

## Research Article

## African-American Home and Family Issues in *Beloved* by Toni Morrison and *Of Love and Dust* by Ernest James Gaines

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper studies the problematic of home and family among the African American community in *Beloved* by Toni Morrison and *Of Love and Dust* by Ernest Gaines. Set in the 1850s southern America, both narratives relates the systems of slavery and racial discrimination that condemned the African American community, in many ways, in conditions which denied them a true home within the south of the U.S., which paved the way for the disintegration of family structure splitting thus parents from children, husbands from wives. However, it is argued that there is still hope for change.

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**INTRODUCTION**

The victims of slavery amount to about 60 million, Morrison says in an interview. Many were drowned in the Atlantic Ocean during the middle passage and eaten by sharks. Those who escaped drowning suffered from mutilation, starvation, humiliation, and horror on the plantations of the South of the United-States. Actually, slavery and racial containment have kept African Americans at the margin of the southern society depriving them of the sense of humanity and freedom. Such circumstances have made of the black community a valueless wandering people in places where they do not feel at home.

In both novels, *Beloved* and *of love and dust*, the oppressed black community is depicted as a devalued people kept at the bottom of the social ladder on the top of which is situated the powerful white master and oppressor. Yet, as early as 1787, and even earlier in the Declaration of Independence of 1776, the Constitution of the United States dedicated that “all men are created equal” and granted all the citizens of the new nation “the unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” (Richi 1985: 357)

Martin Luther King himself declared in his 1963 speech that “America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned” (King 1998: 62-69). Indeed, the African American Community is portrayed in both narratives as homeless wanderers who are lost and permanently in search for an elusive family.

Gaines and Morrison, who are mainly concerned with the racial relationships between the White power and their own

enslaved community, focus on the absolutely problematic African American home and family issues, particularly in the south of the U.S. As a result of the institution of slavery and racial discrimination, the African American community has ever been in quest for true home and family.

**I. African Americans Home and Family Issues:**

In the 1850s the systems of slavery and racial discrimination condemned the African American community, in many ways, in conditions which denied them a true home within the U.S. particularly in Southern America, which paved the way for the disintegration of family structure splitting thus parents from children, husbands from wives. The contemporary authors, Toni Morrison and Ernest Gaines, have developed in *Beloved* and *of Love and dust* these tragic historic realities which had remained for a long time untold.

**1.1. African Americans Home Issue**

If one considers home as being a place where one was born and has grown up or rather where one can psychologically and physically feel free and stay and sleep safely because granted security, protection and citizenship, we can say then African Americans have no home in so far as their lives in the south are concerned. Actually they enjoy no freedom, which is the reason for the African American folklore “Go North man”. Indeed, at the time of the “frontier man”, when people in the Eastern part of the New World were moving Westward (“go West man”) in quest for wealth known as the American

dream, African Americans were trying hard to run to the North so as to escape from captivity and racial discrimination that determined their daily lives in the south.

Gaines and Morrison depict in their narratives Black characters who are lost, and permanently looking for home. In *Beloved*, Morrison presents fearful, fugitive slave-characters who have lost their identity and faith, and feel homeless. They are really lost people since knowing nowhere to go back as their own home. In *Beloved*, for instance, the eight fleeing slaves try to escape their owners and go across the Ohio River to the north, where they believe they will enjoy more freedom. This fact becomes more obvious after the emancipation proclamation, when they are viewed in this antislavery part of the States as free people while the South is still promoting slavery and racial discrimination.

That is the reason why the crossing of the Mississippi River from the south is also absolutely representative and symbolic in almost all African American fictions and literary works. William Faulkner, Gaines and Mark Twain have written a lot about the Mississippi to show the mythic dimension it embodies for the black community in the U. S. The river symbolizes the way toward the north where the community is viewed as free people. The narrator in *Of Love Dust*, Jim Kelly, shows this in his following words:

I was crossing the Mississippi River into Baton Rouge. I could smell the strong odor from the cement plant down below the bridge. Sometimes the odor was so strong it nearly made you sick. (...) I could see hundreds and hundreds electric lights over there (Gaines 1993: 7).

Such words express all that the Mississippi River represents for the African Americans; a bridge to light and freedom, even though there is no definite destination, in the North, where African Americans go as their home since they are in "circumstances of being forced to live in a country whose laws, customs, and instruments of force were leveled against them"(Scott and Shade 2005: 214). Thus, we learn that Miss Julie Rand lives in Baton Rouge, the northern side of the River, free from Marshall after working for about eighty years on the Louisiana plantation. Jim Kelly, Marcus and their slaves-mates find shelter in the quarters of the Louisiana plantation. As cultural and historical African American conservatives, Gaines and Morrison show through *Of Love and Dust* and *Beloved* what they believe should be the first function of Black history and art. In fact, they offer a re-interpretation, or what some critics call re-evaluation and rediscovery of black community experiences in an African American way. Morrison says:

I was scared the world would fall away before somebody put together a thing that was close to the way the African Americans were. After centuries of being defined by others of intended or unintended misrepresentation and misinterpretation of African American life, Morrison wanted to document history as lived by African Americans in this country (Morrison 1974: 89).

Morrison's description of Blacks' haunted ghettos is expressive of the humiliating and unsafe condition of her community in permanent quest for home. I24 Bluestone road, which is the name that Toni Morrison gives to the isolated as well as haunted house where Sethe lives with her daughter, Denver, totally closed from the society, suggests their lack of freedom above all their lack of home because they are permanently terrified by the baby ghost haunting, through them, the entire black community. Indeed, I24 Bluestone road is described as a gloomy, fearsome place where objects like chairs, dishes move making horrifying noise as though the objects had souls, which makes Morrison's community feel unsafe and not being at home. This also evidences the permanent vulnerability of the African American community. "It shows the fragile, threatened side of our self-image as dwellers: beings that need protection, a place to crawl into, walls that announce our vulnerability (Askeland 1992: 785).

Gaines chooses a character as narrator so as to tell the truth as much as possible. Indeed, Jim Kelly, the character-narrator, shifts now and then from a narrator to a character; he appears as a character mainly in dialogues either with Marcus or with the other characters. But, often times, he talks to Marcus, the protagonist, and to Aunt Margaret who plays the role of the traditional Aunt that the reader can encounter in almost all African American fictions. Jim also talks to Bonbon who goes so far as to telling him his own secrets. He appears as narrator when he uses the psychology of his fellow characters that he knows well, and can even guess their thoughts, to tell the story of the novel. In *Beloved* then, the narrator is not a character, he does not take part in the story, even though he sometimes enters the characters conscience and psychology through direct interpretation of the characters behavior and talks.

The irony in the word "SweetHome" is suggestive of all the hardships Black community has been subjected to because of lack of home. In fact, the term just ironically implies that nothing is sweet at SweetHome; everything is rather horror, terror, fear, and humiliation, as Denver and Paul D put it:

How come everybody run off from SweetHome and stop talking about it? Look like if it was so sweet you would have stayed." Then Paul D answered; "True, true, she's right, Sethe. It wasn't sweet and it's sure wasn't home." He shook his head. "It's where we were," said Sethe and altogether. Comes back whether we want it to or not. (Morrison 1993:14-15)

Spaces also play a great role as it appears as a very symbolic feature throughout the novels. There is a significant relation between places and the psychology of the homeless characters. Places are not just used to describe but also to suggest and explain the behaviors of traumatized characters who feel depressed and above all homeless. "Pour présenter ce lien entre l'espace et l'expérience traumatisante de la domination raciale, Toni Morrison peint un tableau méthodiquement conçu pour conceptualiser aussi bien des espaces que des cadres géographiques » (LY 2007 : 6). Actually, not only do

the African Americans feel homeless but they are also victim of serious family issues.

## 1.2. The Problem of Family in the African American Community

The matter of distorted Blacks' families with unknown parents and distorted love of a parent for his or her child under the oppression of slavery and racism is quite representative throughout both narratives. *Beloved* and *Of Love and Dust* greatly address and explore how far racial oppression has distorted Blacks' families. The latter are characterized by the absence of parents and mainly fathers.

The narratives greatly deal with the issue of family disorganization, which is nothing else than the deterioration of African American families. Morrison, just as she does in her book *The Bluest Eye*, describes in *Beloved* black women heading families in many respects due to the absence of fathers. Indeed, "Slavery had emasculated black men, created a matriarchy, and prevented the emergence of a strong sense of family." (Genevieve 1976: 450). Often times, women bear the harvest burden in nearly every big city ghettos altogether with the long endless period of dependence on the white community, which remains the fundamental source of the weakness of the Black community. Helpless, Sethe struggles hard to feed her children, she even steals sometimes food from the master's house. Her husband, Halle Suggs had died of ill-treatment just before Sethe was able to escape from captivity.

Mr. Buddy whipped my tail. Kentucky ain't no good place to be in. Boston's the best place to be in. That's where my mother was before she was given to Mr. Buddy. Joe Nathan said Mr. Buddy is my daddy but I don't believe that, you?" Sethe said she didn't believe Mr. Buddy was her daddy." "You know your Daddy, do you?" "No," said Sethe. "Neither me. All I know is it ain't him." (Toni Morrison 1993: 80)

Put at the center of Morrison's narrative, the character of Sethe is a black woman of unnamed parents who hardly survives under the oppression of the racial discriminating system. She does not know her parents nor does she know to which group or people she belongs. She is depicted as a quite lost woman looking for identity while she is denied having any history or culture. But knowing nothing of her past and her background, apart from the fact that she belongs to Mister Garner her owner, she has no chance in the world to find her kin, much less find her parents. Sethe is just surviving the drama of losing her children Howard, Burglar and Beloved in addition to her own husband, which the old woman, Baby Suggs, has already undergone, thus she says; "I had eight, every one of them gone away from me. Four taken, four chased" (Morrison 1993: 5). Sethe knows that her own children are reserved the same fate since this is the set system.

This fact can be seen through the fate of Sethe's slave mates. The reader learns that all the other slaves have gone through a very tragic and sad fate. Sixo is burned alive, Paul A is hanged, and Paul D and Paul F are sold again. As Martin

Luther King reminds us of the fact in his 1963 speech; the "Negro" men and women living in the south are subjected to lynching, jail, and hard labor, usually separated from their relatives and parents they feel lost and having no people. Denver expresses her feelings about the absence of her father in the discussion with Sethe and Paul D:

You know my father?

Knew him. Knew him well.

Did he, ma'am? Denver fought an urge to realign her affection Of course he knew your daddy. I told you, he's from Sweet Home"

Denver sat down on the bottom step. There was nowhere else graceful to go. They were a twosome, saying "your daddy" and "Sweethome" in a way that made it clear both belonged to them and not to her. That her own father's absence was not hers (Morrison 1993: 13).

The absence of parental figures, and especially fathers, can have serious effects on the psychology of children. As a matter of fact, the family is not only protective, but it also represents the unit through which children are integrated in the external world which is the society.

The society can be viewed as a chain of elements among these the family. So any dysfunction of a family causes the dysfunction not only of the members' personality development but also the dysfunction of the relationship between the family members and the society. This is what has happened to most all African Americans in the south. Actually children need a family to enjoy parental affection, security, protection and above all education but black children have no chance of having peaceful, loving, protective and educative families. Instead, they usually live either without parents or with the mother or aunt, under permanent violence as a result of frustration and anguish. Such children are doomed to live in permanent frustration and rebellious feelings, which is the case of Marcus. Miss Julie Rand protecting Marcus says; "He don't have a mama or a daddy, His mama died and his daddy just ran off and left him. I did my best to raise him right, but you can see I'm old"

Marcus is not raised by his own parents, and others like Paul D, Paul A, Sixo do not remember having any parents. The only thing they know is that they are owned by Mister Garner. The imminence of Parents separated from children, wives separated from husbands is quite representative throughout the narratives. It is a recurrent theme in African American literature as almost all black writers appear victims of the same system separating them from their parents. Richard Wright who is known as one of the famous influential African American writers illustrates that fact through his following statement; "My mother and father split up very early – and it is a theme that enters everything – and I don't know where the fathers are" (Bill FERRI 1990).

We also learn that Sethe's two other sons, Howard and Buglar, have disappeared, and she has no idea of where they might be. As for their father, Halle Suggs, he was killed when the children were just babies. As a feminist, Morrison emphasizes this absence of parents in the black community by describing depressed, solitary and parentless women in the following words:

A young colored woman was drifting from ruin. He (Paul D) had been in Rochester four years ago and seen five women arriving with thirteen female children. All their men – brothers, uncles, fathers, husbands, sons – had been picked off one by one by one (Morrison 1993: 52).

The social discrimination of colored people and their lack of parental figures within America and especially in the South can also be perceived through the distribution of names. Many black characters in the novels bear names which just tell to which white master they belong. Such names as Paul A Garner, Paul D Garner, Paul F Garner, are expressive of the fact that they belong to Mister Garner the slave owner of Sweet Home.

A person who has grown up in a true family with father and mother offering him or her affection and education is likely to smoothly integrate the society. But when he or she does not enjoy these basic fundamentals, they are likely to become frustrated, anguished, and vulnerable to all social phenomena. Such a situation undoubtedly leads to outstanding and threatening impacts on the society.

## II. Between Hopes and Illusion

Various attempts to change the prevailing situation have been done not only by African American themselves but also by sympathizing white people among the white community. Yet, the system has marked life-long scars among African Americans, haunting thus their social, economic and cultural perspectives.

### 2.1. Love and Humanism as Means of Racial Mediation

The racial mediation is presented through humanistic relationships and recognition of black humanity, but also through love between the two mainly existing antagonistic races. Gaines and Morrison create a sometimes peaceful and good environment where Blacks and Whites somehow appear to be in good terms. This is for them a way to make the two mainly opposing races soften their extreme antagonism giving thus way to racial interaction which the novelists believe to be a hope for a better future for African Americans even though the system is still there haunting them.

In *of Love and Dust*, for instance, it is obvious that Bonbon is brutal, yet Gaines sometimes presents him as a racial mediator. The latter, a Cajun manipulated by Marshall Hebert, is the one who controls the African American workers on the plantation, but he also appears as a possible racial intermediary between the white folk and the black community. Paradoxical as it may seem, the African American characters

in *Of Love and Dust*, Jim Kelly, the narrator of the story, occasionally recognizes Bonbon's humanity and goodness even though the latter very frequently shows his brutality and violence. Such contradictory characteristics of the Cajun overseer split him into two sides that can be viewed as evil against goodness that rein in his inner part. Bonbon was a simple man and a brutal man, was the way Aunt Ca'line describes him. He was brutal because he had been brought up in a brute-taught world and in brute-taught times. (Gaines 1994: 67)

The relationships between Jim Kelly, the driver of the tractor on the plantation, and Bonbon are quite telling about their mutual understanding suggesting thus the latter's individual humanity sometimes. Me and you- what do you think we is? We little people, Geam. They make us do what they want us to do and they don't tell us nothing. We don't have nothing to say 'bout it, do we, Geam? (Gaines 1994: 258).

Bonbon says to Jim Kelly showing thus his humanistic side and at the same time he is presenting his weakness as a Cajun also exploited by Marshall Hebert. Bonbon is the one who imposes labor on African Americans, yet he is viewed as a hope for racial mediation, which Ernest Gaines regards as a key path to achieving equality between the two apparently antagonistic races.

Thus Bonbon engages in a serious love affair with Pauline leaving his bony, careless and solitary wife, Louise. Actually he starts to be less and less brutal and little more humanistic toward Pauline who enjoys little more consideration and respect from Bonbon. Thus“ when Pauline came to the big house, she quit wearing the big gingham dresses she had worn in the field. Now she wore light-color dresses that had printed flowers on them” (Gaines 1994: 63).

Yet, the narrator makes us listen and hear the heart-breaking noise that comes out of Pauline's room whenever Bonbon pops in to satisfy his lust, which shows that Bonbon is still brutal even when he tries to be soft. They secretly live like lovers because of the impossibility of the southern taboo to allow a white man to love a black woman much less marry her. When Jim drives Bonbon to New Orleans along with Pauline, he recounts:

She even sat closer to me than she did to him. So that's why he needed me, that's why he wanted me to go with them. Not that a white man could ride all over the south with a black woman, but if they were traveling in daytime by themselves, the black woman had to look like she was either going to work or coming from work (Gaines 1994: 140).

These scenes are described in such a way that the reader feels witnessing them. Now Pauline no longer works on the plantation as usual, and Bonbon no longer forces her to sleep with him on the corn fields, but he just comes down to her room whenever he likes it, because “He's more crazy 'bout Pauline than he is his own wife” (Ernest James Gaines 1994: 14) Jim says. Furthermore, we learn that they have got two

little twin-mulattoes. Bonbon loves them but he never shows that openly, for the white community will never recognize them as Whites. In fact, they are neither accepted within the white folk nor are they in the black community. In *Of Love and Dust*, right at the beginning Miss Julie Rand says to Jim, the narrator, "You think there will ever be a time (...) when him and Pauline will be able to live together like they want" Ernest James Gaines 1994: 14) What she is hinting at through the interrogation is the impossibility of crossing the racial line separating the powerful Whites from the enslaved Blacks.

Besides, Gaines also uses the image of the dog barking between Louise and Marcus to suggest the social stratification established by the racial system which strongly forbids crossing the "color line" (Williams 1995: paperback), as Gregory Howard Williams refers to it. Actually this intended relationship between a white woman and a black man is unthinkable and will be a transgression of the traditional hierarchy of the Southern society. Despite Jim and Margaret's advice and impediments, Marcus as a stubborn convict disrespectful of elders and the existing rules of the society engages in a struggle to transgress the "color line" by seducing Louise. "Louise stood in the small yard a while, then Aunt Margaret heard the back gate slamming. "She's in the big yard now, Aunt Margaret thought; "he's still in the house, and the dog is barking between them" (Gaines 1994: 182).

Gaines' *Of Love and Dust* emphasizes what he calls the interdependence of African American and white people at the time. He raises the issue of transgression of the social structures in Louisiana especially when a black falls in love with a white woman as it is the case between Marcus and Louise Bonbon, just like relationship between Shakespearean Romeo and Juliette. Which is viewed as a danger to all black people's lives according to Aunt Margaret who tries hard to convince the narrator, Jim Kelly, to go so far as to fighting Marcus.

"Hit him because you know what can happen, that's why," I thought. "Because you know they have no pity when they come for one, that's why. Hit him because if they found out about him, every man, woman and child life would be in danger, that's why" (Gaines 1994: 171).

Aunt Margaret, knowing the terrible consequences to which Marcus stubbornness will undoubtedly lead the entire black community, strongly implores Jim to stop him and even go as far as to beating him. She feels totally scared and terrified by the behavior of Marcus who never cares about the community's being in danger. Gaines also describes a dark and fearsome landscape, when Marcus is about to run with Louise just to show to what extent this represents a danger for each and every black person in Louisiana. Indeed, Jim hopelessly tries to steer him from challenging the White who control the entire black community, as Miss Julie Rand and Aunt Margaret, representing the wise elders of the black community, beg Jim to do.

We don't want any trouble on this plantation, hear? (...) The kind of trouble Bonbon would make if he caught you messing with his wife. Do you know what he would do if he caught you near that woman. (...) He would lynch you. He would burn you alive. Him and his brothers Would burn you alive. You and half of people around here (Gaines 1994: 122).

In *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, Mister Garner, the humanistic white owner of Sweethome, has appeared soft and kind to his slaves; which owes his property the name of Sweethome, he even calls his slaves sweethome men rather than slaves or Negroes, he believes that the Blacks are living better conditions at sweethome than on any other plantation in the south. He teaches his sweethome men good manners and allows them to marry (that's why Hall is able to Marry Sethe). And his wife Mrs Garner has been also kind to them; she gives a crystal earring to Sethe on the occasion of her wedding with Hall Suggs and teaches her how to be a good wife. She behaves very friendly to Sethe and fellow Blacks.

Yet, No matter what kind of smooth and soft relationships may occur between Blacks and Whites, there seems to be impossible to transgress the racial boundary. The haunting racial system is all the more persistent as it appears as the one that determines each and every member of either community. Thus, Just like Shakespearean heroes whose own doings lead them to a tragic end, Marcus disrespectful of controlling rules of the society eventually goes through a sad and tragic fate and dies of his own actions; he is killed by Bonbon with whose wife he has plotted to run away. Louise has become crazy and Bonbon has disappeared from the Marshall's plantation as consequence of their transgression of the socially established stratification of the south.

As a result of his challenging the established order of the society, Mister Garner suddenly dies of a stroke. And his wife, Mrs. Garner, soon after calling Schoolteacher to run over managing the plantation at Sweethome, falls seriously ill and is not even able to pronounce a word when Sethe recounts what Schoolteacher's nephews and himself have done to her. As for Sethe who has killed her daughter, *Beloved*, so as to keep her from the system of slavery and has tried to run to the north, infringing thus the taboo of the socially determined southern world order, has been ever since haunted by the ghost of her infant daughter and has been living in permanent fear.

## 2.2. The Ultimate fate of the African Americans

Economically, African Americans possess nothing for the white community dramatically exploits them. Chapter II of Sidney Wilhelm's "Who need the Negro" is titled "Family structure and social status", he states in this chapter that black people's families are unstable and Blacks' households merely reflect the most fundamental processes that condemn the Black in so many ways, namely the interrelationship between economic conditions and White racism (Sidney Wilhelm 1970: 4 – 11).

Indeed, they cannot own anything in the sense that they exclusively labor for their masters. In *Beloved*, Morrison creates a social environment coupled with physical environments which are hostile to African American self-assertion reflecting thus the haunting racial prejudices. The character of Halle Suggs has taken over the labor of her old, exhausted mother, Baby Suggs, in addition to his own burden to free her from daily horrifying activities, the income of which directly goes to Mister Garner, her owner.

Baby Suggs has labored all her life for Mister Garner and has nothing left of her. Sethe expresses that saying "Now I know why Baby Suggs pondered color her last years. She never had time to see, let alone enjoy it before." (Toni Morrison 1993: 201) This fact is all the more dramatic as the reader learns that just a very little time after she is relatively freed, she dies. Miss Julie Rand also states in *Of Love and Dust* "there ain't much left to you when they let you go" (Ernest James Gaines 1994: 11) And this is a traditionally established chain of the system which compels her son, Halle Suggs, to undergo the same fate as the mother or even in a more horrifying condition in so far as he has to accomplish both his mother's labor and his own. Stamp Paid expresses such a horror in the following words:

My morrow is tired. (...) I been tired all my days, bone-tired, but now it's in the morrow. Must be what Baby Suggs felt when she lay down and thought about color for the rest of her life (Morrison 1993: 176).

These words are quite telling about what many African Americans believe to be lifelong labor, for the owners only free you when you are hardly worth a thing. Toni Morrison also expresses that lifetime enslavement through reading the consciousness of Baby Suggs wondering; "what does a sixty-odd-year-old slave woman who walks like a three-legged dog need freedom for?" (Morrison 1993:141). Following the same logic as Morrison, Gaines depicts Miss Julie Rand, the old lady who has raised Marcus, worn out and regretting her old days of torture on the plantation of Marshall Hebert.

Miss Julie Rand is presented as an exhausted, poor and hopeless old lady hardly surviving the aftermath of oppression. Jim Kelly -the narrator of Gaines- describes the old woman when he, along with Marcus, shows up at Baton Rouge for the first time; "An old lady who must have been eighty or ninety was patting Marcus on the face." Indeed, she has spent all her energy and life laboring for her masters and has nothing left of her. In the same perspective, Morrison summarizes what she believes to be the most dramatic about the unforgettable experiences of her own community in the following words:

Whole towns wiped clean of Negroes; eighty-seven lynching in one year alone in Kentucky; four colored schools burned to the ground; grown men whipped like children; children whipped like adults; black women raped by the crew; property taken, necks broken He smelled skin, skin and hot blood. The

skin was one thing but a Human blood cooked in a lynch fire was a whole other thing. (Morrison 1993: 180)

Morrison uses as heroine of her narrative a ghost-infant character to express and emphasize the haunting pressures of the system that stratifies the southern society. Actually, it is a way of keeping in the minds of her readers that not only are African Americans still being humiliated, but she is also suggesting that what her community has undergone so far is unforgettable and remains "a story to pass on" (Morrison 1993:175)

The image of a killed baby coming back to life can also be viewed as an allegory alluding to the horrifying experiences that the community has been subjected to and the scar at the neck of the haunting-infant ghost that never disappears is just the materialization of the unforgettable history of Morrison's community which is not to disappear as well. The scar that never disappears also suggests the haunting pressures of racism and the hunting memories of the "Disremembered and unaccounted for" (Morrison 1993:174) that others, as Gaines will refer to the white folk, consider "unremembered", just as Carol Schmude states it:

Tradition has established two main factors in haunting: an old house or other local and the restlessness of a spirit. The first represents an unbroken link with the past, the second is believed to be caused by remorse over an evil life or by the shock of violent death (Schmude 1992: 588).

## CONCLUSION

With different styles, Morrison and Gaines address the problematic of home and family issues among the African American community. While Morrison narrative uses a complicated metaphysical environment with objects and things moving and making noise as if they had souls, Gaines rather chooses hot and burning environments and places to depict the hard conditions of living which have made of the Black homeless and without true family. Black people have ever been haunted by the system which is set in such a way that they cannot feel at home. They, especially black men, become life-long runners, leaving their families or are deliberately separated from their families and killed or sold to very remote eras by their owners. They lose their real names and bear the names of their owners and they change names very frequently when they are sold to new slave-owners. As victims of serious home and family issues the black community is depicted in both narratives as people permanently in quest for an elusive self in the midst of a virtual home or family. For a long time this racism has kept them in poor conditions of living and denied them citizenship.

Gaines and Morrison speak out and show the ever-lasting scars of the system of slavery and racism which have developed anguish, frustration, violence, poverty and misery among the black community. This is not surprising in the sense that not only are they the defenders of their own people, but also because they believe that their community has

suffered far more from the racial prejudices than any other existing race or ethnic group in the south of the States. These scars of racism are still haunting them and even today, African Americans are mostly the victims of permanent violence such as police shootings, mass murders and incarceration.

However, we can still hope for change and that the stereotype will be deconstructed, as Barak Obama mentioned in *the audacity of hope*, if the African Americans are more educated, not only at the family level but also at school, and enjoy more parental affection and tenderness.

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