused of ‘excessive enjoyment’” (Torfing, 1999: 194).

*trap* a man . . . a **Salomé** from whom he had escaped just in time or she would have had his head on a dinner plate” (1998: 279-280; emphasis added). Deacon believes that Consolata would eat him “like a meal” (1998: 239). However, for Consolata, the biting is simply an expression of her desire for going home: “Dear Lord, I didn’t want to eat him. I just wanted to go home” (1998: 240). The ambiguity of this statement is clarified by what she adds, “[H]e and I are the same” (1998: 241). While Consolata perceives in Deacon the sameness that makes her feel like “home,”<sup>17</sup> her “gobble love” appears to Deacon as that of a pre-symbolic devouring mother. Evidently, Consolata is compared to a vampire (Peach, 1995: 161-162); the allusion to vampirism, as represented in all vampire narratives, insinuates the unconscious fear not only of disease but of sexual potency. As either a female vampire or a fatal woman, Consolata threatens Deacon with her active position, sexual potency and the *jouissance* that appears to him unimaginable and uncontrollable.

Consolata’s enjoyment casts over Deacon the shadow of castration, undermining his masculine pride. As Lone reveals, Consolata has become Deacon’s “personal shame” that must be erased (Morrison, 1998: 279). In addition, she undermines Deacon’s fantasy of femininity. Stewards regarded the Convent women as “the *flaunting parody* of the nineteen Negro ladies of his and his brother’s youthful memory and perfect understanding” and “the degradation of that moment they’d shared of sunlit skin and verbena” (1998: 279; emphasis added). When visiting one of the colored towns with their father, the Morgan brothers watched nineteen Negro ladies, mostly dressed in white, taking photos on the steps of the town hall. Their creamy skin and music voices, “low, full of delight and secret information,” enthralled Deacon

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<sup>17</sup> The biting insinuates Consolata’s homesickness. As Matus contends, Consolata’s South-American background shares with African Americans “a heritage from the era of slavery” and in addition, Deacon reminds her of the black people in her hometown (1998: 158).

(1998: 109). While posing for a photographer, they stepped into Deacon's and Steward's fantasy window, becoming an everlasting, "pastel colored" mnemonic image—"even now the summer dresses, the creamy, sunlit skin excited [Deacon]. If he and Steward had not thrown themselves off the railing, they would have burst into tears" (1998: 110). Despite the "creamy skin," which ironically implies the "adulteration" the eight-rockers abominate, the purity represented by the white dresses and girlish innocence of these nineteen Negro ladies testifies to their fantasy of femininity. The fascination with the feminine innocence these Negro ladies display points to "a male fantasy of pure, unadulterated, intact selfhood and sovereign will," that is to say, the fantasy of masculinity (Read, 2005: 537). It is thus understandable why Steward firmly believes it was this mnemonic image that "carried him and his brother through a war, . . . imbued their marriages and strengthened their efforts to build a town where the vision could flourish" (Morrison, 1998: 279). Against this fantasy of femininity is that of the fatal woman, who is a traumatic object that makes the man feel ashamed of the attraction he feels for her (Žižek, 1994: 102). Consolata's golden skin is reminiscent of the "luminous skin" of the nineteen Negro ladies but her "bending on eating [Deacon] like a meal" turns her into a fatal woman, making her a *flaunting* parody of those Negro ladies and causing Deacon's personal shame.

Moreover, at the time of dislocation, the engraved memory of the nineteen Negro ladies represents the good old days when the Ruby men's masculine identity could be sustained, whereas the Convent women are alien intruders who threaten them with sexual seduction and moral corruption. This mnemonic image of the Negro ladies is closely linked with their nostalgia. They stand for an age of innocence and security. In contrast with those ladies, the Convent women, Steward believes, are a "new and obscene breed female," "*sully*ing [Steward's] *personal history* with their streetwalkers' clothes and whores' appetites" (Morrison, 1998: 279; emphasis added). As Gauthier indicates, the vision of the Negro ladies enables the Morgans to construct "their own sense of

masculinity,” fashioning their identity as the protector of a certain kind of woman (2005: 402). The same fantasy conducts Steward’s desire to protect the all-black community. To maintain the intactness of his masculinity as well as the imagined community, he thereby stigmatizes those female outsiders in eccentric outfits as streetwalkers with whores’ appetites. The word “appetite” reveals Steward’s fantasy about these women’s superfluous *jouissance*.

However, it is not simply the *femme fatale’s jouissance* that renders masculinity at stake. The Convent is especially depicted as a feminine space—a house “permeated with a *blessed malelessness*, like a protected domain, free of hunters but exciting too” (Morrison, 1998: 177; emphasis added). This femininity is also marked by these women’s maternal role as food-providers—they supply agricultural produces. As Read contends, the Convent women’s independence irritates the Ruby men to such an extent that these men need “to control women absolutely to confirm their own masculine status” (2005: 535). As midwives of the town, Fairy and Lone are quite familiar with the men’s intolerance. Fairy’s remarks reveal that this intolerance has to do with the fear of that which is out of the phallic control: “Men scared of [midwives], always will be. To them, we’re death’s hand-maiden standing as between them and the children their wives carry. [. . .] [T]he midwife is the interference, *the dependency irritated them*” (Morrison, 1998: 272; emphasis added). That which really infuriates the men, however, is not so much their dependence as their own defenselessness, or even the *aphanisis* of their subjectivity, when in face of the process of delivery. The midwife, compared to death’s hand-maiden, stands for the part of maternity that is beyond the dominance of the symbolic. She stands close to the locus of *das Ding*, the Lacanian maternal Thing, which is supposed to be severed through symbolization.

Just as the midwives threaten the Ruby men with the shadow of castration, so the Convent and its female boarders undermine the masculine identity with their feminine self-sufficiency. This maleless femininity is the locuna which the formation of the

masculine identity relies on and defies against, just as this womb-like space is the constitutive lack that both constructs and deconstructs Ruby's socio-symbolic edifice. In many of Morrison's novels, maternity and sisterhood are endowed with the magical, therapeutic power that serves as the source of redemption. There is never any monologic ideology that serves to fortify its residents' identification nor is there such consideration of racial identity. Like the house at 124 Blue Stone Road in *Beloved*, it is what Homi Bhabha terms an "in-between," "liminal" space where the "unhomely" (the Freudian uncanny) emerges and the past traumas are loom large to disrupt the continuum of history (Bhabha, 2006: 5, 12, 14-15). Haunted with the traumatic pasts of its five female boarders, the Convent, a hybrid, feminine space marked by its otherness, is implanted with the seed of healing and salvation. Redemption comes from the "Out There" of Ruby's patriarchal socio-symbolic edifice, but not without a price.

#### IV. Healing and Mystic/ Feminine *Jouissance*

The Convent, being the "Out There" that both constitutes and destabilizes Ruby's socio-symbolic network, epitomizes the Lacanian feminine structure not because it is a space inhabited by women but because it points to a domain that is beyond the grasp of phallic function. In light of Lacan's logic of sexuation,<sup>18</sup> the masculine position indicates that man acquires his symbolic inscription through phallic function (Lacan, 1975/1998: 79), and being wholly under the sway of phallic function and castration, man who adopts the masculine position is attached to phallic *jouissance*, which is attainable only "through the mediation of fantasy" (Soler, 2000: 41); in contrast, the feminine, *not all* governed by the phallic function, is akin to that which is *beyond*

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<sup>18</sup> The sexuation defines the masculine and feminine positions, both of which can be occupied by men and women. In other words, it is possible for a man to take up a feminine position and vice versa.

the phallic *jouissance*, a supplementary *jouissance* that is beyond the grip of language (Lacan, 1975/1998: 73-77, 81).<sup>19</sup> The less intimate relation to the phallic function, the “not-all,” allows the feminine position or structure to “*undermine the function of the symbolic* as structured by a founding limit or anchoring point” (Barnard, 2002: 178; emphasis added). Unlike Ruby, which is marked with the phallic control unfolded by the fixity of meaning and totalization, the “not-all” condition in the Convent renders the healing possible and usher the women into a realm of spirituality. In Morrison’s oeuvre, African-American spirituality<sup>20</sup> is characterized with the feminine structure; in the novel, this spirituality is especially intertwined with the mysterious process of healing that results in undecipherable ecstasy that is “other” than the phallic *jouissance* and thereby cannot be deciphered at the symbolic level.

The magic healing power is once again depicted as a sort of maternal inheritance although motherhood is absent in this novel. It is Lone, instead of Mary Magna, who initiates Consolata into the mysterious experience of raising the dead and of what Lone calls “stepping in.” Ruby’s pastors preach the teachings in the Bible, whereas Lone and Consolata practice the doctrine of love and the miracle of raising the dead recorded in the Bible. To assure Consolata of her “gift” and to dispel her doubt of magic, Lone enlightens her with a broadminded view of God, “You need what we all need: earth, air, water. Don’t separate God from His elements. He created it all. He created it all. You stuck on dividing Him from His works. Don’t unbalanced His world” (Morrison, 1998: 244). The loose connection with the phallic function makes Lone less restrained by the town’s orthodox religious doctrines.

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<sup>19</sup> Lacan indicates that even the woman herself knows nothing of this *jouissance* (1975/1998: 74).

<sup>20</sup> African-American spirituality, which is most pronounced in female characters, refers especially to the influences of Afro-Christianity, Gnosticism and African religious beliefs (Jesse, 2006: 130, 137).

Consolata has problem reconciling the African-American woman's view with the faith she inherits from a white nun, who has been a mother and "her rope to the world" even though later on she practices "stepping in" with Mary Magna in order to prolong her life (Morrison, 1998: 247). After Mary Magna passes away, she simultaneously loses her only rope to the world and her social identity, inclusive of insurance and any other forms of social affiliation. The tie with her surrogate mother and the socio-symbolic system, in other words, is completely severed. It is in this status of "subjective destitution" that she experiences the revelation from a man with a cowboy hat that hides his features, and a different sort of subjectivity is reborn thereafter.

Why Morrison doesn't make Consolata's savior a female African is a question few criticisms have explored and come up with a satisfactory interpretation. Doreatha D. Mbalia raises two questions regarding the role of the healer in this novel: Why does Morrison choose a Native American instead of an African as the healer? And why is this mysterious man with a cowboy hat, given his green eyes and tea-colored hair, not "a Garvey, Malcolm, Nkrumah or Tubman figure?" (2004: 152) My answer to the first question lies in Morrison's destabilization of any race-oriented hermeneutic process in this novel. Besides, it is, after all, an African American woman who initiates Consolata. As for the second question apropos of the image of the savior as a male European descendent, Mbalia contends that Morrison's choice are "indices of her own oppression" and expressions to escape the dark skin and curly hair (2004: 153, 154). This argument, however, disregards Consolata's racial identity and fails to fully explain why healing follows the divine revelation made by this male figure. Besides, the celebration of blackness, the counterpart of that of whiteness, is meant to be taunted and deconstructed in this novel. When the mysterious man removes his cowboy hat, Consolata finds that the colors of this man's hair and eyes resemble hers. Suffice it to say that what she sees is a mirror reflection of her own features. Jennifer Terry, also contending that this man is her mirror image,

argues that it is this characteristic that makes the man an envoy, a trickster, of one of the gods of candomblé religion in South America, which with its origin in black mythology or African religions, serves as a reminder of Consolata's South American cultural heritage (2006: 199, 209, n.16). However, given her mixed racial identity and Catholic background, the divine man can also be regarded as a hybrid of Christ in Catholicism and the trickster in candomblé. This explains why it is after this revelation that Consolata ceases to resist the power of "stepping in," which she used to consider a devious practice against the Catholic belief.

Consolata is reborn in the identification with this mysterious man who reveals to her her own innate divinity—the man says to Consolata, "Come on, girl. You know me" (Morrison, 1998: 252). After the revelation which enables her to make a reconciliation between the gift of "stepping in" and the Christian faith, she addresses herself "Consolata Sosa" instead of "Connie" in front of the other Convent women to signify her re-assumption of subjectivity. To prepare the other women for healing, she instruct them with authority how to treat their bodies and desires, "If you want to be here you do what I say. Eat how I say. Sleep when I say. And I will teach you what you are hungry for" (Morrison, 1998: 262). Moreover, transfiguration follows the epiphany: "She has the features of dear Connie, but they are sculpted somehow—higher cheekbones, stronger chin. Had her eyebrows always been that thick, her teeth that pearl white? Her hair shows no gray. Her skin is smooth as a peach" (Morrison, 1998: 262). The rejuvenation, without question, insinuates a new life and the rebirth of subjectivity. She has been an ideal parent and granny goose to the Convent boarders; now she even becomes their mentor enlightening them with truths about their own desires ("And I will teach you what you are hungry for").

Recalling Baby Suggs in *Beloved*, who teaches her people to love their own flesh, Consolata preaches about the tie between the body and soul, which is severed by a phallic logic that also disavows the matrilineal heritage: "Never break [the body and

spirit] in two. Never put one over the other. Eve is Mary's mother. Mary is the daughter of Eve" (Morrison, 1998: 263). Her sermon, accentuating the matrilineal connection, ends with the vision of a celestial paradise and a woman named Piedade, "who sang but never said a word" (Morrison, 1998: 264). In the epilogue, Piedade is portrayed as a woman "black as firewood," a mother figure whose song consoles a younger woman with "tea brown hair" (Morrison, 1998: 318). The latter, given her tea-colored hair, appears to be Consolata herself. In this vision, the mother figure is no longer a white nun but an African woman, whose *black face* Consolata's *emerald eyes* adore (Morrison, 1998: 318). Her name may refer to Consolata's hometown in Latin America, in view of the fact that this name, which means "piety, pity, compassion, mercy" in Portuguese (Bouson, 2000: 215), is a common name for a place in Latin America, while her skin color, "black as firewood," reminds one of the blue black coal color of the eight-rockers. This description unfolds the reason why Deacon can arouse Consolata's desire for home. Piedade, therefore, stands for the spiritual home that Consolata longs for although it is unclear whether she is Consolata's childhood memory or her fantasy and whether she is Consolata's birth mother and Consolata, albeit also insinuated as a native American, is a mulatto who takes after her European father. Nevertheless, it is essential to note that the memory of or fantasy about Piedade is never evoked until the healing starts—she could be a repressed memory that Consolata has "disremembered."

Consolata's account of the vision embarks on a therapeutic process called "loud dreaming." Following Consolata's narration, the other women start narrating their own stories—"[h]alf-tales and the never-dreamed escaped from their lips to soar high above guttering candles, shifting dust from crates and bottles" (Morrison, 1998: 264). Their stories gradually become a collective narrative without the fixity of meaning or authorial presence: "And it was never important to know who said the dream or whether it had meaning. In spite of or because their bodies ache, they step easily into the dreamer's tale" (Morrison, 1998: 264). The aches of the

body are symptomatic of the traumas that torture their psyches. Functioning as a talking cure, their story-telling releases that which has been repressed and silenced for a long time. The visualization of the repressed traumatic memories as a kind of dreaming is accomplished by the free-floating verbal rendition of the traumatic experiences. The floating signifying chain unshelved from the unconscious forms a “multi-vocal, dialogic space” (Michael, 2002: 654), and it also ushers these women into one another’s traumatic experience—in the loud dreaming, they collectively “step into” each dreamer’s or teller’s traumatic past and share the afflictions. Moreover, the “loud-dreaming” arouses their repressed pain and fury but ends with the cure of love: “In loud dreaming, monologue is no different from a shriek; accusations directed to the dead and long gone are undone by murmurs of love” (Morrison, 1998: 264). Through the talks, they release “the dead and long gone,” and through empathy, they find consolation and love. Following the loud-dreaming is the painting on the silhouettes of their bodies; these women paint on their templates on the floor the secrets associated with tormenting traumatic memories, like Seneca’s scar, Gigi’s heart locket which is a gift from her father and Pallas’s baby whose father is unknown. They draw on the silhouettes of their bodies what they cannot utter in speech. In so doing, they are able to leave their traumas on the “shells” of their bodies and spirits which they symbolically come out of. The healing thus serves as a contrary to Ruby’s repressive, monological historiography founded on the fixation on memories. The Rubyites remember in order to forget what they have disowned or disallowed, whereas the Convent women’s collective loud dreaming evokes the disremembered and even forms a zone in which different discourses of remembrance are allowed to coexist (Michael, 2002: 654).

After the collective therapy, that which is also induced in the loud dreaming is an ecstasy or rapture other than the phallic *jouissance*—an “extra,” “ex-sistent” *jouissance* which is “the face of the Other, the God face, [...] based on feminine *jouissance*”

(Lacan, 1975/1998: 77) . Morrison’s depiction of their dance in the rain after the therapy is marked by this Other/feminine *jouissance*:

[The rain] was like lotion on their fingers so they entered it and let it pour like balm on their shaved heads and upturned faces. Consolata started it; the rest were quick to join her. There are great rivers in the world and on their banks and the edges of oceans children thrill to water. In places where rain is light the thrill is almost erotic. *But those sensations bow to the rapture of holy women dancing in hot sweet rain.* They would have laughed, had enchantment not been so deep. If there were any recollections of a recent warning or intimations of harms, the irresistible rain washed them away. (Morrison, 1998: 283; emphasis added)

In the rain, these “holy” women, as if being anointed, experience the rapture which the mystics<sup>21</sup> savor in their encounter with the Holy Spirit and which cannot be deciphered at the symbolic level.<sup>22</sup> Salecl unfolds the similarity in the ecstasy that the mystics go through and that women enjoy: the mystics “immerse themselves in an ascetic stance and detach themselves from the world”; likewise, “the enjoyment a woman finds in a melancholic seclusion from the world is precisely a form of feminine *jouissance*,” which “usually perceived as the highest ‘happiness’ that the subject can experience” (Salecl, 2000b: 313). Before the therapy, the Convent women already enjoy the seclusion from the patriarchal world and submerge themselves in the feminine self-sufficiency. With the mystic “hot sweet rain,” a symbol of purification and baptism, washing away their afflictions, these women display in the rain the ecstasy which is “asexual, designating above all a position beyond the castrative symbolic phallic law” and which “brings back into play the primal

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<sup>21</sup> In her interview with James Marcus, Morrison points out that the rapture is “powerful religious ecstasy” (Marcus, 1998).

<sup>22</sup> Bruce Fink points out the rapture the mystics experience is “ineffable” (2002: 40).

enjoyment of pleasure and pain, initially given body in the unmediated mother-child unity, even while it also signifies the traumatic overproximity of the real, against which the subject must defend itself” (Bronfen, 2000: 179). Their dance, in other words, echoes with the return to the Mother and the embrace of the body, both evoked in Consolata’s sermon. Morrison thereby implies in this episode that the healing takes its root somewhere outside the socio-symbolic edifice. In Lacanian terms, Morrison implants the possibility of healing in the feminine structure, which allows for hopes for change.<sup>23</sup> Just as Consolata starts to address herself “Consolata Sosa” after the revelation, it is in the dance that Gigi is addressed “Grace.” The dance bestows the women a new identity derived from the therapeutic dance.

To critique and manifest the inclination of the patriarchal culture to displace its innate inconsistency and its fear of the feminine *jouissance* onto women/outside, Morrison juxtaposes the “baptism” of this mystic *jouissance* with the latent jeopardy it induces. As a foreshadowing, the narrator points out May’s misassumption about the Convent women’s situation after their “baptism”: “[U]nlike some people in Ruby, the Convent women were no longer *haunted*. Or *hunted* either, [May] might have added. But there she would have been wrong” (1998: 266; emphasis added). Though no longer haunted by the past, these women are still hunted by the men who blame the failure of their utopian all-black town on them. The manifestation of the rapture that points to the beyond of the phallic *jouissance* appears to be menacing to Ruby’s masculine, social fantasy.

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<sup>23</sup> According to Ellie Ragland, the impossible and contingent implied in the feminine logic of the Lacanian graph of sexuation are free from the castration fear, whereas the necessary and possible in the masculine logic are founded on “an illusion of whole (or *all*) as the beginning and end of knowledge”; therefore, Ragland contends that “Lacan places psychoanalytic and cultural hopes for change in feminine logic” (2004: 97). It is precisely in this sense that Lacan places the ethical act at the side of the feminine, regarding this act as “the rupture in the symbolic narrative continuum” (Žižek, 2001: 101).

## V. Redemption

The massacre is evidently triggered by the Ruby men's exclusive view of paradise. In the interview with Marcus, Morrison criticizes the conventional view of paradise as limited: "Our view of Paradise is so limited: it requires you to think of yourself as the chosen people—chosen by God, that is. Which means that your job is to isolate yourself from other people. That's the nature of Paradise: it's really defined by who is *not* there as well as who is." In the novel, the Rubyites' fantasy of being the chosen people in a way relies on the fantasy of a degenerated "breed" that does not belong to the community but possesses excessive enjoyment. The Convent women are hunted because of the undecipherable "excessive" *jouissance* which the Ruby men consider a threat to their masculine identity but which epitomizes the healing that release these women from what they have been haunted. During the raid, the attackers are "alert to the female malice that hides [in the Convent]" and assume that there must have been "revolting sex, deceit and the sly torture of children" (Morrison, 1998: 4, 8). What originally resides "Out There" in their fantasy reveals itself *right here* inside the Convent in that instance (Morrison, 1998: 8). The templates on the floor appear to K.D. as the pornography or Satan's scrawl but to Anna, who can perceive in the templates those Convent women's struggle with haunting traumas, they look more like "the turbulence of females trying to bridle, without being trampled, the monsters that slavered them." (Morrison, 1998: 303). This episode manifests that killing those women amounts to eliminating the abject part within the Ruby men and the patriarchal community, that is, the "dung" which stands for their shame and the unmediated mother-child symbiosis *qua jouissance*.

The baptism of the hot, sweet rain, symbolically, not only purifies the women but also sanctifies the women as "Christ figures, who must die so that others may soar" (Page, 2001: 646), whereas in Ruby's social fantasy, these women are stigmatized as the cause

of the town's degeneration. Near the end of the story, these women turn out to be the Lamb bringing redemption through their sacrifice. The massacre destabilizes Ruby's self-enclosing and homogeneous socio-symbolic system and meanwhile, opens up a crevice for change. As Matus indicates, the assault is "a watershed, [. . .] after which a cavernous difference opens up between the twins" (1998: 162). The Morgan twins used to symbolize the homogeneity and self-duplication implied in the town's ideological narrative, but after the raid "the inside difference was too deep for anyone to miss" (Morrison, 1998: 299). It is Deacon who becomes remorse-ridden after the assault—"his long remorse was at having become what the Old Fathers cursed: the kind of man who set himself up to judge, rout and even destroy the needy, the defenseless, the different." (Morrison, 1998: 302). Reminiscent of Zechariah's renunciation of his twin brother, now Deacon no longer identifies with Steward, even though the psychological severance has left in him "an incompleteness, a muffled solitude" (Morrison, 1998: 300). As if to recompense or to express his remorse for the crime he and the other murderers have committed, he starts to walk barefooted as the Exodusters did. It also has dawned on him that just as the shame which Coffee saw in Tea also exists in Coffee himself, so he shares the shame that he has seen in his ruthless twin brother. The history of "disallowing" one's own brother would repeat itself if Misner did not remind him, "To lose a brother is a hard thing. To choose to lose one, well, that's worse than the original shame, wouldn't you say?" (Morrison, 1998: 303). Ruby's hope, without doubt, lies in Deacon's change and retrospection.

The disappearance of the bodies, a missing link in the narrative, forms a metafictional twist<sup>24</sup> that lays bare the fictitiousness of the novel. The divergence in the critical

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<sup>24</sup> Apropos of the enigma of the Convent women's death, Morrison, in her interview with the OnlineHost, stated that she wanted the reader to decide for themselves whether these women were killed in the raid. See Page (2001: 638).

interpretations of this fictional rendition manifests the authorial attempt to make the trauma “unspeakable” and difficult for interpretation. I would argue that the disappearance of the bodies stands for three aspects of the Lacanian real. First of all, the enigma of the missing bodies, tightly entangled with the question of who the white girl is, points to race *qua* the real, i.e. the deadlock that Ruby’s ideological narrative and historiography attempt to cope with. Secondly, it implies that the Convent women are metaphorically the phantasmatic spectres that stand in the lack and support the fascist-racist ideological narrative. That is, they are the ghostly “Out There” that simultaneously constitutes and destabilizes both Rubyites’ communal identity and ideological discourses. The final aspect of the real the missing bodies stand for is the non-historical kernel where the traumatic past could be redeemed.

Having the bodies vanish from the scene of the crime, Morrison acquits the Rubyites and give them a second chance. As Lone contends, the disappearance of the bodies signifies that “God had given Ruby a second chance. Had made Himself so visible and unarguable a presence even the outrageously prideful (like Steward) and the uncorrectably stupid (like his lying nephew) ought to be able to see it” (Morrison, 1998: 297). Morrison also gives the Convent women a second chance. The last section, entitled “Save-Marie” (Save-Me), recounts the first eight-rock funeral in Ruby and the “afterlives” of these women. At the funeral of Sweetie Fleetwood’s youngest child, Save-Marie, whose death breaks the myth of immortality the townspeople are obsessed with, Misner points out in his sermon, “Oh, Save-Marie, your name always sounded like ‘Save me.’ ‘Save me.’ Any other messages hiding in your name? I know one that shines out for all to see: there never a time when you were not saved, Marie. Amen” (Morrison, 1998: 307). Soon it is revealed that the salvation has been delivered not merely to the Rubyites but also to the Convent women.

The magical-realistic rendition of the apparition of the women is not so much “an artistic solution to the narrative impasse,”

(Bouson, 2000: 213),<sup>25</sup> as an artistic speculation of a chance of salvation coming from “the real” in the Lacanian sense. In the epilogue, after an unspecified period of time, the four Convent boarders, namely Gigi, Seneca, Pallas and Mavis, appear before their families whom they love but who also hurt them the most. Their “apparition” arouses the question whether they return as ghosts. Sarah A. Aguiar even points out the possibility that they had been dead long before they took shelter in the Convent (2004: 514). Ghost or a ghostly mode of existence has been a recurrent motif in Morrison’s oeuvre. Sam Durrant argues that race, which Morrison specifies as “the ghost in the machine of white literature” in her “Unspeakable Things Unspoken,” is literalized as a “real” (in the Lacanian sense) ghost in her *Beloved* (2004: 101). Like *Beloved*, the Convent women, given the diversity and “impurity” of their racial identities, are the “race-ghosts” haunting the Rubyites in their fantasy about racial purity. On the other hand, also like *Beloved*’s apparition, theirs brings about redemptive reconciliation, albeit in a different way.

In the dream-like encounters, the four Convent tenants not only give but also are given a “revolutionary chance” to come to terms with traumas. When these four women appear “cradled in visionary bliss” (Widdowson, 2001: 333), Gigi’s father, Seneca’s mother, Pallas’s mother and Mavis’s daughter confront their past wrongdoings in their “last glance” of their beloved but maltreated daughter or mother. These women’s apparition bids the traumas farewell and thereby redeems the past. As ghosts from the past, their apparition disrupts temporal continuity; to put in Walter Benjamin’s words, that moment of apparition functions like “a Messianic cessation of happening” (1968/1969: 263) or the dialectic image “in which the Then (*das Gewesene*) and the Now (*das Jetzt*) come into a constellation like a flash of

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<sup>25</sup> In her interview with Rose, Morrison reveals her hesitation about the fate of the Convent women and her final decision to have them both get killed and escape (Bouson, 2000: 213).

lightning”(Benjamin, 1989: 49). Benjamin’s conceptualization of the dialectic image and monad implies the “revolutionary chance” in history to “redeem a part of the forgotten past” (Rochlitz, 1992/1996: 250). Žižek, from a psychoanalytic perspective, interprets this redemption as a repetition “located outside time” to redeem “past failed attempts which ‘will have been’ only through their repetition” (1989: 141). The Messianic cessation, so to speak, is a still moment outside historical time, i.e. in the non-historical real, when the traumatic past can be redeemed. These four women show up as soon as they are recalled. For instance, at the very moment when Manley Gibson wonders if there is anyone he can run to after he abandoned his eleven-year-old daughter Gigi, he sees her sitting by the lake; Jean spots Seneca while she is thinking of the daughter she forsook years ago, and Pallas appears when her artist mother Dee Dee tries to remember her chin in order to finish her daughter’s portrait but to no avail. Both for the four women and for their families, this Messianic cessation is a revolutionary chance to retrieve what have been lost. Gigi returns to her “Daddy Man” and finds that her father still remembers the locket he gave her; Mavis returns to her daughter Sally, who apologizes and expresses her love to Mavis. However, Morrison also implies there is a latent possibility of a missed encounter even at this moment of Messianic cessation: Pallas returns to retrieve her lost shoes without exchanging a word with her mother and Jean misses a chance to reunite with Seneca since she forgets the name of the place where she used to live with the daughter she denied and abandoned. Despite the regret the missed encounter may leave behind, Dee Dee is given a chance to see Pallas once again, a chance at least allowing her to finish the portrait, while Jean has a chance to hear Seneca say to her, “That’s okay. Everybody makes mistakes,” albeit expressed in a different context (Morrison, 1998: 317).

The Out There that the Rubyites guard against ironically turns out to be a realm where salvation resides. Billie Delia hopes that the Convent women are alive “*out there*” (Morrison, 1998: 308;

emphasis added). The vision of a beckoning door or window, which Misner and Anna “sense” at the scene of the crime, evokes such questions as “what would happen if you entered? What would be on the other side? What on earth would it be?” (Morrison, 1998: 305). What Misner and Anna perceive, as Misner later realizes at Save-Marie’s funeral when gazing at the coffin lid, is an outlet to “another place—neither life nor death—but there, just yonder” (Morrison, 1998: 307). Morrison places hope for change at this realm *yonder* or “out there,” i.e. the constitutive outside *qua* the real which is expelled out of the socio-symbolic formation of Ruby but which simultaneously destabilizes this socio-symbolic edifice. This place that is neither life nor death is precisely a feminine locus where the ethical acts or the Messianic chances wait to be actualized, chances that the unacknowledged traumatic past may be acknowledged or failed historical attempts may be redeemed.

The novel ends with a seemingly paradisiacal vision that shows Piedade singing, with Consolata’s head resting on her lap, an image reminiscent of the *Pietà* that depicts Madonna holding the dead Jesus Christ in her lap (Bouson, 2000: 215). If the aforementioned visionary encounter is a dialectic image beyond temporal restraint, this image of maternal consolation transcends not only time but also the confinement of racial identity since the racial boundary is transgressed by the image of a Black Madonna holding a daughter who is a “racial hybrid” (Bouson, 2000: 215). Morrison’s postmodern thinking is revealed not simply in her “postmodern skepticism toward closure” made explicit in the novel (Dalsgård, 2001: 244) but especially in her deconstructionist visualization of paradise. The paradisiacal vision no longer depicts “a place where white sidewalks met the sea and fish the color of plums swam alongside children,” where fruits “tasted the way that sapphires look” and “boys [used] rubies for dice” (Morrison, 1998: 263). Instead, tainted by earthliness, the vision represented in the epilogue is a beach where “sea trash gleams”: “Discarded bottle caps sparkle near a broken sandal. A small dead radio plays the quiet surf” (Morrison, 1998: 318). Even the celestial image of the

*Pietà* is blemished by Piedade's ruined fingers and "the colors of seashells," i.e. the colors of wheat, roses and pearl, blended in Consolata's face, recalling the wound on her forehead (Morrison, 1998: 289, 318). This image, in other words, is a pastiche of pity, consolation, as their names imply, and also suffering. It destabilizes the seemingly paradisiacal yearning that the title of the novel tends to evoke.

While the title of the novel directs the reader's attention from the "war" between races and genders<sup>26</sup> to the author's conceptualization of paradise, it also begs the question, "Where does the paradise locate?" In her interview with Marcus, Morrison points out that the epilogue of the novel manifests that "an earthly Paradise is the only one we know"; she also indicates that the nature of paradise is "defined by who is *not* there as well as who is" since we all imagine paradise "in terms of seclusion" (Marcus, 1998). Her critique of the myth of paradise lays bare, in Lacanian terms, the other side of the utopian fantasy of ideal Society—the paranoiac fantasy of an embezzling Other whose seclusion serves to concretize and justify the Oneness fantasized in the myth of paradise. Morrison reveals that paradise, which can only be an earthly one, is a phantasmatic construct generated in an ideological discourse of Oneness that always already includes its own impossibility since "if Paradise had everybody in it, there would be no Paradise at all" (Marcus, 1998). As Misner remarks, Ruby, a "hard-won heaven," is defined "only by the absence of the unsaved, the unworthy and the strange" (Morrison, 1998: 306). What Morrison intends to point out is that all earthly visualization of paradise is founded on "Disallowing," which in the novel is not simply a historical event but a trauma that induces repetitive attempts to soothe the scorch at the symbolic level. Therefore, that which is in issue is not race but the discursive attempts to cope with the trauma of race. However, despite this criticism, it is not hard to detect a longing for the salvation of "the unsaved, the

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<sup>26</sup> The novel was originally entitled "War" (Marcus, 1998).

unworthy and the strange,” i.e. for a state, as indicated in *Isaiah* 56: 3, where the *foreigner* can be included and the eunuch would no longer be regarded as “a dry tree.”

In contrast with the desolate view of paradise is Piedade’s song, which causes the shepherds to “remember their lives” and travelers to “[refuse] to board homebound ships while she sang” (Morrison, 1998: 285)—a conspicuous allusion to the songs of the sirens in the *Odyssey*. Like sirens, Piedade sings and never speaks since feminine *jouissance* is unspeakable; she reveals through her songs the solace and healing power that Morrison conflates with the mystic, feminine *jouissance* that the Convent women experience before the raid. Moreover, what her songs stir up are memories neither Piedade nor Consolata has ever had. The memory of the past they “disremember,” a word Sethe uses in *Beloved*, may be a collective traumatic one which can be traced all the way back to the Middle Passage, implied by the mention of a ship heading to port, with “crews and passengers, lost and saved, atremble, for they have been disconsolate for some time” (1998: 318). The indication that those passengers will rest *before*, not after, “shouldering the endless work they were created to do down here in paradise” (1998: 318) also insinuates that it is a journey prior to their living in an “earthly paradise,” which might refer either to America, where they must shoulder slavery, or to the secular world, where all human beings are created to bear endless works. Despite this ambiguity, Piedade’s songs offer the crews and passengers “the unambivalent bliss of going home to be at home” and “the ease of coming back to love” (1998: 318). In contrast with Ruby’s historiography, the free-floating songs, the lyrics of which are unknown, evoke feminine *jouissance* and disremembered past. They embody the Messianic chance of redemption from the real, beyond the limit of time and the symbolic. Morrison insinuates at the very end of the novel that paradise, if there is one, exists not on earth but in Piedade’s songs of solace, in which both love and a spiritual home reside, as they pacify the disconsolate and heal the wounds gnawing their hearts.

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歷史書寫、社群身分與陰性暢感：  
論童妮·摩里森的小說《樂園》

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摘 要

有鑒於《樂園》呈現歷史書寫成爲強調膚色血統的意識形態論述之後所產生的危險，本篇論文援引拉岡的精神分析理論以及此理論於意識形態批判方面的應用，以分析本書中的歷史書寫在形塑社群身分時如何將非歷史性核心轉置於幻象中的「外界」(Out There)與享受暢感 (*jouissance*) 之大對體 (the Other)。此「外界」正是一具封閉傾向的父權社會符號體系所排斥的「建構性外在」，同時也是促成此一體系改變的契機與醫治之所在。此外，本文指出，書末所出現的「外界」顯示一陰性、非歷史性的領域，隱含著歷史失敗得以被救贖的契機，此領域才是真正的樂園以及家鄉的所在。

**關鍵詞：**意識形態歷史書寫、社群身分、建構性外在、非歷史性核心、陰性暢感