

Feminist literature: An impossible? Working with Toni Morrison's *Paradise*

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Abstract

Identifying a literary work as literary is being increasingly problematized (Eagleton, 2012); and even more when it comes to classifying it as a feminist literary work. In this article I want to explore the relationship between literature and feminism in terms of political strategies. For those purposes, I approach the state of literature through an epistemological framework called "agential realism" (Barad, 2003; 2007). Afterwards, I will take a concrete example, Toni Morrison, and analyze one of her novel under this framework *Paradise*. I argue that feminist literature and reality are part of a continuum.

This continuum implies thinking of literature as a political self-transforming matter that produces certain disruptions within contemporary society in order to shift the repetitive patterns that perpetuate oppressions.

Keywords

Toni Morrison, *Paradise*, agential realism, Karen Barad, feminist literature

Introduction

Identifying the point of departure in a literary analysis is a complicate methodological issue (Eagleton, 2012). In a reading process, multiple factors take place such as the novel, the author, the reader, the contemporary socio-cultural context, and the context described in the novel, as well as the time in which it was written. Feminist theory started to problematize this area back in the nineties (Grosz, 1995) by pointing out the necessity to consider authors, readers, style, novels, and context as one unique entity and the same literary object instead of separate entities. Feminism has tended to promote two different strategies in order to find out what is feminist in Literature. During the preponderance of equality feminism there was a tendency to identify novels written by women and make them more visible (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979). However, during the prevalence of difference feminism, women tended to find a proper “écriture féminine” (Cixous, 1975). Nevertheless, finding the meaning of what should be considered a feminist literature has always been very paradoxical since the criteria to classify one piece of literary art as feminist were even conflicting to each other (Grosz, 1995): is it because of the sex of the author, the sex of the reader, the content of the novel, the style of the novel? Elisabeth Grosz (1995) presents four different lines of thought that identify a text as feminist: a. those defending the feminist nature of the text according to the sex of its author, b. the sex of its reader, c. different characteristics in its style, and d. the content of the novel. As Grosz (ibid) argues, this classification takes those elements as independent from each other and denies the explosive potential of a text. This issue became even more problematic during the nineties, when the category “woman” started to crumble (Butler, 1990).

Thus, defining a particular author or novel as feminist or non-feminist is particularly difficult and paradoxical in order to advance feminist politics and theory. Several voices in feminism have always voiced the need to build a Feminist Literary Canon that helps feminism to make women's work more visible, but also to consider certain novels as example of how a feminist politics would look like. Nevertheless, the contrary is also acceptable. That is, the denial of the established canon and the pursuit of its erasure. In creating a particular canon we are following the same structural patterns that left women aside when the dominant canon was exclusively the white and masculine. Creating a feminist literary canon implies internal debates because feminism has only *paradoxes to offer*¹.

In this paper, I use a particular example of what I consider a feminist writer “provisionally” (Lykke, 2011), Toni Morrison, and one novel that I consider crucial for contemporary feminist politics, *Paradise* to demonstrate that some authors perform a type of self-transforming Literature inherently political for feminism. Understanding Literature as self-transforming means to understand it as part of a continuum of reality and not as a representation of reality. In order to achieve this, I will produce a “close reading” (Lukic & Sánchez, 2011) of the novel focusing mainly on the political strategies that can be identified in the novel.

¹ In using this expression I am echoing Thiele (2014) who in turn, echoes Joan Scott.

Toni Morrison: fighting against social injustices

Toni Morrison is a female African-American writer that won the Nobel prize in 1993 and received the Medal Freedom Award of United States in 2012. She has written ten novels and her work is so influential in the academic arena as to produce changes in the contemporary Black Literary Cannon (Gallego, 1999; Ponzanensi, 2012). Her career started as an editor in Random House where she edited works by Angela Davis or Toni Cade Bambara. Her novels called my attention especially for two main reasons: her conceptualization of gender and the politics, that is the pursuit of social change, engaging in the entirety of her work (whether fictional or not). Firstly, women are the focus of her production although she is not explicitly interested in gender (Morrison, 1983, 2008), because her approach of gender is not traditional. Her notion of gender is relational, always raced and dynamic. Secondly, her work enables the performance of what I consider the self-transformation process in literature. This process engages with a dynamic concept of literature that is always political. Morrison's literature is not a representation of a static reality out there but a dynamic engagement in which readers and writer recreate the targeted novel at the very moment in which both are relating. Besides, this type of literature is *situated* (Haraway, 1991). This means that literature is always contextualized by the entanglement between the multiple geographical spaces (the one in the novel, the one that inspired the novel, the one in which it is read) and the multiple times affecting the same elements as in space. Consequently, I argue that Morrison's novels are self-transforming political agents engaging with oppression from a feminist perspective. In her words (Morrison, 2008: xiii):

I write [...] what I have recently begun to call village literature, fiction that is really for the village, for the tribe [...] I think long and carefully about what my novels ought to do. They should clarify the roles that have become obscured; they ought to identify those things in the past that are useful and those things that are not; and they ought to give nourishment.

I argue that using what Grosz has identified as the history of the relation between feminism and literature there can be seen how Toni Morrison's work implies a review of the criteria that have been used to define a writer as feminist or not (already criticized by Grosz). Grosz's classification of feminist literature indeed does not position Morrison as a feminist writer because, agreeing with Grosz, this classification is limited.

First, as a black female writer, she rejects any kind of racist labeling that separates her from other female writers:

A woman wrote a book on women writers, and she has an apology in the preface in which she explains why the book doesn't include any black women writers. She says she doesn't feel qualified to criticize their work. I think that's dishonest scholarship. [...] as though our [black characters] lives are so exotic that the differences are incomprehensible (Morrison, 1990: 121).

She claims the need to unify literary scholarship in order to be able to create alliances in contemporary society. Her novels are not exotic or incomprehensibly different and for this reason they should not be classified in one type of literature or another. Furthermore, Morrison's narrative is not "teleological" since she does not intend to forget (as the end of the novel entitled *Beloved* demonstrates), either to remember some kind of non-oppressive history in the black community (as the discussion around the African dream demonstrates in *Paradise*). This means that considering past and present as mutually influenced, she is enacting changes in the future. Thus, she is not rescuing from the past, neither is she denying it. Rather, she proposes an epistemology based on processes that consider time as material, in the sense that time embodies past, present and future (Morrison, 1992).

Second, she also denies to be defined as feminist according to the sex of the reader because her work is not centered on a specific reader. Her work focuses on the forces uniting author and reader. These forces create the textual "product" aforementioned by Grosz (1995):

My writing expects, demands participatory reading, and that I think is what literature is supposed to do. [...] The reader supplies the emotions. [...] My language has to have holes and spaces so the reader can come into it. He or she can feel something visceral, see something striking. Then we [you, the reader and I, the author] come together to make this book, to feel this experience. (Morrison, 1992: 25)

Third, the style of her writing is not always well received by some people in the general public of United States, due to the many different readings that it offers². Nevertheless, her style is part of the materiality of the text that crosses dualisms in order to potentiate its self-transforming nature. She produces self-representations of blackness which are contradictory, and because of that, they can receive multiple readings:

² Interview with Morrison (2012): "I want to feel what I feel even if it is not happiness" <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/apr/13/toni-morrison-home-son-love> Last visited: 8/8/2012. Even black contemporary writers, such as Richard Wright accused her of "washing the dirty clothes in public" (Gallego, 1999), and, because of that, of being contrary to the Black movement.

If we follow through on the self-reflexive nature of these encounters with Africanism, it falls clear: images of blackness can be evil *and* protective, rebellious *and* forgiving, fearful *and* desirable – all of the self-contradictory features of the self. (Morrison, 1992: 59)

Since Morrison does not fit in any of these definitions, how do we know that Morrison can help to move towards a feminist politics? Moving beyond author-reader, text-reality, or men-women dichotomies Morrison becomes feminist “provisionally” (Lykke, 2011: 147), “temporary and nonuniversal, embedded in the discursive-material flow of knowledge production, social change and cultural-natural re/generation.” Using again Grosz’s words (1995: 23): “a text is feminist or patriarchal only provisionally, only momentarily, only in some but not in all its possible readings, and in some but not in all its possible effects”. That is why feminist literary scholarship needs to be performed through “close readings” (Lukic and Sánchez, 2011), “provisional cuts” (Lykke, 2011) or “agential cuts” (Barad, 2007). Toni Morrison is a maximum exponent of what does it mean to look at literature from a political perspective, and very influential from a feminist perspective. Dividing her work into any of the above categories would not catch the complexity of her work and would only analyze it partially, or in a relative way. Nevertheless, when we understand all of these factors as always already relating, we observe how literature becomes an active agent in social transformation. It is through breaking representationalist practices, dichotomous opposites, and hierarchies of power where literature becomes an act of resistance from social injustices.

I would like to present these ideas through a close reading, which is a practice coming from the humanities that consists on following a text according to certain premises (Lukic & Sánchez, 2011) of the novel *Paradise*.

***Paradise* breaking oppositional thinking**

Paradise is Morrison’s sixth novel, written in 1997. It narrates the story of a black community (Ruby) who migrated to the country side where an “only-black” community was established. Families in Ruby are building what they consider a nationalistic project no one can really escape from: “He can’t fail at what he is doing. None of us can. We are making something.” (*Paradise*, 240). Ruby becomes the oppressive system by repeating the logic of the oppressor; that is, the total exclusion of those who are different. It is built upon eight families who abandoned Heaven to create what they thought would be the Paradise on earth: a town in which only black people could live and be born, so no racism would be present. In this endogamic structure, people living there could only marry among themselves in order to perpetuate the legacy, which they believed was sanctified. Their inhabitants were called to follow the message of their

ancestors, which was written in an oven in the middle of the town: "Beware the Furrow of His Brow". Thus, they were not only social justice-warriors but God-warriors.

Opposed to Ruby is the Convent, an abandoned church situated in the outskirts of Ruby where eight women live. These two places present differing societies based on specific gendered relationships that differ among each other dramatically. Women in the Convent live without societal rules congruent with conventional patriarchal systems. Ruby and the Convent could be considered what Barad (2003) denominates the "exteriority within". Karen Barad is the creator of the ethic-onto-epistemological strand called "agential realism". Through this framework, she locates specific acts of resistance in what she calls agential space (ibid). This agential space is performed during a relation and not before between matter, language, space and time; thus, above the researcher even though the researcher is also part of it. These agential spaces are the *outside/within* of a determined phenomenon or object of study. This means that while there is a specific object of study involved in a particular feminist research, there are multiple factors that remain beyond the scope of the researcher. Therefore, what is left outside momentarily (or provisionally) will form part of a future phenomenon and because of that the potentiality of agency is enacted in that "exteriority within", mutually dependent on the phenomenon studied. Political agency is situated precisely there.

That is to say, while the focus of the growing black nation resides on Ruby, the Convent becomes a space for contestation materially embedded by the affective relations among these women living in the Convent. Far from living the life of typical nuns (as the name of their location indicates), they embody the radical opposite of the traditional thinking that reigned in Ruby. Their way of dressing, what Ruby identifies as promiscuous women (some of them), their sense of community and generosity with regards to those people going there asking for help, and their lack of prejudices made of the Convent a dangerous place to Ruby's moral and values. As a consequence, a social intervention is needed in this Convent in order to stop the potential danger that these women represent for the legacy of Ruby. Dislocating time even in the novel (that is disrupting the chronological order of time by using literary strategies such as flashbacks), before the reader has all this information, the novel starts with the most curious announcement that one can find in the totality of Morrison's works: "They killed the white girl first." (*Paradise*, 1).

Acting politics: creating literary spaces of resistance

Black female alliances is the main theme in Morrison's work and how the racist discourse penetrates the social fabric (in)visibly while materially sustaining hierarchical powers which derive in new forms of slavery. Nevertheless, the point of departure in this novel particularly seems to suggest something totally different as she explains in the following paragraph (in Fraile, 2002: 109-10):

I wanted the readers to wonder about the race of those girls until those readers understood that their race didn't matter. I want to dissuade people from reading literature in that way ... Race is the least reliable information you can have about someone. It's real information, but it tells you next to nothing.

Literature, from an agential realist perspective, can be considered an exteriority within contemporary injustices where acts of resistance can be located. Thus, literature would not be a representation but rather a disruptive continuum within reality. Therefore, in creating this type of literature, Morrison is enabling a conceptual bridge that helps to understand that oppressive concepts (such as racism) are created and informed by the oppressor and have meaning only in "their imagination". As Morrison (1993) explains in the speech given on the celebration of the Nobel prize, "definitions belong to the definers not to the defined". Thus, she is implying that maintaining oppressive concepts is useful for the oppressor, but not for the oppressed. Therefore, naming oppression is nothing but reinforcing it. It seems, then, that Morrison is aiming at producing a different space to create acts of resistance that moves away from dichotomous oppositions. In fact, as it is explained in the quote above, the only thing that we know about the murder at the beginning of the novel is that "the white girl" was the first one, independently from the fact that in the entirety of the novel there is not any evidence of a white girl. This white girl may be inside the imagination of those who oppressed in the novel, and even those readers who think in oppositional terms, but she does not really exist as a character in that novel. Morrison is definitely implying that certain categories only exist in our mind but are powerful enough to provoke changes in the very conditions of life of people.

If Toni Morrison is not interested in defining oppression, how do we know her literature is politically self-transforming? By blurring the very conditions of life, the

identity of her characters, the pair black/white, Morrison is defining a different political matter in Literature, and different political strategies for contemporary society. One thing remains clear from that statement, the “girl” was killed; and that is something that permeates the novel as well as the fact that Ruby’s community was as racist and oppressive as the hegemonic power (the white male). In this paper, I argue that some acts of resistance to the oppressive order can be only performed by treating matter as a self-transforming active agent. This has two main implications: first, identities (albeit changeable) represent matter as always already a passive representation of an active reality. This is what Karen Barad identifies as a representationalist practice (Barad, 2003). Second, in the very act of politics, geographical spaces, chronological times, novels, authors and readers *intra-act* (as opposed to inter-act). Barad defines intra-action as the “[...] recognition of ontological inseparability, in contrast to the usual ‘interaction’, which relies on a metaphysics of individualism (in particular, the prior existence of separately determined entities)”. (Barad, 2007: 128). Thus, all of these elements come together to perform an “agential space”, where matter is self-transforming in order to promote social interventions in oppressive systems. In summary, thinking through “relatings”, that is relations in iterative movement, instead of “relations”.

For feminist theory, this implies a critical shift in the onto-epistemological referent. As previously stated, the object of feminist theory remains problematical or paradoxical at the least. Debates on the concept of gender are growing (Mikkola, 2011) and a consensus on the referent of feminist politics far from its resolution. Gender is highly criticized for being a discursive hierarchy of two sexes: men and women (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2013). Nevertheless, Karen Barad proposes yet a different alternative. In line with agential realism, she argues (Barad, 2007: 87), that gender itself can only be conceptualized as “in-the-making” Barad (2007: 87) in order to produce a critical thinking that includes social factors. Thus, if gender is always already in the making, it is always a process, a structural difference in which many different elements are self-transforming the very concept by altering its *situatedness*.

Literature as a self-transforming matter: enacting politics

Now, coming back to the novel that concerns the present paper, having performed a close reading, three different political strategies can be identified with a common departure point: identities. These are embodied in three different groups: the “old fathers,” the young people (led by the reverend) and the teacher Pat. The position adopted by the men belonging to the “8-families” is one heavily based on patriarchy and racism. As “fathers” of a new nation, they create their town and materialize their beliefs on an oven where it can be read “Beware the Furrow of His Brow”. Thus, by linking their nationalistic objective with religion, they assert themselves as “Chosen People within a Chosen Nation which, as such, had the covenantal obligation to be fair with them.” (Fraile, 2002: 98). This situation produces a strong endogamic environment in which, as referred earlier, the female position is fixed, while it is also invisible or materially uncountable: “Who were these women, like her [Pat's] mother, had only one name? Celeste, Olive, [...]. Who were these women with generalized last names? Brown, Smith, [...] Women whose identity rested on the men they married if marriage applied: a Morgan, a Flood [...]” (187) Therefore, in order to have a powerful one, a powerless one is required to maintain the established order that enhance their oppression previously. Thus, it is not erasing the hierarchy but substituting it.

Scholars locate the initiation of this isolation in different feelings such as shame, humiliation, vex and anger (Gallego, 2009; Schur, 2004). Therefore, it can be said that this specific type of identitarian politics becomes materially tangible through those feelings while at the same time intra-acting with the discourse of the Oven:

Oven. More than a rule. A conundrum: ‘Beware the Furrow of His Brow,’ in which the ‘You’ (understood), vocative sense, was not a command to the believers but a threat to those who had disallowed them. [...] So the teenagers Misner organized who wanted to change it to ‘Be the Furrow of His Brow’ were more insightful than they knew. (*Paradise*, 195)

The isolation reinforced symbolically by the Oven is materially affected by closing their “doors” to newspapers (ibid, 208), television, “liquor for lunch and dope for dinner” (ibid, 274), etc. As Fraile notes (2002: 103): “The result is an almost complete isolation from the cultural, political and economic events that affect the United States. [...]

however, the young people, supported by Reverend Misner, start claiming their connection to the outer world, thereby putting the dream at risk". This represents the second type of political strategy: young people are trying to break with the isolation in which all the inhabitants are immersed. This is represented through their wish to change the message of the oven: "Be the Furrow of His Brow." This isolation distances them from the outer world which is a recurrent theme in Morrison's novels.

Introducing this generational debate, Morrison aims at promoting a more inclusive politics since she is making her readers aware that time matters and the embodied experiences of the different members of the community are never equal because of their unique development. This generation is the third generation of those "Fathers" who created Ruby and they are the ones in charge to continue with their mission. Thus, a reflection about the kind of knowledge that we pass is enforced. In these regards, Fraile (2002: 107) comments the following:

By transforming the phrase from a warning [...] to a self-assertive statement of divine identification and disapproval of the present, the young people of Ruby express their desire to make themselves creative agents [...] towards freedom and redemption and become in turn mythic parental figures. (emphasis by the author).

Nevertheless, the effort that young people is making does not disrupt the puritan essence in which the community is being built; they want to replace hierarchical orders, to become "parental figures" as their predecessors were. They want to "Be the Furrow of His Brow" but that only situates themselves under the obedience of a supernatural force and elevates them as part of that supernatural force. Their bodies become situated as instruments in the serve of an asymmetrical power.

This political move is lead by Reverend Misner; who, at the same time, allies himself with the Black movement. Morrison reveals her own reticence regarding the movement (as she does in *Song of Solomon* and *Love*) in a heated discussion between Reverend Misner and Pat (Ruby's school teacher). There, Pat is doubting whether the reverend is teaching young people:

" [Misner] I just remembered that the young people in Bible class say 'they' too when talking about their parents'.

'[Pat] Bible class? More like a war class. Kind of military, from what I hear.'

'Militant, maybe. Not military.'

[...]

'Well, let me tell you. Unlike most of the folks here, we read newspapers and different kinds of books. We keep up. And yes, we discuss strategies of defense. Not aggression. Defense.'

'They know the difference?'" (207).

Pat doubts whether using strategies of defense is not the same as being aggressive. On the other hand, Reverend Misner accuses her of being "sad" for not believing in the idea of Africa that he has, as the perfect paradise on earth, to what she answers back:

"I'm really not interested, Richard. You want some foreign Negroes to identify with, why not South America? Or Germany, for that matter. They have some brown babies over there you could have a good time connecting with. Or is it just some kind of past with no slavery in it you're looking for?"

'[Misner] 'Why not? There was a whole lot of life before slavery.'" (ibid.)

The African dream was one of the pillars of the Black Panthers (a black nationalist and socialist party) but, the same as women did not count there, in Morrison's novels women seem to not be interested in this African dream and the African dream is not interested in them. For instance, Soane "had the same level of interests in Africans as they had in her: none." (104).

Even though Pat is directing us towards a different kind of politics, her step is not enough (as it happened with the young people). She embodies the third type of political strategy that can be found in the novel. The genealogical book that Pat is writing is allowing the reader to acknowledge the past that this community has and to understand better the present and their "mission". This is how we learn that Pat's mother was not completely black and because of this reason she has been always rejected by the community. However, Pat is creating this genealogical tree on the basis of a strong detachment through separating her own self (as a researcher) from her object of research: "Pat had wanted proof in documents where possible to match the stories, and where proof was not available she interpreted – freely but, she thought, insightfully because she alone had the required emotional distance." (*Paradise*, 188). Pat's drawing of the genealogical tree is an individual strategy in order to overcome her position as an outsider inside that community. Nevertheless, trying to distinguish between our own feelings (part of our personal embodiment) from our object of research is an "objective" practice that Haraway (1991) warned us against. Indeed, this individual pursuit ends up with a distance from her own daughter, prevents her from creating an alliance in her own personal space: "She [Pat] who loved children and

protected them not only from each other but from too stern parents lunged after her own daughter [...] Billie Delia left the next day [...]” (*Paradise*, 203). Through love, Pat is reproducing the same patterns that left her out. As Fraile (2002: 114) explains, “[t]o invert the poles of such Manichean thinking, as the men of Ruby do with their counter-discursive national narrative, does not change the result.” Racism converts love into hate (Schur, 2004: 297). It provokes the running of her daughter away to the Convent, which is the act of resistance presented by Morrison in this novel.

The Convent, as a geographical space situated simultaneously within and outside, Ruby, is the material space towards the women in Ruby escape from time to time. The women in the Convent are the perfect example of how a collective strategy based on affinities works and creates acts of resistance. Methodologically speaking, Morrison is presenting a space of resistance out of the dominant patriarchal logics that divide the whole population into oppressors and oppressed. The women in this Convent are the outsiders of the community of Ruby because they do not follow the same nationalistic mission Ruby pursues. Consequently, women are considered a threat that must be eliminated, as announced at the beginning of the novel. At the end, these women start to prepare themselves for their own murder, without even knowing that this murdering was happening soon. One day, Consolata, the oldest one in the Convent, prepares the women in order to fulfill their own self-becoming through a process of decolonization: “[it] begins by redefining the body and the mental constructs that give the body meaning.” (Schur, 2004: 292). Their collective strategy consists on externalizing pain and materially confronting it; instead of trying to ignore it (Reverend Misner), being aggressive (the Old Fathers), turning love into hate (Pat) or trying to transform it into something else through discourse (the young people). Before starting the transformation process, Consolata even gives them the freedom to leave the place, to go somewhere else, a rare act for the black community for whom “freedom” was an impossible. However, and even though they were frightened, none of them left the only place “they were free to leave” (*Paradise*, 262). This self-transformation process materialized in each individual followed the following structure:

In flattering light under Consolata's soft vision, they did as they were told. How should we lie? However you feel. They tried arms at the sides, outstretched above the head, crossed over breasts or stomach. Seneca lay on her stomach at first, then changed to her back, hands clasping her shoulders. Pallas lay on her side, knees drawn up. Gigi flung her legs and arms apart, while Mavis struck a floater's pose, arms angled, knees

pointing in. When each found the position she could tolerate on the cold, uncompromising floor, Consolata walked around her and painted the body's silhouette. Once the outlines were complete, each was instructed to remain there. Unspeaking. Naked in candlelight. (ibid).

All of them have a common goal, or a common understanding, which is lying on the floor. However, each one of them should be able to do it in the most comfortable position they can find; being the floor the *intra-action* (Barad, 2003), that is the force capturing the entanglement that relates them all reinforced by the material inscription of language: the silhouette of their bodies. As Schur explains (2004: 292): "Rather than internalize the pain or punish themselves with various forms of self-mutilation, the women can examine that pain and mark it on an image instead of on themselves." While these images are always part of themselves; they are also always part of this exteriority within. Therefore, their own bodies become a political threshold but they are not imprisoned in their own painful burdens.

This is the first step. The second step is reconciling their own selves within a gendered relation. Consolata continues:

My child body, hurt and soil, leaps into the arms of a woman who teach me my body is nothing my spirit everything. I agreed her until I met another. My flesh is so hungry for itself it ate him. [...] Not spirit. Bones. No different from the man. My bones on his the only true thing. So I wondering where is the spirit lost in this? It is true, like bones. [...] Never break them in two. Never put one over the other. Eve is Mary's mother. Mary is the daughter of Eve. (*Paradise*, 264).

Contrary to what the rest of the community is doing, Consolata is passing her own personal experience to the rest of the women. Even though this passage may seem a separation between the body and the "divine" or the "spirit", it is precisely showing that nothing is as clear-cut as it seems. Through her "Never break them in two", she is showing that ontological differences between men and women cannot be other than relations and these relations are performatively different, as the act of going to the Convent (women walk the path while men drive it), but they should "never put one over the other." On the other hand, a strong emphasis should be put on the relationships between women ("Eve is Mary's mother") since, as we have seen in the novel, in a nationalistic and identitarian community, women are left aside as dangerous.

On the other hand, the Convent is not entirely "free" of Ruby (as exteriority within), because a certain degree of dependence is created around these two communities. The path that connects both, Ruby and the Convent, is materially engaging these two

communities albeit by different gendering processes. The women in Ruby need the Convent to free themselves from time to time, whereas the men need the Convent in order to feel what it is a relationship with a woman when it is not based on their political mission. Similarly, at the end of the novel the women in the Convent need Ruby in order to produce the ultimate liberation: freedom from their own pain by confronting their past at the very moment when their conditions of life are blurred, that is the reader is left without really knowing if these women are dead or alive. The murdering of the women in the Convent remains a mystery since no one saw any of the women the following day, no one is sure if they are dead or they escaped. Nothing is left in the Convent the day after they were supposedly murdered. It is not the first time that Morrison blurs the dichotomy between being alive and being dead. The last chapter of the novel shows how the women in the Convent confront their painful past by talking with the people involved in their painful experience. By explaining this “after-life” (a ghostly experience by women who are dead and alive at the same time because they have been murdered but they are also talking with their family and significant others) Morrison is again blurring the conditions of live. The same as she is not interested in explaining to reader who is the “white girl”, now she is not interested in explaining the reader if they are alive or death because her characters do have agency. It is not only that aspect what creates a disruption in hierarchical orders.

As observed, the process of self-transformation carried out in the Convent was what really mattered. These women are entangled in a space of possibilities, they were part of an act of resistance, and they lived their lives according to their own rules. Thus, the reader gets to know how they made peace with their own past in order to avoid trying to ignore their past as an oppressed community. Contrary to what people of Ruby were trying to pursue, these women confronted their fears. These fears put them together on the first place and entangled their past, present and future in order to try to infer a change in the oppressive repetitions that Ruby (as a community) was (re)creating. The women in the Convent disrupt Ruby's order; they disrupt the norm of the Same.

Concluding reflections...

The multiplicity that Morrison's novels present is what holds the liberating factor, the political in Toni Morrison, in her novels and in language itself. Politically speaking, the impossibility to “identify with” is directly related to the impossibility to organize social movements depending on certain identities. Likewise, the social fabric cannot be

permeated through exclusions in which the purity of matter is enhanced. Nothing is crystal clear, not even the conditions of life. At the end of *Paradise*, we see how the women in the Convent have another opportunity to make peaces with their previous life in the Convent; when supposedly they have all been killed.

In order to analyze the complexity of this novel, I have used Karen Barad's "agential realism". Thinking through relations implies visualizing different processes in which subjectivities develop according to their own context. The logics of oppression are repetitive, so the only way out is through disruptive processes. Morrison's work is precisely this, a continuum between reality and a disruptive force that creates new strategies and methodologies by avoiding (re)creating gendered and racist oppressions.

As Spivak mentions (2003) reading and writing are not "allegories of knowing and doing" but the enactment of a "politics of collectivity." Morrison's novels are not presented anymore as a hierarchical relation between author, reader, context and novel but an asymmetrical distribution where acts of resistance are produced. Likewise, the object of study of a feminist literature becomes "feminist" only "provisionally" during the relations. Canons are not elaborated under the premises of the ivory tower of certain authors and hegemonic cultures but relations-in-the-making. Literature becomes an always already act of resistance able to infer changes in the way oppressive mechanisms are re-established contemporarily. In this sense, the novels are not representations with a clear ending but always in the making where the meaning is only constructed when intervening with multiple factors. This novel has proved to be a feminist political intervention even if Morrison claims herself to not be interested on gender (1983). Morrison's work is a dynamic agent intervening in what it is understood by gender and politics contemporarily.

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