

86. Exploring the deep layers of black motherhood in *Beloved* by Toni Morrison and *The Long Song* by Andrea Levy

Derya BİDERCİ DİNÇ¹

APA: Biderci Dinç, D. (2023). Exploring the deep layers of black motherhood in *Beloved* by Toni Morrison and *The Long Song* by Andrea Levy. *RumeliDE Dil ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, (Ö13), 1374-1395. DOI: 10.29000/rumelide.1379403.

Abstract

This article aims to explore the deep layers of motherhood in the literary masterpieces *Beloved* by Toni Morrison and *The Long Song* by Andrea Levy. It is a comparative analysis of the selected novels that share a common background; the history of slavery. The trauma of slavery has an impact both on the literature and on the transfer of cultural memory. African American and Black British women's writings are connected to the malfunctioning results of slavery in their past which also haunts their present. Using certain narrative forms, their neo-slave narratives reflect the trauma of slavery and cultural memory. It uncovers the centrality of motherhood to cultural memory in African American and Black British women's neo-slave narratives. This article engages with the transfer of cultural memory in black women's neo-slave narratives through motherhood. It aims to encapsulate the relationships between colonization, historical injustices, slavery, and gender discrimination to investigate motherhood. Black women are recognized as bearers of cultural memory; therefore, the relationship between a mother and a daughter is used to analyze cultural memory and the trauma of slavery. Morrison and Levy's neo-slave narratives are seen as a means of struggle against forgetting. Despite sharing some features, African American and Black British women's neo-slave narratives have differences. Reading these two neo-slave narratives in a comparative approach, this study presents a renewed point of view for cultural memory studies in literature through black mothering. It will contribute to debates about the importance of maternal ancestry upon black women to construct cultural memory.

Keywords: Neo-slave narrative, black women, cultural memory, slavery, motherhood

Beloved ve The Long Song eserlerinde siyahi anneliğin derin katmanlarını keşfetmek

Öz

Bu makalenin amacı, Toni Morrison'un *Beloved* ve Andrea Levy'nin *The Long Song* romanlarındaki anneliğin derin katmanlarını keşfetmektir. Bu makale, ortak bir tarihi, köleliğin tarihini paylaşan, seçilmiş romanların karşılaştırmalı bir analizidir. Kölelik travmasının hem edebiyat hem de kültürel hafızanın aktarımı üzerinde büyük bir etkisi olduğunu öne sürmektedir. Afrikalı Amerikalı ve Siyah Britanyalı kadınların yazıları, geçmişteki köleliğin bugünlerini de rahatsız eden hatalı sonuçlarıyla ilgilendirilir. Onların neo-köle anlatıları, belli anlatı biçimlerini kullanarak köleliğin ve kültürel hafızanın travmasını yansıtır. Afrikalı Amerikalı ve Siyah Britanyalı kadınların neo-köle anlatıları anneliğin kültürel hafızadaki önemini ortaya çıkarır. Bu makale, siyah kadınların neo-köle anlatılarında kültürel hafızanın annelik aracılığıyla aktarımına odaklanmaktadır. Anneliği

¹ Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, İstanbul Topkapı Üniversitesi, İktisadi, İdari ve Sosyal Bilimler Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı (İstanbul, Türkiye), deryabidercidinc@topkapi.edu.tr, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-9443-7136 [Araştırma makalesi, Makale kayıt tarihi: 30.08.2023-kabul tarihi: 23.10.2023; DOI: 10.29000/rumelide.1379403]

araştırmak için sömürgeleştirme, tarihsel adaletsizlikler, kölelik ve cinsiyet ayrımcılığı arasındaki ilişkileri özetlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Siyah kadınlar kültürel hafızanın taşıyıcıları olarak kabul edildiğinden anne-kız arasındaki bağ köleliğin travmasını ve kültürel hafızayı yansıtmak için kullanılıyor, bu yazarların neo-köle anlatıları unutmaya karşı bir mücadele olarak görülür. Ortak özellikler paylaşmasına rağmen, Afrika kökenli Amerikalı ve Siyah Britanyalı kadınların neo-köle anlatılarında farklılıklar bulunmaktadır. Bu çalışma, bu iki neo-köle anlatısını karşılaştırmalı bir yaklaşımla okuyarak, siyah kadınların kültürel hafıza oluşturmada siyahi anneliğin önemi konusundaki tartışmalara katkı sağlayacak ve bu hareketle edebiyatta kültürel hafıza çalışmalarına yenilenmiş bir bakış açısı sunacaktır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Neo-köle anlatısı, siyahi kadınlar, kültürel hafıza, kölelik, annelik

1. Introduction

This article explores black motherhood in neo-slave narratives *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison and *The Long Song* (2010) by Andrea Levy from a feminist perspective. Black feminism provides a framework for analyzing how these neo-slave narratives address the issues related to colonialism, slavery, race, and gender. The intersections of colonialism, race, and gender have shaped the lives, experiences, agencies, roles, and challenges of black women, especially black mothers, within these novels' historical and social contexts.

This article analyzes how Black motherhood is incorporated and rewritten in Toni Morrison and Andrea Levy's neo-slave narratives. Black motherhood is a profound concept in the context of their neo-slave works that revisit, reimagine, and rewrite the experiences of slavery and its enduring legacy. The central theme in neo-slave novels is the relationship between a mother and a child, particularly between a mother and a daughter. Morrison and Levy subvert stereotypical representations of black women that have stemmed from the period of slavery and are still embedded in contemporary culture. They use the concept of motherhood as an act of resistance against stereotypical representations. They explore the multifaceted experiences of enslaved mothers, they emphasize black mothers' sacrifices, challenges, strength, and resilience that define their roles in societies characterized by discrimination, oppression, and violence.

This article examines black motherhood with a focus on cultural memory within the experience of slavery. It unveils motherhood with intertwined concepts such as power, oppression, slavery, and cultural memory. These African-American and Black-British women's neo-slave narratives deal with the transfer of cultural memory through motherhood. They offer a complex exploration of the intersections between historical oppression, slavery, cultural memory, and gender. The writers skillfully weave these themes in their narratives to reveal the challenges and struggles of black women, particularly mothers and daughters. They deal with the black women's traumatic experiences of slavery and explore how their relations with their bodies and communities are entangled with the legacies of slavery.

This article is divided into three parts. The introduction includes the study's theoretical background, outlining black feminism and neo-slave narratives. The subsequent parts of this article engage in close textual analysis. They examine how the theme of motherhood is provided with some references to key concepts such as slavery, racism, gender, identity, and cultural memory. It explores the impact of the enduring legacy of slavery on the lives of black women and on cultural codes surrounding motherhood

and how the main characters Sethe and July pass beyond the racialized and gendered boundaries by using cultural codes of motherhood.

1.1 Black feminism

The analysis of the article is grounded in Black feminism. Black feminism has emerged as a critical framework within the feminist theory which fails to address the experiences, challenges, struggles, and status of non-western, non-white women. It encourages challenges against Eurocentric and ethnocentric discourses and deconstructs misrecognition or misrepresentations of black women. While expanding upon mainstream feminist theory, it has marked its own departure from it by acknowledging the diverse experiences of marginalized, colonized, non-white, and non-Western women. It points out recognizing that black women's experiences are shaped by intersecting factors such as race, gender, class, and valuing the strengths and resilience of black women.

Black feminism traces back to the earliest days of colonialism and slavery. Within the context of African colonialism, racism, slavery, and diaspora, it addresses the double enslavement of black women who are ignored and silenced because of their gender and race; they are colored women. It reconsiders colonial history from the perspectives of black women who suffered its effects. Black women have experienced displacement, enslavement, and violence and also resisted violence and dehumanization. Black feminism is described

as a praxis that identifies women racialized as Black as knowing agents for social change. Black feminism is both a theory and a politics of affirmation and liberation. Black feminism names and valorizes the knowledge production and lived experiences of different Black women derived from our class, gender identity, legal status, and sexuality. (Emejulu and Sobande,2019,3)

It is stated that Black feminism has a dual role as a theory and a political practice. In addition to being a theoretical framework, it is an active attempt to create social change. It is an approach to dealing with intersections of colonialism, race, and gender.

Black women are vulnerable to gendered racialization in their everyday lives, they are seen in stereotypical ways: oppressed mothers and wives, domestic workers, and dangerous and sexualized others. It signifies opposition to prevailing norms and ideas. It aims to free black women from the constraints of racism and sexism. "It radically dissents from and subverts the hegemonic constructions of Black women as either irrelevant and invisible objects or alien Others who disrupt the taken for granted racialized and gendered social and economic order" (Emejulu and Sobande,2019,3). This quotation references how the mainstream narratives construct black women as invisible objects and outsiders who disrupt the established social norms. Besides depicting them as threats to the existing power systems, they ignore the significance of their experiences and contributions to society. Black feminism acknowledges and celebrates black women's knowledge and agency in shaping their lives and their societies. It values revival and preservation of cultural practices, traditions, and knowledge systems that empower black women. Therefore, it promotes a positive affirmation of black women's identities and experiences, besides addressing problems and oppression. "Black feminism does not merely operate against violence and exclusion but creates and fosters a different way of seeing and being in this world" (Emejulu and Sobande,2019,3). It suggests a reevaluation of social norms and power structures, it favors more inclusive, equitable systems.

In brief, Black feminism aims to redefine the role and status of black women in society. To subvert the idea that black women are invisible, silent, and disruptive, it calls for an empowering understanding of

their experiences, to do so, the black women writers develop neo-slave narratives that portray black women are narratives of resistance. Within the historical contexts, are not passive victims, they resist dehumanization.

1.2 Black Women Writers' Neo-Slave Narratives

After the Black Power Movement which was a revolutionary political and cultural response to the dominant white culture in the 1960s and 1970s, the concept of black subjectivity was revisited by writers, historians, and intellectuals,

who thought of themselves as representing the collective using the intellect and imagination, questions of representation were intimately bound up with moral and political, as well as aesthetic, concerns. "race" and the slave past became the prime means through which the collective was identified and more or less forced to identify. (Eyerman83-4)

The intellectuals, historians, activists, and writers engaged with black subjectivity, reexamining the meaning of being black individuals and a part of the black community. This underlines the significance of critical thinking and creative expression in comprehending and representing the experiences of black people. Representations of black people are related to moral, political, and aesthetic concerns. The historical and societal forces, racism and slavery, determine and construct black subjectivity and the collective identity. The movement challenged racism by promoting the idea of embracing black identity with pride and self-assertion in contrast to the Eurocentric and ethnocentric narratives of black inferiority and self-dislike imposed and perpetuated by the legacy of slavery.

While empowering black people to redefine their identity, The Black Power Movement prompted black people to take "charge of their lives by forcing changes" (Rushdy, 1999, 4). This caused disruptions in the social order and stimulated intellectuals to revise the role of black people in American history. African people gained the power and voice to represent themselves through cultural instruments, particularly in white society. "Formation of African American Identity itself, the issue of how the collective should be represented before and to the dominant white society became increasingly central as blacks slowly attained the possibility to represent themselves through cultural means" (Eyerman, 2004, 83-4). Through various cultural forms and works, the intellectuals, historians, activists, and writers assert their identities and narratives, they subvert the pervasive stereotypes, caricatures, and dehumanized portrayals, and they value their heritage and experiences.

The slave narratives provide an insight into the lives of slaves. Even so, they are regarded incomplete as they lack psychological description by contemporary writers. The slave narrative has been enriched by engaging with the inner world of slaves, as a result, a neo-slave narrative emerged. Neo-slave narrative, refers to the fiction about slavery, in *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition*, Bernard Bell, who coined neo-slave narrative, depicts it as "residually oral, modern narratives of escape from bondage to freedom" (1987, 614). It has been used to describe all contemporary novels about slavery. In *Neo-slave Narrative*, Rushdy depicts its more specific use, he states that neo-slave narrative is a kind of slavery fiction, "that is contemporary novels that assume the form, adopt the conventions, and take on the first-person voice of the antebellum slave narrative" (1993, 3). Using the restrictive definition of neo-slave narrative described by Rushdy, this article analyses novels about slavery narrated in the first person.

While emphasizing the historical injustices of racism and the experience of slavery, the black subject is studied retrospectively. The neo-slave narrative includes "texts that illustrate the centrality of the history and the memory of slavery to individual, racial, gender, cultural, and national identities" (Smith, 2007,

168). It foregrounds the impact of the history and memory of slavery on racial, cultural, and gender identities. Contemporary writers go back and forth in time to provide their readers with

the complicated history of race and power relations in America. They blend their knowledge and imagination to build a story that is arranged in the past and related to the future, they “reveal an undercurrent of folk realism and the continuing search for a useable past on which to build a more viable, humanistic future. (Bell, 1987,290)

They weave together past and future, history and their imagination in their narratives, shedding light on the struggles of the marginalized communities to envision a more just, inclusive, and humanistic future. They have engaged with the socio-political issues of their time to address the themes related to power, race, and identity. It is stated that identity formations cannot be considered without cultural trauma. Traumatic historical events such as war, genocide, colonialism, slavery, and natural disasters create emotional and psychological wounds, this is known as cultural trauma, a collective or a cultural group experience it. “The trauma in question is slavery, not as an institution or even experience, but as collective memory, a form of remembrance that grounded the identity-formation of a people” (Eyerman,2004,60). The traumatic history of slavery is integral to black people’s identity.

Cultural trauma is conditioned by a shared sense of loss, grief, and injustices, embedded in the collective memory, and passed down through generations. The memory of slavery has an impact on how individuals perceive themselves. “Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectively feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks up their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways”(Alexander,2004,1).

In neo-narratives, writers use the individual memory rather than public memory, found in the slave narratives, to deal with the influence of trauma. To create a cultural heritage and memory, the slaves lack family and community ties, “[w]ith the regular separation of families, and constant and unpredictable risk of being sold to other plantations, the stability of a group to pass down collective memories and cultures was almost absent from the slaves’ world”(Ball, 2013,10). Slavery deliberately, systematically, and forcibly separated families and communities, this made it very hard for the enslaved people to maintain their cultural heritage and collective memory. The writers aim to reconstruct a collective memory of black and national identity through individual memory.

Women’s rights movement, a subset of The Black Movement, explores black women’s experiences of challenges and discrimination based on race and gender during slavery and its aftermath. The women writers are drawn to the neo-slave narrative which offers a compelling perspective on the echoes of the history of slavery in the modern world, they engage in the untold and unwritten history of slavery. In human history, certain voices have been marginalized and obscured so their stories remained unheard and invisible under the dominant narratives. The history of slavery is re-examined in most of the works such as folk histories and slave narratives, nevertheless, black women’s stories of slavery are often ignored and unknown and relegated to the periphery. The historians erase the voices that disrupt and destabilize the authorized national narrative. Therefore, the neo-slave narrative is about more than enslavement, it gives voices to the legacies of slavery and also uses the history of slavery to explore race, gender, and sexuality and to debate how systems of subjugation persist.

Black women writers revise black-and-white patriarchal history and fiction, they challenge the dominant narratives to rewrite women into history. They endeavor to rebuild the narrative of slave history and contribute to herstory-the retelling of history from a feminist perspective.

The role of women in nationalist discourses is an important issue, for historically women have expressed nationalist zeal and patriotism, although, often, they have been dispossessed in the documenting of nationalist struggles and/or in the shaping and reconstruction of new societies. (Davies,1994,51)

Black women writers are interested in their heritage, folklore, and values, they aim to explore their heritage beyond the master narratives of white or black male writers and scholars. to render enslaved women as individuals and agents of history, they are inspired by real-life stories. Black women are involved in the creation of history through their memories or values. their narratives, including cultural memory, have risen as powerful testimonies that challenge the dominant narratives and reclaim a place and voice for black women in history. Oral tradition is extremely important in black women's writings as it symbolizes the authority of the female narrators, allowing them to take their voices back. Black women's writing "redefines identity away from exclusion and marginality. Black women's writing/existence, marginalized in the terms of majority-minority discourses, within the Euro-American male or female canon or Black male canon" (Davies, 1994, 4). the neo-slave narrative is charged with revisionist ideas, it can change the perception of black women by subverting the negative connotations, and stereotypes about the black female subject and motherhood. They rewrite the perceptions of black women and black motherhood in society. black women are portrayed as strong and independent individuals who have a sense of self-awareness and empowerment. They are actors who can take active roles and agency in their lives and society, they can make their living and turn the system of slavery back. Rather than presenting motherhood as a burden, neo-slave narratives define it as a powerful and inspiring thing.

Black women writers concentrate hard on the details of the everyday lives and experiences of enslaved women. "The intimacies of everyday life"(2006,201), "Elements found in the everyday speech"(2006,7), and the poetry of everyday black speech(2006,915) are included in neo-slave narratives. In *Writing African American Women*, Beaulieu, one of the critics who focus on black women writers' neo-slave narratives, states, "who often wrote of the everyday lives of black women, made clear to more contemporary scholars the rich and diverse legacy of African American women's literature"(2006,933). Black women writers' neo-slave narratives take a significant role in representing the black women's stories, perspectives, struggles, and triumphs, they countered historical ignorance and stereotypical representations.

Black women writers' neo-slave narratives accentuate the importance of community, family, and motherhood to provide an African female point of view for cultural memory. Black women's neo-slave narratives use cultural memory, which relies on oppressed and traumatized historical experiences, to ensure cultural continuity. mothers have significant roles as the bearers of culture and maternal heritage. through the motherline, cultural memory is constructed and transferred to the next generations. Black women participate in the mother line, black women learn about their female roots and gain ancestral knowledge and identity through their mothers, other mothers, or other women in their community. As a result, collective knowledge and collective identity for the next generations is preserved.

[T]he articulating discourse surrounding cultural trauma is a process of mediation involving alternative strategies and alternative voices. It is a process that aims to reconstitute or reconfigure a collective identity, as in repairing a tear in the social fabric. A traumatic tear evokes the need to “narrate new foundations” (Hale,1998, 6), which includes reinterpreting the past as a means of reconciling present/future needs. (Eyerman, 2004, 63)

While exploring the mothering of black women, they consider how black mothers develop various ways to ensure the survival of their children. Black mothers have to instruct their children to stay alive in a hostile environment and resist racial oppression. In *Shifting the Center*, Collins focuses on

the experiences of women of color that reveal very different concerns: the importance of working for the physical survival of children and community; the dialectics of power and powerlessness in structuring mothering patterns; and the significance of self-definition in constructing individual and collective racial identity. Collins thus highlights the importance of race and class in differentiating women's mothering experience. (Glenn et al., 1994, 7)

As a result of Black mothers' taking their role in empowering and inspiring the next generations, the concept of black mothering, which underlines the gender issues, the motherhood among all women of African descent has appeared in literature. The neo-slave narratives expanded the perceptions of black women and their experiences and contributed to black women's literature.

They create a shared past that is open to the voices of minority groups especially female slaves. The black women are made to speak against the norms within which they live. Therefore, the women's memories and testimonies, which are based on their felt and lived experiences, empower them to demand recognition as actors in their lives and their societies and provide them the ability to speak for themselves. Their articulating their own experiences of victimization, exploitation, and abuse for themselves and the next generations is a means of agency and rejecting the mindset that views black women as backward, voiceless, passive, and vulnerable. Black women are also reminding patriarchal and racist authorities that they are more than exotic others, victims of slavery, domestic workers, and prostitutes, they were mothers struggling to nourish, clothe, and educate their children and preserve their cultural heritage.

1.3 Cultural memory

This article is concerned with motherhood which is constructed through collective dealings to construct and transfer cultural memory in *Beloved* and *Long Song*. This article explores how motherhood in these black women writers' narratives uncover the invisible history of slavery through fictional cultural memory of mothers. The black women writers trace cultural memory rather than historical accounts. They are not concerned with historical correctness or reliability.

Neo-slave narratives, however, use speculative fictional devices to refuse traditional narrative modes and thus also reject traditional notions of what constitutes the real. These literary devices that disrupt temporality and narrativity “are designed to convey certain truths about slavery that are inaccessible through the discipline of history” Dubey, ...reclaim lost voices, to critique traditional historical methods associated with white, nondisabled men, and to use fiction and non-realism to expose many of the untruths and absences of the historical record and cultural memory of slavery. (Schalk, 2018, 37)

They aim to unveil the past. They create a counter-history by revising the stereotypical description of slave women, they deal with women's resilience and empowerment through motherhood. Neo-slave narratives function as a medium of remembrance that produces collective memory by recalling the past in the form of a narrative. The black women's collective memory is accepted as authentic but also it has

been ignored by historians. The black women's collective memory works to construct cultural memory through the fragmented recollections of personal and communal histories. Henderson states: "This horror, found in the fragmented recollections of daily life, haunts the individual and collective memory to the extent that any formation of a new identity in the aftermath of slavery becomes predicated upon remembering and disremembering these moments (2002,88).

The neo-slave narratives are concerned with the cultural trauma of slavery and criticize the social, economic, and political structures that create and prolong trauma. They focus on the trauma experienced by African women, mothers, and daughters who suffered from racism and sexism during slavery and its aftermath. Their experiences of collective trauma of slavery drive African women to create their strategy for survival through the act of mothering rather than change their future identity in irrecoverable ways. They transform their trauma into cultural memory through motherline while protecting, nurturing, and training the next generation. Due to traumatic experiences of discrimination, oppression, and slavery, Black women feel a sense of support and assist each other. They construct a collective memory through sharing the act of mothering. The collective memory which emerges from the interaction of individuals is kept and transmitted by mothers. The cultural trauma and traumatized behavior of the generation that suffered directly from slavery are transmitted from mother to mother and also generation to generation by social learning or black mothering of the slave women. Cultural memory in black mothering is a way of constructing and conveying the collective past. Constructing cultural memory in black women's neo-slave narratives is shaped by mothers who aim to ensure the survival of the next generations under the tyranny of slavery.

In light of the theories on memory and trauma, the main debate in this article is on black mothering as a feature of cultural memory. Black mothering refers to all women of African heritage whose ancestors lived through slavery and look after their biological or non-biological children. In neo-slave narratives, Black mothers follow the duties of protecting the next generation, nurturing them physically and psychologically, and bearing African traditions, values, and skills for survival. They also perform the act of other mothering which is loving, guiding, nurturing, and taking care of children who do not biologically belong to them in their communities. other mothering is a way of protecting the next generation from the tyranny of slavery. Therefore, motherline is a web of women sharing and transmitting cultural memory. When mothers tell stories about bleeding, pregnancy, giving birth, etc. to their daughters, and share knowledge that refers to their culture, they connect with their daughters.

Their neo-slave narratives function as cultural memory. The memories don't belong to the writers, however, the real parts are formed through intertextuality, in the selected novels, the diaries, letters, or parts from other literary works are seen. Therefore the text or literary works themselves construct cultural memory, "whose explicit project is cultural memory, fiction that is centrally engaged in retrieving, imagining, and giving voice to the experiences and legacies of slavery, specifically the experience of the female slave and the African American woman writer's daughterly inheritance. (Vallas, 2000, 102)They don't only give voices to minority groups, victims, and women but also present their cultural memory that is maintained through practice and observance of mothering. Their collective memory, which refers to the shared memory creates a feeling of belonging to a group to construct community and identity. They concentrate not only on the violations of the female body but also on mother-child relations, particularly mother-daughter relations. Neo-slave narratives center on the daughters and their point of view as they are potential mothers and the mothers are also daughters.

To sum up, Black women writers have made valuable contributions to literature with a diverse and powerful body of works that deal with the intersections of colonial history, racism, slavery, gender, and socio-cultural issues. From the early writers such as Phillis Wheatley and Harriet Jacobs to the contemporary authors like Alice Walker, Sherley Anne Williams, Toni Morrison, Andrea Levy, Gayl Jones, Octavia Butler, Maya Angelou, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Black women writers deal with the historical injustices experienced by their communities. Their narratives mainly explore black women's experiences of slavery, racial and gender inequalities. They aim to give voices to black women's experiences and perspectives. Most of these writers have achieved widespread recognition and critical acclaim, they have won Pulitzer Prizes, National Book Awards, and Nobel Prizes. Their writings encompass a wide range of genres including novels, poetry, essays, and autobiographies that cover themes such as racism, slavery, inequality, oppression, identity problems, the challenges of womanhood and social issues, and the struggle for justice. Their works have enriched the literature and they continue to inspire readers of all backgrounds by fostering understanding and empathy.

2. Black Motherhood and Memory in *Beloved*

This part aims to analyze black motherhood in Toni Morrison's neo-slave narrative *Beloved* from the perspective of Black feminist literary criticism. *Beloved* is a literary masterpiece that takes the reader on a profound journey into the world of slavery. It vividly presents the impact of slavery on black individuals of all ages, especially on women. In *Beloved*, black motherhood becomes the central theme in the novel, and the act of mothering including protection, nurturance, and cultural bearing is used for survival. Morrison deals with motherhood in her vivid portrayal of the lives of African-American women during slavery and its aftermaths. Therefore, Through the stories of Sethe, Beloved, Baby Suggs, Denver, and the other Black women characters. Morrison's neo-slave narrative reflects on the racist and gendered discrimination and oppression, the violence and dehumanization of slavery, and the perpetuation of White domination and black subjugation. she challenges the stereotypical representations of black women and reconstructs black women from a black feminist perspective.

The idea for *Beloved* came from a real-life event in a newspaper clipping about a slave named Margaret Garner who murdered her child to protect the child from slavery. In the novel, Morrison fictionalizes this horrible event within the legacy of slavery. She engages in slavery by investigating black women, focusing on maternal figures. She revisits the life of a slave woman to celebrate the black woman, her strength, and her culture and explore the black feminine self. In the novel, both the daughters and mothers struggle with the traumatic incidents of slavery and its results. The legacy of slavery haunts the past and present. She reveals the existence of unhealed wounds in the African-American community and how their memories of slavery haunt their lives.

The plot of *Beloved* is set in 1873, in the period of Reconstruction after the American Civil War that began as a result of the long-standing disagreement over the institution of slavery. After this war, the institution of slavery was abolished, but it didn't end the racial tension. Morrison rewrites the history and the ills of slavery that have been ignored, buried, and silenced in the recorded history of slavery, she "exhibit[s] a deep distrust of the historiography of slavery" (Mitchell-Taylor, 2009, 163) She rewrites the memory of history that the Americans desire to repress. Not to leave the black life in the past to the interpretation of the whites, she unveils, recreates, and reclaims the hidden or ignored lives of the black people who survived the ravages of slavery. Morrison portrays black life and how the slaves experience violence, dehumanization, and brutality through the slaves working on Sweet Home, a plantation. She narrates the experience of slavery from the perspective of the blacks, particularly black women who get

tortured, raped, and mistreated on the plantations. *Beloved* “invokes the slave past and interrogates its role in the construction of the female self” (Mitchell and Taylor,2009,75).

Morrison uses the legacy of slavery to investigate black women, focusing on maternal figures. Morrison explores motherhood through black Afro-American women’s experiences and struggles with the legacy of slavery, and their desires to protect their families and children and to declare an identity. The narration revolves around the life of one particular maternal figure, Sethe who was a formerly African-American slave. She portrays the dehumanizing, brutal, and devastating effects of slavery on the past and memory of Sethe. Sethe escaped from the Kentucky plantation called Sweet Home to Ohio and she lives in the house at 124 Bluestone Road with her daughter Denver and her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs. Even after achieving her freedom, her traumatic experience of slavery and the guilt of killing her baby haunt Sethe. under the burden of these memories, she tries to reconstruct a life for herself and her daughter, Denver. Years later, the spirit of the dead baby, as a young girl, called *Beloved*, appears and plagues Sethe’s house and evokes her traumatic past. The fleshly manifestation of *Beloved* metaphorically is the ghost of slavery which goes on besieging Sethe’s life.

In *Beloved*, motherhood is related to the return of repressed past events and memories. With the arrival of Paul D, an old friend and ex-slave from Sweet Home, and the spectral appearance of *Beloved*, the daughter that Sethe killed, Sethe remembers the traumatic events of her past life in slavery that she represses. Her traumatic memories consist of her experiences as a slave at Sweet Home, Sethe’s encounter with the schoolteacher and his nephews, her escape from Sweet Home, and the mystery of Sethe’s baby’s murder.

Her conversation with Paul D takes Sethe to Sweet Home and makes her face the painful experience of slavery that disrupts her marriage, family life, and motherhood. Sethe’s past life at the plantation is revisited. Sethe is replaced with Baby Suggs as his son Halle buys her freedom with five years of weekend labor on the plantation. Since her arrival at Sweet Home, Paul D has desired Sethe, however, Sethe marries Halle and they have three children. The owners of Sweet Home are Mr. and Mrs. Garner, after Mr. Garner’s death, the schoolteacher and his two nephews come to live with Mrs. Garner and manage the farm. Because of the schoolteacher’s dehumanization and cruel attitudes, the slaves desire to run away. While escaping from Sweet Home, Sethe who is pregnant with a fourth child, Denver, and Halle are separated, and her husband does not arrive at the place where they plan to meet, nobody knows what has happened to him.

Morrison tells about the lives of slaves on the plantation, Baby Suggs, Sethe, Halle, Pual D, and others had no chance to have identities in families. Slavery tears apart the traditional family structure and also prevents the formation of families, slaves aren't allowed to legally get married as they are contracted to their owners. They are deprived of any identity apart from being slaves. They suffer loss of sense of self as they are treated as subhumans, commodities, and subjects. Moreover, they don't lay claim on their spouses and their children. In addition to the social abuse of African-American people, Morrison tries to “rescue the African-American body from its inanimate position as “thing” and “property” and give it a three-dimensional character”(Mitchell and Taylor,2009, 12). She focuses on the interior lives of enslaved women. Sethe suffers the psychological trauma of slavery and tries not to remember her past the haunting history of slavery appears in the form of her horrible memories.

Sethe bears the physical and psychological scars of slavery on her body. Paul D’s kissing of her scars and intention to heal the wounds initiate the return of the expressed event of her being milked and

whipped harshly. She remembers that the nephews of the schoolteacher try to rape, molest and milk her by using force. Previously in the novel, the boys used cows to satisfy themselves. they pinned down the nursing Sethe and stole her milk as if she were a cow. The black female's body is reduced to animality, and Sethe is seen as a cow. Their insult on her body has far-reaching physical and psychological consequences. This memory highlights the brutal and dehumanizing nature of slavery and the issue of gendered racism, a black woman's body is controlled, abused, insulted, and violated by the White slaveowners. she is seen as a sexual object. She repeats the phrase "Those boys came in there and took my milk" (Morrison, 1987, 16-7). Even if Sethe tries to forget and repress the abuse of her body and the cruelty of slaveowners, she bears the physical and psychological scars of it. After telling this to Mrs Garner, she was punished and wipped making a tree scar on her back. and Amy, a White girl, uses the chokecherry to describe the form of a mass of ugly scars. Her ugly scars become a beautiful symbol of the transformation of oppression into a story of survival. However, seeing the ugliness and violence of her scars as a tree cannot disguise the brutality of slavery. She carries the scars of the whips on her back, The scars represent the dreadful and horrible past of slavery as "slavery is not something relegated to the past; it is forever present" (Eyerman, 2004, 108). Furthermore, breastfeeding which establishes the bond between a mother and her children is broken and violated by slaveowners, Slavery separates families not only physically but also spiritually. This event reveals Sethe's resilience and strength as a mother, she goes on loving and protecting her children despite her pains and traumas. Morrison creates alternative ways to visualize African-American female subjectivity despite the scars of slavery. Throughout the novel, the theme of disruption of motherhood is repeated in the stories of other black mothers.

Within the system of slavery, the violence and brutality against women are ignored and silenced by legal and social authorities. The African American slave woman is not treated as a human being, she does not have control over her body. For example, Ella, the black woman, is physically beaten lost her teeth, and bears physical scars on her body, her physical scars expand on her psychological scars. she is raped and gives birth to her baby which is described as " a hairy thing lived five days never making sounds"(Morrison). Her baby's inability to make sound represents her unspeakable psychological scars. "As an inaudible scar, this child's bodily presence stands as a powerful reminder of the inarticulate nature of rape" (Mitchell and Taylor, 2009, 2). The violent recollections of her life in slavery are analyzed from a black feminist perspective in this study.

The haunting ghost of her past reemerges with the arrival of the young woman *Beloved*. Mitchell and Taylor explain:

In making *Beloved* flesh, Morrison makes this historical moment tangible as *Beloved*'s physical frame becomes a material symbol of those bodies unaccounted for—those sixty million or more lost on various sea voyages between Africa and America. She is the conduit through which these disembodied victims of the Middle Passage gain aliterate voice. (2009,89)

This quotation suggests that Morrison makes *Beloved* a real and embodied character, so she makes the transatlantic slave trade tangible. *Beloved*'s corporeality becomes a material symbol of those countless enslaved individuals who were literally and metaphorically lost during their transportation through the Middle Passage. *Beloved* epitomizes the collective suffering and trauma of the black slaves. Those victims are given a voice through *Beloved* who functions as a conduit. Morrison gives voice and presence to the victims of slavery who were marginalized and silenced by history through the embodiment of *Beloved*. In addition, she embodies the return of the repressed memory of Sethe, she forces Sethe to recall her past and face the traumatic events that dominated her life. "This slavery is something lived

and living; it forms a habitus that determines current behavior and thus requires a radical spiritual transformation to be rooted out. The rediscovery of one's true past is central to this transformation" (Eyerman, 2004, 108). Her presence represents the ghosts of the past that continue to influence the present; the echoes of slavery continue to affect postcolonial societies. "The ghost's major function is to metaphorically represent the past and the way that the traces of the past persist in the present" (Erickson, 2009, 16). As the readers learn about Sethe, Baby Suggs, and Beloved, they are reminded of the enduring connections between human experiences and the ongoing struggle for justice in the world of slavery. Beloved brings back the memory of slavery and racism. "[I]n their various encounters and engagements with Beloved, the characters explore what it means for them to confront their past suffering and to move beyond that past" (Smith, 2007, 176). Her bond with Sethe's family represents how the history of slavery still shapes the present.

Beloved's questions enact Sethe to recall her painful past, her interest in Sethe's past makes horrible experiences reappear in Sethe's eyes. While Sethe is arranging Denver's hair, Beloved asks Sethe about her mother: "Your woman she never fixes up your hair?" this is a question for Sethe since that's who she was looking at. "My woman? You mean my mother? If she did, I don't remember" (Morrison, 1987, 60). After her question, Sethe becomes sad as she recalls her memories of her mother. She has only a few fragments of memories about her mother because Sethe isn't able to share and communicate with her mother while growing up. Despite the failure of oral transmission, her mother has a connection with Sethe through her trauma. She recalls her mother's carrying a mark on her body. Before being hung, Sethe's mother points to a scar on her body, she says, "You can know me by this mark" (Morrison, 1987, 61), she tells her to use the mark to identify her body if she dies. As a small child, Sethe desires to have the same mark as a bond between herself and her mother, she doesn't understand the trauma of being marked, When she asks to be marked, her mother slaps her. She says: "I didn't understand it then. Not till I had a mark of my own." (Morrison, 1987-61). After being whipped and murdering her child, Sethe understands why her mother did this. Sethe has a mark on her body and she also marks her daughter's body by cutting her trout and scratching her forehead with her nails.

Communally, Sethe is known for the marks she bears on her body, as she is also simultaneously recognized as a bodily inscripator herself. Her marking of her sons Buglar and Howard, as well as her marking of her daughter Beloved, provides a complicated example of competing social discourses that posit the constitution of slavery against the conventions of motherhood. (Mitchel and Taylor, 2009,101)

The mothers and the daughters bear the physical and emotional scars of slavery. Their bodies and spirits are marked by the scars and traumas. The marks and scars on their bodies construct a tie between them and create a cultural memory. "Beloved seems especially engaged with the havoc wrought upon black bodies under slavery" (Smith, 2007, 177).

Sethe doesn't remember the plantation she grew up in, "she remembered only song and dance." (Morrison, 1987, 30). While escaping from Sweet Home, the plantation, Sethe feels her baby's movements in her womb, she says: "She did the little antelope rammed her with horns and pawed the ground of her womb" (Morrison, 1987, 30). The baby's kicking and straining against Sethe's stomach copies both the antelope and the traditional dance. The baby's movement reminds Sethe of 'the little antelope,' Sethe is taken aback because she has never laid eyes on an antelope, but the memory of her mother performing a traditional African dance that emulates this specific creature remains vivid in her mind. She says, "They danced the antelope" (Morrison, 1987, 31). Her mother's traditional dance which is particularly an African ritual, is a cultural memory. As a slave woman whose motherhood is disrupted,

she feels the energy of the traditional dance with the baby's movement in her stomach. Through her mother's dance, she constructs a bond with her motherline. Sethe is unable to join the dancing and singing because she has forgotten her mother tongue. She loses oral expression that functions as a means of conveying cultural knowledge like dancing and singing. When her mother is hanged with many other slaves, Nan, another enslaved woman, in an African language, tells her how Sethe's mother and she were transported through the Middle Passage to America. "What Nan told her she had forgotten, along with the language she told it in? The same language her ma'am spoke, and which would never come back" (Morrison, 1987, 62). Nan narrates that they come across the ocean on the same ship, and the crew rapes them repeatedly, Sethe's mother threw away the children she had by the White remember. She kept sethe as if she had a black father. After her confrontation with her mother's dead body, she suppresses her fragmented memories of her mother so she quits getting cultural heritage from her mother. As a result, she loses her connection to her motherline and she loses her mother's language which represents the kind of cultural devastation. Morrison evokes the ancestors' memories of the Middle Passage.

Beloved's question about her earrings takes Sethe back to Sweet Home, where she has experienced both horror and fleeting moments of happiness, and she is taken to the time that Mrs. Garner presented them as a gift when she chooses Halle as her husband. Sethe is taken from her familiar land after the death of her mother, she tries to rebuild a familial environment for herself. Mr. Garner appears fatherly figure to the slaves on the plantation, Mrs. Garner takes the position of a mother figure for Sethe, and Sethe helps her in cooking, housekeeping, and sewing. Sethe adorns the kitchen with blossom, as she feels at home. However, her feeling of a sense of belonging to a familial sphere is disrupted when Sethe requests a wedding ceremony from Mrs. Garner, "[l]aughing a little, she touched Sethe on the head, saying, "You are one sweet child." And then no more" (Morrison, 1987, 26), Mrs. Garner's reaction, though gentle, underscores a lack of authentic mother-daughter relationship, so her connection to her motherline is disrupted. She becomes heartbroken because the slaves don't have a right to make a wedding ceremony. Sethe's yearning for maternal affiliation stimulates her to imitate Mrs. Garner's wedding dress by crafting an ugly patchwork dress from stolen materials. Furthermore, on the plantation, there is no "othermother" who conveys her knowledge about caring for the child to Sethe. Sethe has three children but she can't protect them as she does not know how to take care of them, and She says,

there wasn't nobody to talk to. Woman, I mean. So I tried to recollect what I'd seen back where I was before Sweet Home. How the women did there. Oh, they knew all about it. How to make that thing you use to hang the babies in the trees—so you could see them out of harm's way while you worked the field"(Morrison,1987,160)

Sethe manages to have incredible strength in her commitment to protecting her children. As a child of a slave mother and a former slave, Sethe experiences the atrocities of slavery and endures punishment. She is determined to protect her children from slavery. She tries to build a new life for herself and her children. Therefore, she escapes the plantation known as Sweet Home.

Morrison explores black Afro-American women's strength in the face of horrible pain and hardship through Sethe. The most significant instance of her strength in the struggle is seen when Sethe escapes from the slave plantation; She is pregnant, abandoned by her husband, Halle, and gives birth to her baby. Her bringing a child into the world lonely while embarking on a journey to freedom proves her maternal strength.

Sethe's murder of her daughter is the main traumatic event that she represses, at the same time, it reveals her maternal strength and determination to protect her children from slavery. When şPaul D asks Sethe about a clipping from an old-dated newspaper, this clipping is about Sethe's killing her daughter. Sethe returns to the moment of the trauma, the most striking example of the repressed traumatic past is recalled. who keeps this horrible event in her consciousness, She hides infanticide in her mind for many years. "Every day. She works "dough. Working, working dough. Nothing better than that to start the day's serious work of beating back the past" (Morrison, 1987, 73), however, she isn't able to forget it.

To understand how she is driven to murder her baby, the horrible legacy of slavery is revisited. Sethe experiences the atrocities of slavery so she has a strong determination to protect her children from enslavement, from the inhuman conditions that are prevalent at the plantation. Unfortunately, her desire to protect her children from slavery leads her to attempt to kill them and finally, she kills one of her children. *Beloved* is seen as a testament to how slavery changed maternal bonds, she breaks the black women's traditional duty of protecting the next generation. However, Sethe protects her children Sethe believes that death is better than returning to Sweet Home as a slave. She knows what it means to be a slave, as a daughter of a slave woman, and as a slave, she is humiliated tortured, and raped. She doesn't want her children to experience them. Killing her child is a violent act but she doesn't find any other solution to protect her children. She murdered her baby daughter to prevent her from being enslaved by slave owners. Her act of murder driven by her determination to protect her children from enslavement reveals what a mother can do to protect her offspring. She demonstrates a deep love for her children. She murders her child to secure her safety, the slave master cannot take her child and claim her child's future. By killing her child, the black woman tries to resist to slavery system and retains her authority over her child's destiny.

Because the social contract of slavery mandates the taking of a child from its parents, the intent being the destruction of black families and the severing of familial bonds, Sethe's rebuttal to this affront on her personal space is to write back in a language as brutal and as violent as that spoken to her. ...This suggests that Sethe's demonstration of love is an effort to transform the language of slavery written upon the black bodies of her family through a forceful reclaiming of the bodies of her children. (Mitchell and Taylor, 2009,101)

The main aim of black mothering is to protect and empower children. In the same way, in *Beloved*, Morrison explores the role of black motherhood as a means of surviving slavery and empowering the next generation. "Morrison defines and positions maternal identity as a site of power for black women. From this position of power black mothers engage in a maternal practice that has as its explicit goal the empowerment of children" (O'Reilly, 2004, xi).

Morrison reveals the disruption of the motherline -motherly system- that is built by black women to ensure the transfer of cultural memory. The connection to the motherline lets black women and girls gain ancestral knowledge and expand the range of cultural memory. Morrison depicts the consequences of the disruption of the motherline by slavery through Sethe's relationships and communications with her mother, her children, and other women in her community. Morrison re-evokes all the repressed past experiences events and memories in the unconscious part of Sethe's mind to establish the motherline, to make slavery visible, and to break the widespread historical silence by critically examining what has been left unspoken. She tells her community and daughters about the unspeakable with passion.

The texts of the slave narratives can be regarded as classic examples of the 'return of the repressed,' primarily because the events relating to violence and violation (which are self-censored or edited out)

return in ‘veiled allusions.’”⁸ These “veiled allusions” are unmasked in Morrison’s novel through a series of repetitious accountings of the dead and the forgotten. (2002,85)

She tries to explain her motive for infanticide to the community and her daughters. She tries to justify her murdering the child, but the community doesn’t listen to her explanations, Sethe is outcasted, and excluded from the social sphere, and she doesn’t take part in traditional events of the community. Baby Suggs, her mother-in-law, passes away. She loses her motherline. It became impossible for black women to keep a family together because of slavery. Her sons, Howard and Buglar run away. Sethe and her daughter, Denver, continue living in the haunted house. They become our *Beloved*’s only victims.

Furthermore, through the story of infanticide, Sethe tries to create a link to her maternal heritage. “Sethe could recognize only seventy-five printed words (half of which appeared in the newspaper clipping), but she knew that the words she did not understand hadn’t any more power than she had to explain” (Morrison, 1987, 160). Sethe is not able to communicate with her daughters until *Beloved* appears as a mysterious young woman. She reveals the conditions that forced her to commit infanticide.

there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes, and although there was not a leaf on that farm that did not make her want to scream, it rolled itself out before her in shameless beauty. It never looked as terrible as it was and it made her wonder if hell was a pretty place too. Fire and brimstone are all right, but hidden in lacy groves. Boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world. It shamed her—remembering the wonderful soughing trees rather than the boys. Try as she might to make it otherwise, the sycamores beat out the children every time and she could not forgive her memory for that. (Morrison, 1987, 6)

According to Gülrenk Hayırcıl, “Sethe has to remember traumatic events to be able to justify her infanticide” (42). The violence of murder is camouflaged by beautiful descriptions like beauty, pretty place, lacy groves the wonderful soughing trees, and children. Although she has the disturbing feeling of shame when she is telling this story to Denver and *Beloved*, she tries to connect them to the motherline. The novel’s exploration of black motherhood is connected to the transfer of cultural memory. It is only Sethe’s emotion of “shame” that indicates that there is an evil side to this peaceful memory (Morrison, 1987, 7). The image of the sycamore tree appears later when Sethe tries to explain her infanticide to *Beloved*.

What I had to get through later I got through because of you. Passed right by those boys hanging in the trees. One had Paul A’s shirt on but not his feet or his head. I walked right on by because only I had your milk, and God does what He would, I was going to get it to you. You remember that, don’t you; that I did? That when I got here I had milk enough for all? (Morrison, 1987, 198)

While *Beloved* who blames Sethe doesn’t want to listen to her, Denver listens to her mother’s words and explanations. Therefore, she understands why her mother murdered her child. Furthermore, *Beloved* quickly controls the household. As a result, their lives take a turn. Paul D banishes the disruptive ghost, however, she seduces Paul D and forces him to leave the house through a series of spiritual sexual transactions. After driving Paul D from the house, she battles with her mother, Then, she sets her sights on Sethe and weakens her both physically and mentally. Denver asks for help from female neighbors, they manage to drive *Beloved* away. *Beloved* is a bridge between personal and communal history allowing for healing the wounds. With the help of the women of the community, ironically the same women who neglected to warn her family of the white men’s arrival some years earlier, Sethe exorcises *Beloved*’s ghost and, finally, at the end with Paul D’s help, comes to realize that she, not *Beloved*, is her own “best thing.” (Mitchel and Taylor,2009.77)

Towards the end of the novel, the women of the community begin to accept Sethe when they start to listen to Denver's explanations about strange events at Bluestone Road. Sethe hears their song in her yard, this is a sign of her being accepted by the community and connected to the motherline.

[W] Here the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. (Morrison, 1987, 261)

Singing together is a means of oral communication, black women generate a sense of belonging and power as they share a common cultural memory through singing together. Sethe is a mother herself, but she is assisted by other mothers many times to continue to survive. Othermothers help other women to find a way to experience cultural memory. At the end of the novel, Sethe shares her maternal past with her daughters and is accepted by the black community.

3.3. Motherhood and Cultural Memory in *The Longs Song*

This part aims to analyze *The Long Song* (2010) by black British women writer Andrea Levy from a black feminist perspective. The novel deals with the themes of race, identity, and the legacy of slavery, it is acclaimed for its portrayal of vivid characters, rich historical details, and the strength and resilience of black people, particularly black women in the face of racial and sexist oppression.

The Longs Song is one of the neo-slave novels that can be seen as a British development within the tradition of African-American novels of slavery. Black British women's neo-slave narrative focuses on Britain's involvement in slavery. It contributed to the effort to bring slavery to the representations in Britain. It aims to integrate the legacy of slavery into the narrative of British literary traditions. It uncovers the traditionally hidden narrative of slavery and the reverberations of the heritage of slavery in contemporary society. The literary fiction about slavery published in Britain has been produced by women authors of African and Caribbean origin such as Bernadine Evaristo, Laura Fish and Andrea Levy, S.I. Martin, and Carly Philips. Their works revise the original slave narratives and offer diverse perspectives of different characters who experienced slavery. They include first-person narratives that combine the perspectives of others.

Andrea Levy who is one of the Black British women writers created fiction about slavery in Britain. She was born and raised in Britain. She is connected to the Caribbean through her family history. She doesn't have a direct memory of a journey through the Middle Passage or enslavement. She learns about her ancestral past through the memories of her grandparents. She frequently underlines the significance of slavery in her narratives by presenting the experience of slavery through the first-person perspective of the enslaved people who live in Britain. This novel is set in the turbulent years before and after the abolition of slavery, it is "perhaps be considered her first real work of 'historical fiction'" (Baxter & James, 2014, 41). It contributes to the rewriting of the British past as it underlines the involvement of the country in slavery and the slave trade, so slavery is integrated into the memory of the British nation.

Levy addresses the issues of slavery and explores the impact of the slave trade and slavery on black people, particularly on female slaves in British society. She deals with the predicament of female slaves and the disruption of motherhood by slavery in Britain. She challenges the conventional perceptions of black women in British history and literary canons. In her neo-slave narrative, *The Long Song*, she responds to the life stories published by black women writers in the 19th century such as Mary Prince

and Harriet Jacobin. Levy presents the first-person narration of the enslavement and freedom of a black woman.

The Long Song's narration revolves around, July who is a former house slave living in 19th-century Jamaica. The novel is told in the form of July's memoir. From July's perspective, Levy presents insights into the brutal realities of slavery, the relationships between master and slave, and how the enslaved women resisted within the confines of the institution of slavery. July is a slave at a sugarcane plantation called Amity, she witnesses the Baptist War and the beginning of freedom. Through her story, Levy deals with the forgotten histories of Jamaica and Britain. The narrator and July are the same person, July is an unreliable storyteller, and she creates a counter-memory to the real accounts of historical events. Rather than recovering history, Levy's neo-slave narrative is "based on re-imagining the subjectivity of the enslaved. In *The Long Song*, history and memory function to deconstruct and rebuild the concepts of community, home, and family" (Lima,2012,144). She tells her own story and stories of other black women, presenting a perspective that subverts the dominant narrative. Unlike the main characters in African American neo-slave narratives, the main character of Levy refuses to be depicted as a passive victim. She is an active agent in her life, she is depicted as an individual with her desires, emotions, ambitions, and decisions. She challenges the racial and patriarchal power systems. For her brutal, violent, and traumatic experiences, she doesn't blame any person or slavery, despite her circumstances, she asserts her identity and maintains her dignity.

The Long Song deals with the brutal actions of slaveowners and also the complex and equivocal relationships between the masters and the enslaved people. The brutality of the former enslavers' treatment of black people is presented through the abduction of July. July experiences the violent retribution enacted by white settlers on the slaves. She is the daughter of a black field slave on the Amity sugar plantation which "was a busy plantation with many, many, many indolent, skulking, tricky, senseless, devious slaves" (Levy, 2010, 72). She is separated from her biological mother and moved to the great house of Caroline, the sister of John Howarth who is the master of the plantation named Amity. Due to her boredom and only for pleasure, Caroline who is a childless woman takes July with her. And John justifies her sister's selfish act, he says, "[y]es if she'll amuse you. She would be taken soon enough anyway. It will encourage her to have another. They are dreadful negros" (Levy, 2010, 56). When July's mother Kitty struggles to free her daughter from Caroline, she is whipped. The unity of the black family is disrupted as a result both the motherline and cultural memory are disrupted. July is separated from her cultural heritage, from "the field slave, and forced to enact a grotesque parody of English aristocratic country-house life" (Clark, *The Long Song by Andrea Levy*). Caroline tries to impose English culture and a new identity upon July. She stripes her name, July, renames her Marguerite, and forces her to wait hand and foot upon her and stitch patiently, she subjugates her with ill-treatment and threats. When July cries for her mother, she "leaned in close to July to yell, '[y]our mama is sold away... you are mine now'" (Levy, 2010, 76). She treats July as an object, she compares July to her childhood dolls.

However, July is not depicted only as a victim, Levy forms her character like an African trickster or mischievous figure in Anancy tales told in the plantations. July succeeds in being happy in the midst of chaos, and she knows how to endure the horrors of enslavement. She develops cunning solutions for her situations, her outwitting behavior enables her to overcome many traumatic events. She is an unusual character when compared to the conventional stereotypical portrayal of a black woman who occupies a different hierarchal position from men and white people. Levy overturns the conventional race and gender order and positions black women at the center. The constructed nature of values is brought to the fore in its comic inversion of common assumptions about history and women.

July manages to avoid any punishment and she also begs for the whip after her disobedience. Even though Coralline tries to teach her English manners, she doesn't let her influence her character, she uses her name bestowed upon her by her mother, "renaming reiterates the imposition of the slaveholders' version of history that July seeks to undo, and July forever holds onto the name her mother gave her" (Baxter & James, 2014, 114-5). Caroline tries to control her life, but July does not accept the white othermothering of Caroline. Moreover, she is aware of the weakness of her mistress, she outwits Caroline, for example, to revenge on her, she ruins her mistress's Christmas meal by using an old bed sheet instead of an Irish linen table cloth, as a result, Caroline, the sadistic figure, turns into a comic figure. July takes revenge by serving insects as a dish to the White slave owners. She squashes an insect with her bare hands to show her power. She has a relationship with her mistress's new husband, Robert Goodwin, acting as the mistress of the house. rather than being vulnerable to sexual exploitation and violence, she decides to go to bed with him. Levy reverses the image of Western enslavers and assumptions about black women.

Not only do Caroline's actions demonstrate the slave owners' accrual of benefits at the expense of the enslaved, but they also suggest that she is in control of the storyline of July's life. Yet at each step of the way, it is July who refuses to allow these events to destroy her and who prevails despite the pain she endures. She does this by snatching the plot away from Caroline and becoming the protagonist in her narrative, telling it in her way and not allowing herself to be silenced. (Baxter & James, 2014, 112)

In her use of humor and anachronism to depict slavery, Levy breaks expectations of seriousness just as *Beloved*. Her novel "move[s] away from the expected gravity of slavery novels" (Muñoz-Valdivieso, 2016, 46). Levy underscores the absurdity of the institution of slavery that commodifies black bodies and cultural forms. July becomes the owner of her own body and an active agent in her own story while simultaneously mocking the system. In her novel,

humor works variously to create sites of resistance and moments of reprieve, at the same time that it moves towards articulating an ethics of empathy. Certainly, Levy's unflinching engagement with the complex and shifting issues of racial exclusion, discrimination, and dislocation across hundreds of years of black experience means that her work is frequently – and appropriately – unnerving. But that doesn't mean that we don't often find ourselves laughing our way towards serious work. (Baxter & James, 2014, 4)

The reversal of the roles is evident from the beginning, black woman is presented as tricksters and also as heroine. July's mother, Kitty, becomes a heroic cultural memory of motherhood as she tries to save her daughter who runs away after seeing the overseer soot her lover, Nimrod. Caroline charges Nimrod with a crime that he doesn't commit, which results in the death of Nimrod and Kitty. Black people on the plantation create diverse versions of this event and depict July's mother as a heroic mother. To save her daughter, Kitty kills the cruel overseer Tam Dewar, July's father. July is conceived as a result of the rape of Kitty, like Sethe's witnessing the hanging of her mother along with other slaves. She witnesses her mother's being hanged for murdering Tam Dewar. Witnessing the death of her mother turns into a traumatic memory for July.

In response to the disruption of the motherline, July decides to leave her son to the minister man, she doesn't want to mother her child as she is not ready to be a mother. She "had no intention to suckle this misbegotten black pickaninny. But neither did she wish to leave him mewling upon a mound of trash, nor whimpering within the wood. She found no strength to smother him, nor will to hold him" (Levy, 2010, 186). She begs the minister's wife Jane not to sell her son as a slave. She plays with Jane's motherly feelings, she betrays white woman to raise her black baby. July "behaved upon that day; come, how else

was she to get this white woman to raise her black boy?” (Levy, 2010, 194). However, she doesn't feel any shame about either abandoning her son or deceiving Jane. Many years later, July wants to test her motherly feelings towards her child, so she visits the feast to stare at her son,

a school feast was held every year in the chapel yard beneath the shade of orange trees, where a gathering of people from about the parish came to observe the miracle of the little learned negroes of the Baptist mission school. Even July came once to stare. (Levy, 2010, 188)

She looks at her son. Her staring at his son is compared to Kitty's peering through the windows of the big house to catch a glimpse of her daughter. July doesn't desire to see her son like the way Kitty stares at her, as the idea of being a mother is an unusual thing for her. Moreover, his son is brought up by white people as a result his bond with his African ancestry is broken. He is detached from the black motherline. And he becomes the subject of the experiment of Baptism. He was raised with a Christian education. The novel ends with a retrospective account of her son, Thomas, who was left to be adopted by Baptist ministers as a child.

July's second child, Emily, is abducted from her, this is another disruption of the motherline in the novel. Emily is the child of July and Caroline's husband Robert Goodwin. July witnesses Caroline's interest in her baby, a white woman loves the little child of her black slave, and Caroline says, “[s]he looks just like him. She is so fair. Not like a nigger's child at all” (Levy, 2010, 319). July recalls how Caroline separated her from her mother so she “snatched her baby from the daybed” (Levy, 2010, 320). This foreshadows the abduction of her baby, Caroline and Robert abduct Emily and sail back to England. The loss of her daughter is a trauma for July. By telling her story, July calls back her suppressed traumatic memory and reclaims her past and her daughter to construct her motherline. She writes down her story for Thomas and her daughter, her intention is to find her own lost daughter by publishing her book. In the epilogue of the novel, Thomas asks the reader to contact him if they know Emily Goodwin living in England as “finding a negro blood within a family is not always met with rejoicing” (Levy, 2010, 386).

To sum up, in the novel, the protagonist is represented as a cunning character who plays tricks on people to avoid punishment she learns how to overcome the enslavers. Indeed, she tries to survive the disruption of her mother line through her use of humor. She has experienced serious traumatic events due to the slave system and the selfishness of the white enslavers. She manages to survive as she is a cunning fighter. She struggles against slavery individually. She is continuously struggling with traumatic incidents that she has to fight back. In her humorous and energetic narration, she directly expresses her desires and describes the tricks and games she plays such as sabotaging the Christmas dinner, serving insects, and sharing a secret recipe to take her revenge and achieve her goal. She can revolt against her oppressors. She is a shrewd and independent-minded woman so she doesn't want her son or others to interrupt her narration. When Thomas tells her mum not to mislead readers or leave out the significant episodes, she says, “READER, I BELIEVED AFTER all the fuss-fuss my son” (Levy, 2010, 291). The protagonist in Levy's black British neo-slave narrative creates cultural memory by writing down her story. She doesn't want the reader to pity her so she ends her narration with the use of nurturance and nurturance. She creates a happy ending for her story, she imagines herself as a popular cook, and she envisions a future where people will say “[b]ring me Miss July's naseberry” (Levy, 2010, 350).

4. Conclusion

African American and Black British people share a common history of slavery but there are some main historical differences between their past, these differences are reflected in their narratives of slavery in

their literary works. The black people were taken to Britain as private servants, in contrast to the mass enslavement of Africans for work on the plantations by America. Britain took part in the transportation of African people and their enslavement in the colonies such as the Caribbean. However, the memory of slave history in Britain is ignored by the dominant culture which believes that after ending the trade, slavery is abolished and there is no perpetuation of slavery. Also, the distance between slave plantations and Britain affected the ignorance of the slave trade. Black people from former colonies in Africa migrated to Britain after the decolonization period in the hope of having a better future. Britain is constructed as a motherland to define the relationships between mothers and daughters, the mother fits the profile of the colonizer and the daughter is colonized. However, there is no mother-daughter relationship between the black people and the British. Black people have difficulty finding jobs and houses, they have to endure racial discrimination and attacks. Although the migrated black people didn't experience slavery in Britain, they felt they were "the other."

Even though there are differences in their history of slavery, Both African American and black British women's neo-slave narratives deal with motherhood as a way of transiting cultural memory. Both of the writers of *Beloved* and *The Long Song* deal with the history of slavery in a literary way and offer new points of view to give meaning to present events. They blend their African heritage, historical knowledge, and research with their imaginations to write their novels. They imagine the experiences that weren't captured in the original slave narratives or historical accounts. They write back to the original slave narratives. Their task as novelists is to reconstruct those terrible events. They produce a reconsideration of slavery and its legacy.

In neo-slave narratives, *Beloved* and *The Long Song*, slavery affects the lives of black people, particularly, the lives of black mothers. This article aims to uncover the rich meanings woven into the portrayal of black motherhood in the novels. Mothering is the only way to transfer cultural memory in black women's neo-slave narratives. This does not mean that the transfer of cultural memory through mothering always has positive outcomes.

Black women authors Toni Morrison and Andrea Levy, acknowledge their debt to the enslaved and ex-slave black women who came before them. In their neo-slave narratives, they unearth the ancestral past through women who are mothering. The mother protagonists in their novels have the strength to transfer cultural memory despite their physical and mental abuse. The female characters are burdened by their memories and they experience trauma, they search and achieve peace through the motherline and find a bond with cultural memory.

In their narratives, they forge a connection between the female characters' personal experiences and the collective memory of their community. Their narratives encapsulate the transformative power of self-expression, they transform the tales of pain into tales of empowerment, and the women characters in their novels refuse to be defeated by the challenges they encounter. Their stories function as a testament to the strength that is nurtured by previous generations and resides within themselves. They transmit the special knowledge for survival through generations with the help of the act of black mothering. Mothering is a social thing rather than biological in their writings. "Thus agency is central to an understanding of mothering as a social, rather than biological, construct" (Glenn, 1994, 3). they are using the motherhood narrative as an effective way for women to access the public sphere and highlight inequalities as a public issue while rejecting the role of passive and vulnerable objects.

Morrison and Levy, search the complex web of power dynamics, racism, and socio-economic exploitation that characterize neo-slavery. While unveiling uncomfortable truths about the colonial past and present, they also explore the agency, courage, and resilience of black people, especially black women. The strength of the black women cannot be measured in physical attributes alone, it is their cultural memory that radiates strength and grace. Morrison's statement, "[y]ou your best thing, Sethe. You are" (1987, 273) echoes black women's strength, resilience, wisdom, and beauty. "Wanna fly, you got to give up the shit that weighs you down" (Morrison, 2004,296). Her well-known quotation that means if you want to fly, you have to give up the things that weigh you down can be applied to the things that weigh a woman down, it alludes to black women's individual, historical, and collective burdens. Morrison and Levy's narrations are woven with liberation and self-discovery, the fear and silence of black women are transmuted into courage and activism, and they create a ripple effect that defines societal norms and challenges long-standing prejudices. The women characters reclaim their voices and agencies and they define their roles in society by establishing a bridge between past and present. They inspire the next generations.

The sentence In the last section of *The Beloved*, "This is not a story to pass on" (Morrison, 1987, 275) encapsulates the essence of slavery novels, it articulates both the difficulty of capturing and sharing the lost experience of enslaved human beings and the imperative need not to forget their existence. The original slave narratives are silent about many things and forget many others. Although the lightness in the treatment of the serious topic of Caribbean slavery is apparent in her narration, the novel has a serious agenda. Levy's novel *The Long Song* traces the protagonist's experiences as a slave. Her novel is a memoir that describes July's life during and after slavery. It is told by the voice of July, an old black woman who tells memoirs about her past as a house slave in the final years of the 19th century. She depicts the realities of the plantation life of slaves on the plantation. It portrays the historical past of the black people and the reality of plantation life which includes extreme physical hardship, brutal treatment, being raped, flogged, and hanged locked in a rat-infested prison. They produce the first-person speaker of the original texts by former slaves to probe more explicitly into the powers and limitations of self-representation through the written word. In their novels, they deconstruct the stereotypical black woman who was usually presented as helpless and wretched, while underlying motherly representations.

This article focuses on the role of the literary narrative in creating and transmitting cultural memory along with examining motherhood, both of the selected novels by African American and black British women writers are categorized as neo-slave narratives, they have differences in their approaches to motherhood, and memory. Black British women's neo-slave narrative revises black mothering in the same way that African American neo-slave narratives do. However, black British females overcome traumatic events individually and they develop a different aspect from the transmission of cultural memory. *Beloved* which is a tragic novel is based on a true story. The British counterpart resists forgetting and incorporates humor in the narration. *The Long Song* isn't about slavery in general, it is about the life of the protagonist, and July has her own view on telling her memoir. She was a slave in the past who writes down her story when he is old and free. With July's unreliable narration, she writes down her story not only as a memoir for her children but also as a counter-history, she gives voice to a history that was kept silent. She rewrites British history by filling its gaps from a different perspective. Thereby she creates a cultural memory for the next generations. Unlike the main character in African American neo-slave narratives, the main character of Levy refuses to be depicted as a victim. For her brutal, violent, and traumatic experiences, she doesn't blame any person or slavery.

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