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**Constructing the Black Atlantic: History and Memory in Toni Morrison's  
*Beloved* and Caryl Phillips' *Cambridge***



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***Abstract :***

*The desire to revisit the past is a common practice for postcolonial writers. While the reconstruction of history remains central to most of these writers, some of them have dedicated their works essentially to the rewriting of the history of transatlantic slavery from the perspectives of slaves. The reliance on memory to retell the story constitutes the means through which the past is recovered. It is within this framework that Toni Morrison and Caryl Phillips revisit history to highlight the silences and gaps of master narratives.*

*Through their neo-slave narratives, these writers not only reinstall historical contexts as significant and determining for the rehabilitation of modern history, but their approach to history also problematises historical knowledge. These issues have been appropriated by the black Atlantic which seeks to establish the historical relation that exists between the*

Americas, Europe and Africa for the purpose of transcending the cultural barriers that have often led to racial discrimination as reflected in Morrison's *Beloved* and Phillips' *Cambridge*. In this respect as the paper will examine, however, the reconstruction of history through memory recollection also means the construction of the black Atlantic.

Informed by new historicism and psychoanalysis, the paper therefore discusses how the hitherto silent voices (blacks) construct history by returning to their past through the work of memory and concludes that victims of slavery tell their traumatic experiences, and in this process, they not only assert their place in History, but also their narratives/narration release them from their trauma.

**Keywords :** Psychoanalysis, new historicism, neo-slave narratives, black Atlantic, postcolonial writers

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### **Research Paper :**

The desire to revisit the past is a common practice for postcolonial writers. While the reconstruction of history<sup>1</sup> remains central to most of these writers, some of them have dedicated their works essentially to the rewriting of the history of transatlantic slavery from the perspectives of slaves. The reliance on memory<sup>2</sup> to retell the story constitutes the means through which the past is recovered. It is within this framework that Toni Morrison and Caryl Phillips revisit history to highlight the silences and gaps of master narratives.

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<sup>1</sup>The word "history" comes from Greek word "historia" and means inquiry, information, narrative. In *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, history is defined as "narrative of events, a story; a chronological record of events, as of the life or development of a people or institution; something that belongs to the past" (833). What these definitions seem to highlight is the fact that history is a narrative, a narration of past events. From the perspective of this paper history is understood as the narrative of events, the reconstruction of past events. Pierre Nora in "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Memoire*" corroborates this view. To him, history is "the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer... [it] is representation" (285). In this sense, historical accounts become a narrative in the sense that a person relates them.

<sup>2</sup>The word "memory" comes from the Latin word "memoria" meaning mindful. It refers to a process that is often associated to mental activities. In *The American Heritage Dictionary of English Language*, the word memory is defined as "the mental faculty of retaining and recalling past experience; the act or an instance of remembering, recollecting; all that a person can remember..." (1096). It is a psychological process that is associated with the past.

black Atlantic which seeks to establish the historical relation that exists between the Americas, Europe and Africa for the purpose of transcending the cultural barriers that have often led to racial discrimination as reflected in Morrison's *Beloved* and Phillips' *Cambridge*. In this respect as the paper will examine, however, the reconstruction of history through memory recollection also means the construction of the black Atlantic <sup>3</sup>.

Informed by new historicism and psychoanalysis, the paper therefore discusses how the hitherto silent voices (blacks) construct history by returning to their past through the work of memory and concludes that victims of slavery tell their traumatic experiences, and in this process, they not only assert their place in History, but also their narratives/narration release them from their trauma.

Morrison's *Beloved* and Phillips' *Cambridge* delineate the reconstruction of history through memory recollection. Indeed, Morrison and Phillips' treatment of the theme of slavery is not intended to reproduce it in its historical exactness. Rather, it aims at bringing out the multifarious imaginative potentialities of the woven complexity that the enslavement of Africans by Europeans has produced. Quoting Fred D'Aguiar's *The Longest Memory*, Benedict Ledent (1997) presents the reason for which Phillips attaches more attention to slavery. She holds that it was because of Britain's attempt to both exclude blacks as forming part of British history, and to erase slavery from her history. Carl Plasa and Betty Ring (1994:xiv) suggest that: "In Britain the subject of racial oppression has been examined primarily in relation to colonialism, postcolonialism and imperialism but much less fully with regard to the problematic of slavery". If slavery has often been obliterated from the critical debate in Britain, it has also been markedly absent from imaginative writing. However, as many post-colonial critics have shown, slavery has always lurked in the literary background, all the more conspicuously so for being left out of the master narratives of empire. It is this remarkable absence that Phillips seeks to transform into an eloquent presence by underscoring that slavery is an indelible past that links black history to Western history. To this effect, Ledent (1997:272) quotes D'Aguiar (1994:33) who observes that:

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<sup>3</sup>The black Atlantic is both a theme and a theoretical approach that explains and generates criticism over the shared experience of enslavement and emancipation of blacks. According to Paul Gilroy (1993), it is an attempt to recover a social past governed by terror and atrocity (slavery). It is at the origin of racial terror and dislocation shared by black communities throughout the Atlantic. It is the root of a productive syncretism that Gilroy wrests from what has otherwise been cast as wholly negative, perpetuating a limiting sense of victimhood, cultural exclusion and inferiority. Black Atlantic therefore offers a basis for (re)writing African-European history in a transnational and intercultural way. In focusing on formerly silenced voices, it also initiates constructive cultural relations that defy the hegemonic white discourse.

There is simply too much history between us all [ ...]. What began as a single thread has, over the generations, woven itself into a prodigious carpet that cannot be unwoven. There is no good in pretending that a single thread of cause and effect exists now when in actual fact the carpet is before us with many beginnings and no end in sight.<sup>4</sup>

Ledent however notes that the dislocated, ternary topography of slavery, covering Africa, the Americas and Europe, provides one clue to these potentialities. The three continents are the spatial anchor points of the web of diasporan identities which Paul Gilroy terms the black Atlantic.

However, the renewed literary interest in slavery on the part of the Caribbean writers is not only related to Britain. It is also part of a broader movement which can be traced back to African American literature. The interconnectedness that signals the construction and existence of the black Atlantic also bears its roots in genealogy. As George Schuler remarks in *Black No More*, racial differences are only skin deep. Speaking through the mouth piece of one of the characters in the novel, Mr. Samuel Bugarie, Schuler reassesses race through genealogical statistics and finds instead that:

These statistics we've gathered prove that most of our social leaders [...] are descendants of colonial stock that came here in bondage. They associated with slaves, in many cases worked and slept with them. They intermixed with the blacks and the women were socially exploited by their masters. Then, even more than today, the illegitimate birth rate was very high in America.<sup>5</sup>

Likewise, for Phillips and Morrison, slavery is a meaningful and fecund site for black Atlantic history and memory, as it offers the occasion to both writers not only to revisit the past, but also to create a heterogeneous and spatial community.

In *Beloved*, Morrison reconceptualises American history. She constructs history through the consciousness and actions of slaves, a consciousness that reveals itself through the recollection of traumatic experiences of the past. This psychological recovery then becomes a process which leads the character to the construction of history. Only, the memories are

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<sup>4</sup>Ledent, "Remember Slavery: History as Roots in the Fiction of Caryl Phillips and Fred D'Aguiar" in *The Contact and the Culmination: Essays in Honour of Hena Maes-Jelinek*, P. 272

<sup>5</sup>George Schuler, *Black No More*, p.178

represented in fragments and their delineation by the victims follows a regular shift between the present and the past.

In part one of the novel, the arrival first of Paul D then of Beloved forces Sethe to confront her past in her incompatible roles as slave and mother by revealing her experiences in slavery; traumatic experiences that are accumulated through fragmented recollection. Beloved represents the physical manifestation of traumatic memories both in the text and to other characters. She is both the pain and the past. Her relation to the various characters in the novel provides them a window into their past through their memory recollection. This perception seems to be approved by Linda Krumholz (1992). She argues that:

[Beloved] acts as an unconscious imp, stealing away the volition of characters, and as a psychoanalytic urge, she pries open suppressed memories and emotions. In a sense she is like an analyst the object of transference and cathexis that draws out the past. Countering traumatic repression, she makes the characters accept their past, their squelched memories, and their own hearts, as beloved.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, slave victims construct history in the light of Beloved's presence. It is her presence that takes them memory lane to voice the atrocities they encountered while in bondage. She forces Sethe to confront the gap between her mother love and the realities of motherhood in slavery. In the meantime, the three sections of the novel correspond to the characters' reckoning with the history of slavery. In the beginning of the text, stories of slavery are accumulated through fragmented recollections, culminating in the revelation of Sethe's murder of her child in the last chapters of the section. In part two, the reader is immersed in the voices of despair. Morrison presents the internal voices of Sethe, Denver, and Beloved in a ritual chant of possession, while Paul D and Stamp Paid are also overwhelmed by the legacy of slavery. The last part of *Beloved* captures the comic relief of the conversation of Paul D and Stamp Paid and the hopeful reunion of Sethe and Paul D. The narrative ends with Denver becoming the new teacher and as Krumholz (1992:397) remarks, "providing the reader with a model for a new pedagogy and the opportunity for the reconstruction of slave history from a black woman's perspective".

At the beginning of the novel Sethe, Denver and Paul D are haunted by the ghost in 124 (their

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<sup>6</sup>Linda Krumholz, "The Ghosts of Slavery: Historical Recovery in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*", p. 400

residence). Overwhelmed by the discomfort the ghost's presence orchestrates, "Sethe and Denver decided to end the persecution by calling forth the ghost that tried them so [...] So they held hands and said, 'come on. Come on. You may as well just come on'"<sup>7</sup> The interpellation here symbolises Sethe and Denver's decision to confront their memory, their past which Beloved, the ghost incarnates. Their insistence to see her appear is a metaphor for their angst to come to terms with their psychological persecution, one that can only be resolved if they are brought forth to consciousness; that is if they reveal it overtly. And there seem to be no escape, for 124 and other places are also haunted by ghosts and perhaps by more destructive adult ghosts as Baby Suggs remarks when Sethe suggests, "we could move"<sup>8</sup>. According to Baby Suggs, there is no point moving for as she says:

'Not a house in the country ain't packed to its rafters with some dead Negro's grief. We lucky this ghost is a baby. My husband's spirit was to come back in here? Or yours? Don't talk to me. You lucky. You got three left. Three pulling at your skirts and just one raising hell from the other side. Be thankful, why don't you? I had eight. Every one of them gone away from me. Four taken, four chased, and all, I expect, worrying somebody's house into evil.' Baby Suggs rubbed her eyebrows. 'my first born. All I can remember of her is how she loved the burned bottom of bread. Can you beat that? Eight children and that's all I remember'.<sup>9</sup>

Baby Suggs' advice to Sethe also sounds like a warning to her. In fact, she makes Sethe understand that what they are going through can be witnessed everywhere, and Sethe's situation is even better than hers. Trying to escape from 124 will be illusive because she bears the trauma with her. As Baby Suggs narrates her own trauma, she sheds tears for among the children she had none is left, and she is even unable to remember each of them. And when it appears she is able, the only memory left to her is about her first born who "loved the burned bottom of bread"<sup>10</sup>. She could neither remember the men who fathered her children, for each time after they met each other, these men were taken away from her as she contends that: "A man ain't nothing but a man,". This is because "anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn't run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, stored up, mortgaged won, stolen or seized. So [her] eight children had six fathers"<sup>11</sup>. And so,

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<sup>7</sup>Morrison, *Beloved*, p.4

<sup>8</sup>Morrison, *Beloved*, p.5

<sup>9</sup>Morrison, *Beloved*, p.6

<sup>10</sup>Morrison, *Beloved*, p.6

<sup>11</sup>Morrison, *Beloved*, p.24

the men she encountered and had children with appeared to be mere game objects. But they were not alone in this game. The game objects also included her eight children, a reason that explains “what she calls the nastiness of life”<sup>12</sup>; that is “the shock she received upon learning that nobody stopped playing checkers just because the pieces included her children”<sup>13</sup>. Despite the assurance of her white master who promised her no harm and the protection of her child in exchange for sex, she was still abused. The narrator captures these circumstances in the following terms:

To make up for coupling with a straw boss for four months in exchange for keeping her third child, a boy, with her, only to have him traded for lumber in the spring of the next year and to find herself pregnant by the man who promised not to and did. That child she could not love and the rest she would not.<sup>14</sup>

Baby Suggs’ memory recollection enables her to construct history in the sense that she reveals what she underwent as a slave woman, a detail not recorded by official history; an aspect silenced by Western discourse. As an unaccounted for, Baby Suggs makes a revelation that is not recorded by modern history: the inhumane treatment of black slaves, the rape of black women by their white owners and the atrocious abuse of their motherhood. The recollection of her traumatic suffering enables her to participate in the restitution of the official history of slavery. The experiences of her children taken into slavery and “moved around with like checkers”<sup>15</sup> is an event that has haunted her all her life to the extent that she finds no interest in “whatsoever”<sup>16</sup> and whatever.

When Paul D insists that Sethe and Denver should leave the haunted house. Sethe responds: “No moving. No leaving. It’s all right the way it is”<sup>17</sup>. This firm resolution to stay testifies to Sethe’s will to voice the pain piercing her heart and her soul. The scar the past has left on her is not only psychological, but also physical. She tells Paul D: “I got a tree on my back and a haint in my house, and nothing is between but the daughter I am holding in my arms. No more running, from nothing. I will never run from another thing on this earth”<sup>18</sup>. The tree on her back which she refers to, results from the beating she received from Schoolteacher and other white boys seeking for milk from her breast. By then she had just delivered her daughter

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<sup>12</sup>Morrison, *Beloved*, p.24

<sup>13</sup>Morrison, *Beloved*, p.24

<sup>14</sup>Morrison, *Beloved*, p.24

<sup>15</sup>Morrison, *Beloved*, p.4

<sup>16</sup>Morrison, *Beloved*, p.24

<sup>17</sup>Morrison, *Beloved*, p.16

<sup>18</sup>Morrison, *Beloved*, p.16



Beloved. But she preferred her breast for her child as she points out: “all I knew was I had to get my milk to my baby girl. Nobody was going to nurse her like me. Nobody was going to get it to her fast enough, or take it away when she had enough and didn’t know it”<sup>19</sup>. But this decision does not hold for long for soon after, as Sethe narrates:

Those boys came in there and took my milk. That’s what they came in there for. Held me down and took it. I told Mrs. Garner on em. She had that lump and couldn’t speak but her eyes rolled out tears. Them boys found out I told on em. Schoolteacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree. It grows still.<sup>20</sup>

Further, in an exchange with Paul D, she describes the manner and the condition in which Schoolteacher sucked her milk and extracted some using a cowhide. She further describes the scene of her assault in the following terms: “after they handled me like I was the cow, no, the goat, back behind the stable because it was too nasty to stay in with horses”<sup>21</sup>. Paul D, being scandalised by this revelation inquires from her:

They used cowhide on you?

And they took my milk.

They beat you and you was pregnant?

And they took my milk!<sup>22</sup>

Further, she adds that “two boys with mossy teeth, one sucking on my breast the other holding me down”<sup>23</sup>. This scene illustrates enough the reason for Sethe’s trauma and the reason for which she murdered her child. Not only was she abused under horrible and unspeakable conditions, but also she was submitted to an unprecedented torture a result of which were the deep scars of the wounds she sustained during that inhumane experience Schoolteacher and the other boys inflicted on her. The scars on her back which she refers to as her chokecherry tree is illustrative of the brutality she was frequently submitted to. Chokecherry tree, Sethe explains, “trunk, branches, and even leaves. Tiny little chokecherry leaves. But that was eighteen years ago. Could have cherries too now for all I know”<sup>24</sup>. However, the pathetic image of Sethe’s chokecherry tree is reflexive of the trauma she is suffering from. Again, it reflects the internal wound, hurt and pain slavery has placed her in. she feels no sensation on

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<sup>19</sup>Morrison, *Beloved*, p.17

<sup>20</sup>Morrison, *Beloved*, p.17

<sup>21</sup>Morrison, *Beloved*, p.20

<sup>22</sup>Morrison, *Beloved*, p.18

<sup>23</sup>Morrison, *Beloved*, p.74

<sup>24</sup>Morrison, *Beloved*, p.16



her back “because her back skin had been dead for years”<sup>25</sup>. Therefore, by surfacing her memories she provides an insight into another aspect of slavery, one elided by western record of that historic moment in the life of blacks in general and of black women in particular. The act of recalling her story becomes (his)tory, although fragmentary and non linear. And since her memories exist in the world as fragments of a historical memory, then by extension, the individual process of recollection can be reproduced on a historical level. The recollection of her traumatic past contributes to the construction of the black Atlantic.

Also prominent in the novel is the trauma black men (slaves) suffered from as they struggled to escape from slavery. Like the women, their life is shattered by their tragic experiences in slavery. Men were always submitted to inconceivable scenes of torture. This often involved severe brutality on parts of the body. A vivid illustration of this kind of inhumane treatment is one being recalled by Sethe to Paul D, in an exchange on the matter. Sethe observes of Paul D that “he [Paul D] wants me to ask him about what it was for him, about how offended the tongue is, held down by iron, how the need to spit is so deep you cry for it”.<sup>26</sup> The narrator completes this painful scene thus:

She (Sethe) already knew about it, had seen it time after time in the place before Sweet Home. Men boys, little girls, women. The wilderness that shot up into the eye the moment the lips were yanked back. Days after it was taken out, goose fat was rubbed on the corners of the mouth but nothing to soothe the tongue or take the wilderness out of the eye.<sup>27</sup>

The act described by the above excerpt is one of the several reifying treatments that have led black men (slaves) to lose their manhood and their responsibility within their families and their societies.

Cathy Geagan (2012) suggests that Paul D is in a worse position than Sethe as his scars are internal and he has to fight his own battles; he has never spoken of his time under the Schoolteacher in Sweet Home to anyone, and it is only in accidental defence of the actions of Sethe’s husband Halle, who was “broken” by witnessing the assault on his wife, that Paul D confesses how difficult stoicism can be, admitting “A man ain’t a goddamn ax. Chopping, hacking, busting every minute of the day. Things get to him. Things he can’t chop down

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<sup>25</sup>Morrison, *Beloved*, p.18

<sup>26</sup>Morrison, *Beloved*, p.75

<sup>27</sup>Morrison, *Beloved*, p.75

because they're inside"<sup>28</sup>. Paul D has none of the physical markings of trauma for someone like Sethe to kiss better- even his eyes do not have the usual wildness which Sethe believes follows on from having worn a bit; and so his fight with memory holds the potential for more pain than Sethe. Unlike Sethe, Paul D has to conquer his repression and his tendency to keep his painful remembering, "where it belonged, in that tobacco tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be. Its lid rusted shut"<sup>29</sup>.

Charles Atangana Nama(2001:180) points out that "their [African American males] past, that is slavery, coupled with the repercussions of being ostracized economically in a racist society have contributed enormously to this demise". However, the trauma black male characters undergo is the result of the deprivation of all the pleasures of life. The narrator remarks:

And so they were: Paul D Garner, Paul F Garner, Paul A Garner, Halle Suggs and Sixo, the wild man. All in their twenties minus women, fucking cows, dreaming of rape, thrashing on pallets, rubbing their thighs and waiting for the new girls... the Sweet home men abused cows...<sup>30</sup>

In addition, the traumatic state of Sweet Home men is emphasised when the narrator notes, "unlike a snake or bear, a dead nigger could not be skinned for profit and was not worth his own dead weight in coin"<sup>31</sup>. The trauma even leads Paul D, the most prominent male character in the novel to an incestuous relationship with Beloved. Such manifestation of male debility has brought critics like Nama (2001:185) to argue that "in the tradition of the slave narratives, in *Beloved* Toni Morrison captures the psychological repercussions of slavery on the psyche of the African Americans".

The above analyses demonstrate that *Beloved* reconstructs the history of slavery by portraying how individual characters and the black slave communities construct history by recounting their traumatic experiences in bondage. Through memory recovery, their past is revealed and through this process, the hidden aspects of slavery are brought to daylight. And as Krumholz (1992:407) suggests, Beloved as the forgotten spirit of the past represents the symbol of that memory. Again, alluding to the end of the novel which says, "this is not a story to pass on"<sup>32</sup> Krumholz (1992:407) concludes: "in one reading, the story is not one to pass by or to pass

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<sup>28</sup>Morrison, *Beloved*, p.69

<sup>29</sup>Morrison, *Beloved*, p.72

<sup>30</sup>Morrison, *Beloved*, p.11

<sup>31</sup>Morrison, *Beloved*, p.148

<sup>32</sup>Morrison, *Beloved*, p.290

over. At the same time, the more evident meaning is intensely ironic, ‘this is not a story to pass on’, and yet, as the novel shows us, it must be.”

Like Morrison, Phillips gives voice to subaltern subjects to construct their history. In *Cambridge*, he presents two distinct narrative voices: Emily’s and Cambridge. While Emily’s account of life on the island represents Western historical records of slavery. Cambridge’s perspective of slavery captures slaves’ construction of history through memory recollection. However, instances exist where Emily mediates the voices of slaves. Such instances are significant as they symbolise the black Atlantic.

Meanwhile, the traumatic experience suffered by Cambridge in slavery is narrated by Cambridge himself while in captivity as he says in the beginning of his narrative: “ Pardon the liberty I take in unburdening myself with these hasty lines [...] Soon I know not when, I am to be dispatched. To where, I know not”<sup>33</sup>. This shows that his experiences are in the past, and he makes use of his memory to recollect them. However, his account concerns his experience both of the slave trade in the coast of Guinea, and the Middle Passage. In his narrative, he begins by condemning the natives who easily fell prey to the western business of trading human beings. Cambridge observes that:

Many natives in my home country are canting, deceitful people about whom one must exercise great caution. The treachery of some of our petty kings, encouraged as they are by so-called Christian customers, leaves one no doubt that gratitude, that most desecrated of words, has long since fled their crude language... These Christian inheritors of Hebrew tradition have corrupted the virtues of former times.<sup>34</sup>

Cambridge in the above assertion accuses white Christians for corrupting the natives to participate in the slave trade. To him, his people (the native) were known for their human virtues and good skills in trading. But when they had contact with whites, they abandoned these virtues and applied their commercial skills perversely to fetch human cargo destined for the slave trade. In his reflections, Cambridge regrets the encounter between white and black that has resulted in this other type of business, the black slave trade. He says: “it sours my blood that in the Guinea of my youth it was not to be the good fortune of my brethren to meet such men, for unfortunately our shores were visited by those whose eyes were blinded, and hearts stupefied, by the prospect of profit”<sup>35</sup>. It is this encounter that is responsible for

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<sup>33</sup>Phillips, *Cambridge*, 133

<sup>34</sup>Phillips, *Cambridge*, 133-134

<sup>35</sup>Phillips, *Cambridge*, 134

Cambridge's captivity and present situation as a slave in the West Indies. This reminds him of his capture back in his native Africa as he points out:

When I imagine myself to have been not yet fifteen years of age, I was apprehended by a band of brigands and bound by means of a chain to hand and foot. I must confess, to the shame of my fellow Guinea-men, that I was undoubtedly betrayed by those of my own hue.<sup>36</sup>

Cambridge moves on to describe the conditions of their detention before their transportation across the Atlantic Ocean, what is otherwise known as the Middle Passage. He notes that while in captivity, they were:

Shackled unceremoniously to a fellow unfortunate at both stern and bow, we unhappy blacks formed a most miserable traffic, stumbling with jangling resignation towards our doom [...] I was forced to endure pain the like of which I had never suffered [...] native conversation was punishable by the lash. Day and night our ears were forced to admit their English talk which, at this stage, resembled nothing more civilised than the manic chatter of baboons.<sup>37</sup>

Cambridge's account of the Middle Passage in *Cambridge* shows that it was the first dreadful experience that he went through as a slave. His description of this painful moment in the life of slaves is a way that he contributes in the construction of the history of slavery. In this respect, Cambridge's story of his painful experience can be considered as efforts to account for those whose names have been erased from the history of slavery. His vivid description of the treatment of slaves during their transportation to the Americas is illustrative of Phillips' commitment to highlight some aspects of black history that were crossed over by hegemonic history. In this engagement, Phillips participates in the reconstruction of black history, mainly the history of slavery. However, some of these aspects elided by Western history are the atrocities that accompanied slave deportation that is the traumatic pain they endure during the Middle Passage. Cambridge recaptures these hard moments in his long memory. He notes that they were transported "herded aboard the vessel with less regard than one might bestow upon the basest of animals"<sup>38</sup>. Despite the bad treatment they received, they were frequently subjected to acts of violence to the extent that Cambridge wondered whether "with such savagery and brutal cruelty", they still "expected profit to be extracted by [their] eventual

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<sup>36</sup>Phillips, *Cambridge*, 134-135

<sup>37</sup>Phillips, *Cambridge*, 135

<sup>38</sup>Phillips, *Cambridge*, 137

sale”<sup>39</sup>.

Cambridge proceeded in this account with the description of the conditions in which blacks were detained, the pain they endured and the survival some fought for. He narrates that:

With much rough handling and unnecessary ferocity, we were now ushered down into a place of perpetual night... The heat of the climate, the number of cargo, the necessity for loathsome deeds in this common space, soon rendered this wretched situation impossible... In this time many died where they lay, some on top of others, until the whole scene become one unconceivable horror. The white men came below with eatables. Those who found the strength to refuse were lashed, often to death.<sup>40</sup>

Rape and physical torture were constant brutalities which the white men onboard submitted black women to, as Cambridge remarks: “Their most constant practice was to commit violent depredations on the chastity of female slaves, as though these princesses were the most abandoned women of their species”<sup>41</sup>.

As the novel paints it, the tragic experiences of black slaves during the Middle Passage were beyond compare. By describing these horrors Cambridge partakes in the uncovering of the hidden aspects of the history of slavery. In the novel however, Emily also offers her own account of the history of slavery. In her account she allows the voices of some slaves to echo. It is these voices that will be extracted from her narrative, at this level, to present blacks’ experiences of slavery in the island.

One of these black voices echoes the situation of slave women whose role apart from working on plantations, was to populate the plantations. They were therefore considered as breeders whose role was essential to the maintenance of the plantation economy or slavery. One of the black women, who has just put to birth remarks to Emily, “See misses, see! Here nice new nigger me born to bring for work for misses”<sup>42</sup>. A similar case is observed by Emily who narrates that even pregnant women were not spared. Like other slaves, they worked in the fields “under ‘the pleasing punishment which women bear’”<sup>43</sup> till they gave birth to their baby. As soon as the delivery takes place the newborn child is taken to midwives whose duty is to cater for it, as the breast-feeding mother is “pressed again into service and driven

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<sup>39</sup>Phillips, *Cambridge*, 137

<sup>40</sup>Phillips, *Cambridge*, 138

<sup>41</sup>Phillips, *Cambridge*, 138

<sup>42</sup>Phillips, *Cambridge*, 67

<sup>43</sup>Phillips, *Cambridge*, 68

afield”<sup>44</sup>. Emily also remarks that the slave mother is severed from care for her child, since she spends the day working in the plantation. She loses maternal affection and sometimes forgets about the existence of a child she has given birth to some weeks before. While describing life in slavery, Emily further observes that: “On the mothers’ return to the fields their progeny are lost to the charge of these self-same midwives. It is only to be expected that before long the pleasures of field-gossip far outweigh the burdens of that weary duty known as motherhood”<sup>45</sup>.

Another instance of black’s account of slavery is rendered by Cambridge when he tries to explain the reason behind Christiana’s madness. Cambridge contends that Christiana, his wife, suffers from sexual abuse on the part of Mr Brown who after having used her for several years abandons her for Emily. Cambridge helplessly remarks that:

Mr Brown’s obsession with this woman, and his lack of attention to my wife, caused my wife further to enter that region of the mind whence all attempts to retrieve her are rendered futile [...] my wife’s mind was no longer her own [...] she now considered herself little more than a common animal.<sup>46</sup>

The above quotation shows the treatment black slave women received from their masters. In fact, they were the sexual object of their white masters, regardless of whether they (black slave women) were married, pregnant from their husbands or not.

By juxtaposing both perspectives, also allows the revision of black slaves’ history by subjective voices that is those who were directly involved in the slavery machinery (the whites) as well as those whose life was subjected to it. In this light, the reconstruction of the history of slavery not only becomes the reconstitution of those painful traumatic moments in the life of blacks as they (the moments) were, but also an important contribution to rendering that history more integrative. Memory therefore stands as a veritable tool to unearth the hidden aspects of the history of a people. Vaiva Bernatonyte Azukiene (2012:72) corroborates this argument when she affirms that: “what allows Morrison’s fiction to be named as revision of black slaves’ history is the way she gives subjective voices to the enslaved ones who reveal their emotional and psychological depths”. She explores black female slaves’ memories and painful traumatic experiences.

The fact that some characters (Sethe, Baby Suggs, Paul D in *Beloved*, and Cambridge in

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<sup>44</sup>Phillips, *Cambridge*, 68

<sup>45</sup>Phillips, *Cambridge*, 133

<sup>46</sup>Phillips, *Cambridge*, 164-165

*Cambridge*) constantly come back to the past with their memories and thoughts reveal that the past is an inseparable part of the present, and that the present traumas cannot be healed without reminiscences of the past. Therefore, memories of past, although traumatic, serve as a healing power in these novels. Thus, if *Beloved* can be viewed as the exemplification of the embodiment of trauma, in turn *Cambridge* can represent the embodiment of a common history of slavery among the people of the Atlantic Ocean basin<sup>47</sup>.

In conclusion, the history and memory of the Atlantic slave trade and slavery constitute the crucible of Euro-American and African hybrid identity. Both concepts (history and memory) have not only offered critics and writers of fiction the occasion to revisit the past to reveal signposts in the history of blacks and whites, but they have also generated reflections pertaining to the future of the relationship of the people living in three continents which have in common the Atlantic Ocean. In the context of the black Atlantic therefore, the history in question is the story of those excluded from dominant narratives and Western modernity in general. Memory then becomes a kind of “oral history” which marginalised subjects use to occupy the central stage and assert an identity. It is this history that Morrison and Phillips have depicted in *Beloved* and *Cambridge* respectively. Their works establish historic and cultural connections that exist between blacks and whites. These connections, based on the memory of the Atlantic slave trade and slavery which these people have in common, reveal the rhizomorphic nature of African, European and American cultures, and also constitute the black Atlantic. In effect, slavery and racial injustice, so prevalent in their novels, are generated by ideologies which uphold skin colour as a mark of difference. And as both writers announce, a reliance on these classifications often results in categorisations and racial injustice. For them, since each people possesses a feature that binds them one to the other, humanity, the emphasis should be on what unites rather than what separate them. Morrison and Phillips thus advocate through *Beloved* and *Cambridge* respectively, tolerance, dialogue and solidarity as a response to antagonism. These conditions are essential for social integration and a peaceful cohabitation between people of different cultural or racial background.

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<sup>47</sup>Here we mean Africans, Americans and Europeans.



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