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Tension and Paradox in the Construction of Collective Identity through Narrative in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*

Perspective and the Interplay of Identity Discourses

An analysis of the narrative representation of identity in Toni Morrison's novels implies a focus on the function of tension and paradox in the construction of identity discourses and on degrees of interdependence of various levels of self-definition – racial, community, social, gender, moral, sexual, etc. In the formation of subjectivity (that personal identity is based on), the raw material of experience is interwoven with cultural, racial, class, gender determinants and markers and the interaction of different dimensions and parameters of self-representation and self-positioning is rendered through multiple narratives and through inner and external discourses of characters.

A focus on both the poetics and the intrafictional level of Toni Morrison's works requires a consideration of the interplay between disintegration, dissemination (Derrida, ed. 2007) and forms of transformation, restructuring or 'narrative repair' (Nelson, 2001), since both tendencies are strongly reflected in her novels - the deconstruction of conventional literary devices or ideologically supported polarities, hierarchies, etc. and a centripetal force related to the need of identity-securement within the individual personality or on a collective level. In novels such as *Beloved*, *Love*, *Jazz*, *A Mercy* and *Paradise*, memory plays a significant part in the construction of narrative identity, as a first stage in the materialization of a pre-linguistic self or collective consciousness shaped in the narrative discourse. Memory is also a means of redefining identity from a point of view that grants different, deeper and even more objective understanding of experience, given the temporal distance it implies. When rendered in narrative discourse, memory offers the basic material in a process through which authorship over experience (and life) is assumed (Anderson, 2000). Perspective is thus fundamental in the process of identity

formation and for the continuity/discontinuity of identity discourses. On one hand, it can account for conflicting discourses due to psychological factors as well as for distortion, dislocation, split, polarization and impaired understanding (*Song of Solomon*, *Paradise*, *Tar Baby*, *Sula*, etc.). On the other hand, tension between different perspectives can prove to have catalytic value, engendering a redefinition of the self, a restoration of meaning while guaranteeing a form of continuity implicit to identity and, in the same time, narratively rendering various nuances of the ongoing change of identity discourses (as in *Beloved*, *Jazz* or *Love*).

Perspective is also an important factor on a synchronic level, leading to tension between discourses reflecting different codes that are defined racially, socially, ethically or in relation to gender parameters. Forms of negotiation between different points of view having personal, collective, political or ideological basis as well as paradox and conflict between different identity codes, representations and markers are narratively articulated in the rendering of power relations and in the representation of various acts of (self-)definition - especially in the novels *Beloved*, *Tar Baby*, *Paradise*, *Sula* and *Jazz*. On a collective level, perspective is a means of polarization, in a process of identity construction and preservation in which tension is an intensifying factor for self-representation. However, its value is usually not evolutionary, as it doesn't lead to reconciliation of differences or to a redefinition of values or (individual or collective) sense of self. In Toni Morrison's novels, hybridity is usually not rendered as a source of richness or complexity, but as a stimulus for tension between discourses that can hardly converge or permit juxtaposition on the level of personal identity, which can lead to fragmentariness, to split or to the imperative of a choice (*Tar Baby*, *Sula*, etc). On a cultural level the constant interaction and tension between competing perspectives, discourses and voices[1] is represented in what Justine Tally calls 'Toni Morrison's dialogic imagination' as a manifestation in of a plurality of experience that is necessary to combat authoritarian discourse, dominant social myth that privileges some human beings over the others (Tally, 2001 : 61).

The relations between different discourses involved in the 'negotiation' of identity as well as the forms and results of tension lead to structural patterns which shape Toni Morrison's works (polarity, fluidity, continuity, fragmentariness, hybridity, etc.). In the narrative rendering

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[1] A constant struggle reflective of ideology that can be correlated with Bakhtin's heteroglossia prevents the imposition of a unique unitary point of view.

of Gestalt tension can sometimes have evolutionary value, as identity is configured according to integration/repression and transformation/preservation principles. Tension is also reflected in the interpersonal dimension of communication as well as in the projection of (different aspects of) identity through language. When this dimension is focused on, obviously both identity and context are open to a certain degree of intentional manipulation by the self and also to interpersonal negotiation between self and other (Evans Davis in Bamberg, De Fina and Schriffin (ed.), 2007 : 73).

By means of the integration of experience into narrative order, identity is shaped through a series of untold, ingrained or repressed stories that thus become actual stories. Narrative order transforms 'potential or inchoate stories' (Ricoeur, 1984 : 74) into coherent and concordant stories. Experience itself and, as many theorists think, 'human reality' as well are inherently narrative, a quality being considered to be the very means of accessing a reality (Brockmeier and Carbaugh, 2001 : 14). Moreover, 'the discoursive order in which we weave the world of experiences emerges only as *modus operandi* of the narrative process itself' (Brockmeier : 50). Narrative order is thus not primarily a mode of representing, but a mode of constructing and constituting reality (Brockmeier : 50).

Thus the unexpressed, raw material of experience can be tangling or disconcerting, especially when it revolves around contradictory notions or externally imposed identity markers which in Toni Morrison's novels relate mainly to race, gender or social matters. At the same time, a form an entanglement is exerted by untold, unacknowledged stories (either personal, or 'borrowed' through family or larger collective channels) as well as by inherited 'blocks of information' or frames and representational patterns or possibilities that are embedded in historically, culturally or socially conditioned, shaped and even determined discourses. What this extra-empirical dimension of self-definition refers to is very well described by Holstein's notion of 'discourses-in-practice' (Holstein, 2000 : 92) which is correlated by its very author with Foucault's approach to systems of thought and to discourses – understood as 'broad configurations of meaningful action' (Holstein, 2000 : 93) that provide the possibilities for self-construction and self-representation. Often these discourses whose resources are neither empirical, nor interactional (corresponding to a self constructed through external or internal discoursive practice) entangle the individual, requiring manifestation, processing, understanding by means of narrative articulation. As far as the empirical aspect of

identity is concerned, narrative order contributes to the construction of meaning. Through representing the self in stories, structures of development, narrative and time merge into a 'retrospective teleology' (Brockemeier : 252), where a meaning that subsequently may appear inherent to personal experiences is shaped as the very *telos* of a life (or of a represented part of it).

Memory, Narrative and the Construction of Collective Identity in Toni Morrison's novel *Paradise*

The discussion about narrative identity and the analysis of the formation of collective identity, of the function of tension as well as of the interplay between different discourses, social and community codes and identity markers focus on the novel *Paradise*, one of the most significant of Toni Morrison's works in this respect. This novel is also relevant for the intrafictional rendering of tension: conflict is here a strongly polarizing factor, contributing to the reinforcement of a sense of community identity and ensuring the preservation of collective consciousness through the struggle against an external enemy whose negative image and threat are obviously exaggerated.

The analysis of the narrative construction of identity in the novel *Paradise* shall concentrate on intrafictional representations of collective consciousness and on the function of memory in the process of identity formation as well as on metatextual issues regarding narrative and identity. The novel *Paradise* depicts the construction of a community identity that is articulated through a series of mystified stories and sedimented collective memories which are embedded in the main third person narrative and usually presented as activated through the perceiving and remembering consciousness of different characters. Internal narrative discourses and personal recollections are interwoven with 'collectively objectified' narratives that have shaped the identity of the community and have become a narrative representation of its continuity and individuality. In a continuous narrative interplay between past and present, memory is a channel for collective imagery and beliefs, a medium for the crystallization of collective identity and ideology by means of inherited narratives reflected in external and inner discourses of individual characters.

The novel *Paradise* focuses on the construction of a collective identity with a strong Biblical subtext, rendering its historical evolution as well as its different struggles for survival and conflicts with other groups threatening its sense of self. The narrative articulation of the identity of the Haven community is done through the main third person narrative of the novel, but also by means of inner or externally directed and articulated narratives of different characters who create or reiterate stories through recollection (with a sense of collective *jouissance*) which are embedded in the discourse of the heterodiegetic narrator (Genette, 1986). As F. K. Stanzel says, 'remembering itself is a quasi-verbal process of silent narration by which the story receives an aesthetic form, primarily as a result of the selection and structuring inherent in recollection' (Stanzel, 84 : 215). Experience is made intelligible when narrated (De Fina, 2003) by means of memory, which permits the reaccessing of the raw, compact, unprocessed, pre-expressed, pre-thematic material (Kerby, 1991 : 7). Memory combines the visual and the verbal, the sensorial and the abstract, in a process of recovering a past reality that is related to the securement of a sense of self. Articulated through narrative, memory gives temporal order to past events that contain 'incipient stories' [2] and carves through the imagery, metaphors and myths that make up the continuum of experience, articulating and structuring them in whole coherent stories with meaning-making and identity-making functions.

As for the function of memory in the formation of collective identity, it is related to a shared horizon of signifying processes and collective self-definitions in which fact and myth mingle (Neumann, Nünning, Petterson, 2008 : 12). Thus, when collective identity is constructed by means of memory, as in the novel *Paradise*, there is a double narrativization that the sense of self of the community is based on (the old common stories within personal stories). At the same time, corresponding to the three-fold structure of the narrative articulation of past reality[3], there is a double transfiguration that can take the form of reinterpretation, redefinition, revision, retranslation, etc., processes that account for both a degree of fictionalization and a form of solidification of memory into structured language, narrowing down the multitude of facts and images that make up the past to a fixed series of stories. Through narratives and storytelling, a

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[2] Anthony Kerby talks about a quasi-narrative quality of experiences, 'incipient stories' that should be distinguished from the the conscious, explicit and organized narrative found in historical, biographical and fictional works.

[3] In Nicola King's terms : the event, the memory of the event, the narrative rendering of the memory of the event.

situated discoursive practice (De Fina, 2003 : 5), collective identity is constructed by means of socially shared meaning and ideology, in a continuous dialogue that, in its turn, creates meaning and behaviour (De Fina, 2003 : 5), drawing upon and also enriching a repertoire of resources valued by a community. This double influence can also be correlated to the notion of interweaving reference (Ricoeur, 1984 : 32) that implies a mutual influence between stories and extralinguistic reality.

When collective memories are activated through storytelling, they also engender the articulation of social representations and beliefs and a relation between the narrator and the group. In the novel *Paradise*, these are rendered through inner discourses of characters whose memories of their own past as well as of older stories about the community told in their families are triggered by the events in the narrative present. The initial scene of the act of justice performed by the representatives of the community sets off imagery of the past and the history of the ethnic group that also serves as a justification for the murderous act, as the preservation of collective identity required the destruction of chaotic, disruptive elements. The narrative structure reflects the processes of memory, since the novel is circular, starting with the decisive scene whose presentation will be completed in the end, then proceeds in a multitude of subplots and narrative shifts (that somewhat evoke fractals) which are also meant to explain and contextualize the focal event.

Memory is not only a way of consolidating collective identity by means of discourses that grant its continuity, but also a process that is subordinated to the present self and to its goals and purposes. Through memory, stories of the community past are to a significant extent retrospective constructs that have defining and legitimating function. Not only do they ensure a diachronic sense of identity, but also they are instruments of political legitimation of a 'collective self' versus a 'collective other' (Neumann, Nünning, Petterson, 2008 : 12). The female community leading an independent life in the Convent outside the control of the patriarchal Haven society is considered and represented as a threat to collective identity preservation and to the survival of the Haven community, hence the defensive act of justice of the male authorities. Especially in the beginning of the novel, during the assault of the Convent, the mental processes of some of the men are presented through reflectorization (Stanzel, 1984; Fludernik, 1996), which engenders both the description of the slaughter and the recollection of images and stories

rooted in the community's past. At the same time, they are a means of representation for what Alan Palmer calls 'intermental thought', namely shared, group or joint thinking (Palmer (ed.Meister), 2005 : 152).

The Convent has a symbolic function in the collective consciousness of the group whose narrative identity is represented in the novel *Paradise*. Described in the narrative present as a doomed place of evil and disorder that has to be abolished in order to keep the community pure, it is one of the major symbolic images impressed in the collective consciousness of the Haven people, allowing for contrasts between several periods and generations. Present and past are interwoven both on the Convent's walls, rooms and furniture and in the consciousness of the men who intrude this secluded enigmatic place to destroy its inhabitants and its powerful myths. An image of constancy despite variations, the Convent also echoes the historical continuity of the community of Haven and is in a certain degree part of its collective identity, but eventually it is imprinted in its collective memory as a place where immorality, debauchery, paganism and crimes ruled – an image that the closed society of Haven uses ideologically and politically.

As they walk through its rooms and corridors looking for evidence of the catastrophe and debauchery that supposedly filled the place and aiming at killing the women, the nine men notice architectural and lifestyle details in the Convent, the overall opulence as well as the mixture and overlapping of styles as in palimpsest technique (which also triggers memories of their own childhood, past and community history while they seem to be fighting archetypes rather than a real place with real people) : *'Then there is the grandeur. (…) A mansion where bisque and rose-tone marble floors segue into teak ones. Isinglass holds yesterday's light and patterns walls that were stripped and whitewashed fifty years ago. The ornate bathroom tubs, which sickened the nuns, were replaced with good plain spigots, but the princely tubs and sinks, which could not be inexpensively removed, remain coolly corrupt. (..) Now armed men search rooms where macramé baskets float near to Flemish candelabra; where Christ and His mother glow in niches trimmed in grapevines. (..) The chill intensifies as the men spread deeper into the mansion, taking their time, looking, listening, alert to the female malice that hides here ..'* (Morrison, 1999 : 3-4)

Thus memory is not necessarily associated here with retrospective rearrangement and awareness or with a meta-perspective entailed by 'afterwardness' (King, 2000), but it functions

as an instrument of preserving the continuity of collective identity. Justifying current acts through memories and images of their past (with their inevitably selective nature), the nine men who act as representatives of the Haven people can avoid discrepancies between past claims of heroism and justice and present murderous acts. Thus structured in their narrative discourses, events and acts take on the guise of necessity, through emplotment: contingency is diminished and disparate elements are drawn into concordant unity (Ricoeur, 1984).

At first a mansion, *'an embezzler's folly'*, the Convent has always been a grandiose and mysterious place whose coldness and opulence contrast in people's memories and imagery with the simplicity of their houses. Images of *'bisque and rose-tone marble floors'* and *'princely tubs and sinks'*, chipped-away nymphs whose marble hair *'still strangle grape and tease the fruit'* contrast in the consciousness of the men with memories of the simple places they grew up in: *'The kitchen is bigger than the house in which either man was born'*; *'his mother bathed him in a pot no bigger than that. A luxury in the sod house where she was born'*, etc. The sharp contrast between glimpses of memory and the luxuriant images in the narrative present strengthens the collective sense of self of the men who function as agents of justice and further catalyses several ideological reasons for the destructive urges and acts that followed a collective decision. The narrative techniques include flash-backs of the men's past that are made of personal memories as well as of inherited images preserved in the collective storied past which would correspond to a level of communication that Wolf Schmid calls 'quoted world' (Schmid, 2010 : 34). In narrative discourses that render the consciousness of the men, random details in the Convent are selected and used in support of their 'cause', as the text reflects parts of the inner discourses of several characters and their concrete thinking processes while they justify their murderous act historically and ideologically, in a symbolic act of destruction whose necessity is rooted in the collective identity.

The tension between discourses of the past and images of the present, the interplay between personal memories and stories that are part of the collective mythology, the sharp differences between the two social groups reflect a narrative texture that is based on polarity of contrasting forces. Imagery and narrative discourses gravitate towards the construction of a collective identity that defines itself in relation to 'the other', 'the different', 'the antagonist'. However, this relation does not take the complex form shaped by Ricoeur, as 'self' and 'other'

are treated as dichotomic notions that never blend or overlap in the consciousness of the Haven people. This community seems locked in its own perspective, as if there were no dynamic relation between 'self' and 'other', no sameness (Ricoeur, 1990), no form of identification, no shift in view and understanding. On the contrary, while selfhood does depend on otherness for a relation of contrast, for underlining differences, the other is represented in the novel *Paradise* as a product of collective projection, in a process similar to the one described by Toni Morrison herself as 'romancing the shadow' (Morrison, 1992), although based here on gender and social contrasts, not on racial difference. Thus in Ricoeur's terms, still 'one passes into the other' (Ricoeur, 1990 : 3), yet in a process in which unacknowledged traits of the self are attributed to another and fought against. One could say that *idem* has prominence over *ipse* in the novel *Paradise*, demanding a form of immutability and inflexibility for the sake of conserving a (fixed) image of the self, independent of a broader social and cultural context that could allow for openness, variation, transformation and a more mobile relation with the other. As a concrete manifestation of the same process taking over collective psychology, the massacre of the Convent women is an act of diverting violence against 'the enemy within' in a context of meeting a threat to security by finessing that to the community's integrity, deflecting it onto scapegoats (Taylor, 2004 : 182).

The name of the place that polarizes images of danger and threat for the people of Haven is connected to a second phase in the past of the community and to a second use of the grandiose building. Although conceived as a luxurious mansion, it was transformed into a convent. The conversion is represented minutely later in the novel in a description that is narratively connected to the perspective of one of the women who arrived and settled in the Convent. Through Gigi's eyes when she first gets inside the building accidentally, past and present are again related, but this time without any collective significance that imbued the detailed descriptions in the beginning of the novel. The third person narrative discourse that reflects the perspective of the newly come woman is nevertheless important for the construction of imagery associated with the Convent, as a counterpoint for the male socially and politically influenced perspective and discourses: *'Gigi [...] immediately recognized the conversion of the dining room into a schoolroom, the living room into a chapel; and the game room alteration to an office.'* (Morrison, 1999 : 72).

Although the focus and the perspective as well as the nature of the details noticed are different from those reflected in the men's point of view, signs of the interweaving of past and present (as well as of spirituality/religion and debauchery/corruption connotations) are abundant : *'the female-torso candleholders in the candelabra hanging from the hall ceiling'*, *'a Venus or two among several pieces of nude statuary beneath the cellar stairs'*, *'brass male genitalia that had been ripped from sink and tubs, packed away in a chest of sawdust as if, however repelled by the hardware's demands, the sisters valued nevertheless its metal'* (Morrison, 1999 : 72).

In a third temporal stage that overlaps the one correlated to the narrative present, the Convent become place of refuge and freedom where a group of women had gathered and it got imprinted in the collective imagery of the Haven people as a space of corruption and immorality. Challenging the traditional female images valued by the collective as well as the patriarchal authority, the small and isolated female group in the Convent got to identify in the collective consciousness of the Haven people with an archetypal enemy to be destroyed for the preservation of the 'pure race' descending from the Old Fathers, the freed men. However, this parallel female community does not have a crystallized collective sense of self, as its formation is correlated with randomness and accidental happening and affiliation. There are no clear and articulated values and beliefs to hold the group together and to build a social identity on. The narrative identity of the Convent society is constructed mainly through external points of view and through the obviously biased perspective of the Haven people that reflects the nature of identity as categorization (De Fina, 2003: 18), a process through which a group is represented through a fascicle of associated traits and labels reflecting shared conceptualizations of self and others. Although the women have narratively articulated individual stories of the lives they have led until reaching the Convent, there are no collective memories and stories that could be treated as community resources and thus lead to crystallization of a coherent Gestalt or identity. Throughout the novel, deliberate, organized and socially conscious narrative practice is somewhat hegemonic (Neumann, Nünning, Petterson, 2008 : 10), as the rendering of the stories about the mythicized past reflects the power relations between the two groups. The Convent women cannot empower themselves as a group, since they do not have common history or a collective sense of self. In its social component, identity points to a self-concept that derives from a sense of belonging to a group as well as from an emotional connection to it and from an adherence to its values (De Fina, 2003:15). On an intrafictional level, the collective identity

discourses and forces are not balanced, since the narrative focus seems to favour the Haven society, emphasizing the effects of the disturbances represented by the Convent women on their collective values. At the same time, in Ricoeur's terms, mainly the Haven people are represented in the narrative as agents, while the Convent women mostly as patients (Ricoeur, 1984), as only for the patriarchal community does the desire to act and create a change in the world have a deliberate and organized form (socially and politically)[4].

While the Convent is a metonymic representation of otherness for the patriarchal community, another symbol shapes the collective memory of the people of Haven almost as a polar opposite: the Oven (*'round as a head, deep as desire'*) : an *axis mundi*, albeit a movable one. Created and valued as a symbol of the community's strength and continuity, a place of gathering, feasting and storytelling, it has been disassembled and carried along when the people moved and throughout their entire history, just as the Haven people's stories have been disassembled, carried along and then reconstructed from fragments. As a centre holding the people together, a place of social rituals, political negotiations, ceremonies, gossip, cooking, celebration, etc., the Oven was well-known for a traffic that was greater than the one to the town's churches and stores, being always 'alive', as a *locus amoenus* even when other things around were endangered or impaired, as an image of the persistence and power of the community supported through repetition in different narrative contexts : *'Loving what Haven had been – the idea of it and its reach – they carried that devotion, gentling and nursing it from Batan to Guam (..). He touched the stove hood admiring its construction and power. It was the same length as the brick oven that once sat in the middle of his hometown. When they got back to the States, they took it apart, carrying the bricks, the heartstone and its iron plate (…). He remembers the ceremony they'd had when the Oven's iron lip was recemented into place and its worn letters polished for all to see. (..) As new fathers, who had fought the world, they could not (would not) be less than the Old Fathers who had outfoxed it; who had not let danger or natural evil keep them from cutting Haven out of mud and who knew enough to seal their triumph with that priority'.* (Morrison : 6).

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[4] The desire or need to act as a manifestation of social, cultural, political values can be correlated to Ana De Fina's notion of 'identity as agency' (De Finna, 2003).

The source of ambiguity and tensions that arise inside the community is related to the words engraved by the Old Fathers on the Oven : *'Be(ware) the Furrow of His Brow'*, leading to conflicting ideological directions referring to the relation between man and divinity; a part of the community interpreted the words as a suggestion that people should be agents of justice and protection on behalf of God, manifesting his wish, while another part claimed that the first word was initially 'beware' and the whole inscription represented a warning related to negative acts the people in the community could do – including abuse of power in the process of leading and conserving it. The inscription on the Oven is one of the written tokens of the collective identity constructed in the novel *Paradise*, intensified by the ambiguity and debate connected with it. At one point a new interpretation arises: 'Be(ware) the Furrow of Her Brow'', echoing the threat of the female community in the Convent which challenged the identity of the Haven people.

Collective identity is constructed in the intrafictional world of the novel *Paradise* through both centripetal internal narratives of various characters and through a series of external narratives whose interaction in the novel grants its coherence and continuity. The actual experiences[5] gathered in the memory of the Haven people are the background on which their narrative identity is articulated. Condensed memories of individual people that reflect stories in the community's past are embedded in the main third person narrative, creating the collective identity of a group both through representation of beliefs and values and though the presentation of historical facts almost turned into collective myths from the beginning of its 'foundation' as a group of freedmen looking for a place to settle and enduring various difficulties and misfortunes until the reaching of a state of security, stability and prosperity necessary for survival. Overall, the community depicted in *Paradise* reflects the dialectic tension that Denise Heinze considers to be a quality of most Toni Morrison's fictional communities - 'simultaneous expressions of structure and *communitas*, [they] provide unique insight into the conflicting value system of America. Entities devoid of direct contact with the white world, they are nevertheless irrefragably tied to it and exhibit both a unique system of beliefs and the values of a society that constitute the frame of their continuing social-historical narrative. While this does not always create an obstacle to growth and fulfilment, it does impose a context from which black Americans may never be free in their struggle for autonomy and recognition. The effects of such

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[5] The pre-expressed, pre-thematic, quasi-narrative material, as Anthony Paul Kerby calls it in his work *Narrative and the Self*, Indiana University Press, 1991, p. 8.

a condition include a dialectic tension, an arm wrestling of values, that can breed frustration and resentment, but that often creates a brilliant articulation of divergent social structures' (Heinze, 1993, 107-8)

The destructive act deemed by the male authorities as collectively justified is also regarded as a compensation for what the people have endured and as a means of making sure no threat gets strong enough again to destroy the collective order and power. It is thus rendered in the collective consciousness as an act of purging and as a precaution measure: '*From Haven, a dreamtown in Oklahoma Territory, to Haven, a ghosttown in Oklahoma State. Freedmen who stood tall in 1889 dropped to their knees in 1934 and were stomach-crawling by 1948. That is why they are here in this Convent. To make sure it never happens again. That nothing inside or out rots the one all-black town worth the pain'*. (Morrison : 5). The genesis of the community that defined itself as a pure race is represented in a Biblical intertext as the foundation of the edenic, utopian space which the people 'lose' and attempt to reconstruct throughout their history. All along and all through their symbolic journeys and new beginnings, they carried along the pieces of the Oven, as a concrete image of their continuity and force, as the axis and the glue that held the community together and moving in the same time. Together with it, they carried their collective memories and their stories (disassembling them and then reconfiguring them back from fragments as well), continuously consolidating their identity, as a result of discursive work, giving concrete form to a latent sense of self and to a constellation of facts and self-images. Through repetition, their collective stories have become a repertoire of self-representations, in spite of their inevitable distancing from the original historical facts through memory – a frequently narrated memory takes a form that first destroys the 'original memory' and then solidifies its image in a crystallized form (King, 2000 : 25).

The Haven people are described as a group that made its own justice and took care of its own safety in a town that had no jail, because it hadn't needed one, as the relations between people supposedly did not imply any 'prey-predator' interactions. Therefore, the Convent appears in the collective imagery as a threat of disorder and evil coming from outside and demanding immediate annihilation, in a process that reflects a form of repression and redirection (perhaps instead of sublimation) of the destructive urges into a fight against an external enemy whose image is obviously distorted and whose threat is exaggerated. Although the initial

inoffensive nature of the place is still present in the collective memory, the isolated neighbours are gradually represented as a threatening enemy who challenges and taints the social and ethical values of the Haven people. In the process of identity construction, the Haven community is driven by a sense of collective narcissism (Bauman, 2005 : 136), under whose influence personal identity is blurred as individual characters identify with the values and power of the collective.

The most important narrative techniques by means of which collective identity is constructed are related to memory and to stories inherited from the ancestors that are evoked in the consciousness of the characters. Two focal characters are the twins whose memories are emblematic for the representation of collective identity in the novel and its relation to personal identity. Stories told in their families and especially by their grandfather are imprinted in their own sense of self that is inseparable from their collective identity: *'The twins have powerful memories. Between them they remember the details of everything that ever happened – things they witnessed and things they have not. (..) And they have never forgotten the message or the specifics of any story, especially the controlling one told to them by their grandfather – the man who put the words in the Oven's black mouth. A story that explained why neither the founders of Haven nor their descendants could tolerate anybody but themselves.'* (Morrison : 13)

Collective memories antedate personal memories and influence them through family and community discourses that are ingrained in personal consciousness. They are stories that explain the autonomy and the 'purity' of the community (justified by its instinct of self-preservation) and the reasons why for them there was no way to relate to any kind of otherness except for polarity. This value system built from stories reflects a kind of moral order based on 'the idea that there is a Law of a people, which has governed this people since time out of mind and which, in a sense, defines it as a people' (Taylor, 2004 : 9). However, the moral order of the community in the novel *Paradise* seems to combine both types that Charles Taylor describes in *Modern Social Imaginaries*, namely one based on a law that both derives from and shapes a people's history and another 'organized around a notion of hierarchy in society that expresses and corresponds to a hierarchy in the cosmos' (Taylor : 9). The latter implies both gender differentiations and a dogma entailed by the belief that the community's leaders have not only the right, but also the obligation, the responsibility to make justice on the behalf of a divine will that makes itself known one way or another. The community represented in the novel *Paradise* permits no

disruptions of institutionalized hierarchy, no displacement of moral and social laws and no hybridity and, at the same time, it almost requires the neutralization of individuality and personal stories under the force of collective identity (a phenomenon that is obvious in the experience of one of the twins whose personal memories include a love story with one of the women in the Convent).

The significance of the story of the 158 freedmen travelling from Mississippi to Oklahoma looking for a place to settle is vital in the formation of collective consciousness at whose core there are the two principles that are generally fundamental in the formation of identity – sameness and selfhood (Ricoeur, 1990). The notion of selfhood is reflected in the sense of social responsibility and in the articulation of a set of collective values (ethic codes of existence and operation), whereas sameness is not only related to a sense of historical continuity, but also exaggerated in a form of exclusivism based on myths of uniqueness and purity. While looking for a place to settle in, the freedmen were rejected and unwelcome by other 'Negro towns already being built' whose discouragement and aggression they hadn't expected. The already formed communities had 'restrictions' that made the freedmen appear 'unacceptable', in spite of the similarities between them and the others, which led to the formation of a self-centred and closed community who could only 'identify' with itself and recognize its people as 'the same, not different'. While the sense of self is both diachronically and synchronically constructed (through sharp contrasts and conflicts with other group), the sense of inexorable difference is mostly historically justified through the rejection other black communities subjected them to when first looking for a place to settle, as any possible similarity is subsequently ignored for the sake of identity conservation. In an almost paradoxical way inherent in the notion of identity, as Zygmunt Bauman notices, sameness is constructed mainly through sharing differences (Bauman, 2005 : 30). Thus racial identity is totally deactivated by community identity, strengthened throughout the history of the Haven people and supported by social and political means. The initial revolt has turned into a 'cold-blooded obsession' about maintaining the purity and the power of the community, as the stories of the initial journey were reinforced through repetition and embedded in the collective memory.

The general representations of otherness in the collective consciousness of the Haven people is very relevant : whatever is 'Out there', outside the community, although somewhat

alluring, is regarded as dangerous and hostile, which is a lesson learnt in three generations and ingrained in the memory of the community, urging the people to perceive the Convent women as a threat and as an entropic element that has to be destroyed in order to preserve the autonomy and purity of the community lest it loses its diachronically constructed identity and disintegrates. The 'act of justice' that was deemed absolutely necessary reflects what Charles Taylor calls an ontic component of a moral order (which is more than just a set of norms) related to the identification of features of the world that make the norms realizable (Taylor, 2004 : 10). The apparent chaos and paganism of the Convent group allowed the Haven people to view their norms as 'realizable'.

The collective identity of the Haven group is thus constructed around the core-principle of 'the chosen people', the biblical subtext being obvious throughout the novel. Protection and guidance from a divine source are suggested throughout the narrative by means of references to 'signs' coming from an unknown and inexplicable source as well as emphasized in the common beliefs and acts of the community that derive from the idea of making justice on God's behalf. The Haven people consider themselves a 'pure race' ruled by a strong self-preservation instinct and by the need to fight any threat of decentralization of power which implicitly challenges their identity. The Convent women get to represent an element of chaos and danger in their collective consciousness rather through their total independence than through concrete antagonistic action, threatening the values of the Haven community in a passive and indirect way that is however strong enough to engender their association with the archetypal enemy. The identity of the community is also related to the memory of a claim of immortality and by the belief that it is guaranteed by maintaining the purity of the community. This belief is shattered by the imprinting of a common guilt in the collective memory, which equals a tragic flaw, a collective *hybris* that influenced the entire community identity constructed throughout the novel.

Collective identity is not only supported by common myths and values and rendered through personal memories with embedded old stories of different characters, but also through scriptural means: the history project that started from a collection of genealogic trees and family data about the fifteen families, which falls under the responsibility of a character called Patricia. Initially defined by the claim of historical objectivity, the project eventually included a variety of supplementary notes, historical facts thus interweaving with information altered and fictionalized

by the memory of the real events and people. Patricia's project is of great significance in the construction of the collective identity, as it subtly suggests a *mise en abyme* and it reflects the very principles that narrative identity is based on (in Ricoeur's terms, prefigured time becomes refigured time through narrative configuration). The book created by Patricia, but comprising information about all the families of the Haven people and constructed both through historical, traceable facts and through personal memories of the people is a narrative hybrid that articulates like a book within the book the collective identity of the Haven families. Although conceived as a mere gathering of facts and having no formal narrator, the book is a narrative instance in which the community of Haven is presented as both the subject and the object of both recollection and narration, although not very much of interpretation as well, a process naturally involved in the 'rewriting of the self' (Freeman, 1993) and it is like a text that writes itself though a multitude of stories and voices arising from the collective memory. However, unlike the stories, the chronicle is descriptive, not evaluative (De Fina, 2003 : 98); it has temporal organization, but it is a mere account of events and it does not imply a single evaluating and structuring point of view.

The character Patricia is also used as a reflector of numerous stories about the 'heroic' past of the community, as she 'collects' and personal memories of people in the fifteen families and narratively articulates them for her comments in the book she works on. Thus supplementary narratives that construct the identity of a community defined by beauty and isolation, qualities that eventually attract the suspicion and hostility of outsiders and, as in a vicious circle, strengthen the closed nature of the collective and its myths of uniqueness and exceptionality. The 'pure race' is symbolically named 8-R (eight rock, *'a deep deep level in the coal mines'*) and is made of *'blue black people, tall and graceful, whose clear, wide eyes gave no sign of what they really felt about those who weren't 8-rock like them'*. Their uniqueness and their exclusivism are also considered fated and the '8-rock' a distinctive feature that caused their misfortunes. However, when confronted with racial identity, their myth of community purity as well as social differences become blurred, as *'now they knew a new separation: light-skinned against black'*, not only *'free against slave'* and *'rich against poor'*. However, the construction of identity along the poles of difference and sameness is once again emphasized in the novel, echoing the major conflict between the Haven collective and the Convent women that structures the narrative.

The novel *Paradise* illustrates the construction of narrative identity as a 'self' that undergoes a process of temporalization. If one were to correlate the stories that make up the

collective identity of the Haven people with one of the modes of narration described by Charles Taylor, one would find a lot of elements indicative of an old mode, not of one characteristic to modern social imageries, resembling 'the old stories of state founding, drawing on the old images of larger-than-life figures' (Taylor, 2004 : 175), constantly relating to a „higher time'. Fighting both a threat of disintegration and a fear of impermanence and fluidity[6], the community aims at constructing and preserving its identity through crystallizing its history, collective memories and social meanings and values in stories.

The novel *Paradise* builds on a paradox in relation to the reliability of memory and stories. While on an intradiegetic level narratives are the very material through which collective consciousness is formed and community identity is preserved, on a metafictional level this idea is deconstructed in a more or less overt manner, as the notion of the construction of a narrative identity that subordinates memory and the collective system of values and beliefs brings forth the matter of the reliability of the narration and of the degree to which imagination and memory interweave, accounting for fictionalization, social, political or ideological distortion and mythicization. Although intrafictionally on a collective level memory and stories are rendered as a reliable source of identity formation, there is a subtext in which this very idea is subtly deconstructed throughout the novel by means of various comments and references (such as the twins' *'powerful memories of things they've witnessed and things they have not'*) and also in the end of the novel by means of the presentation of two female characters that seem to escape the fictional level. In a paragraph that could be read as an indirect metatextual comment, the reliability of memory is undermined, as its inevitable relation to imagination and the fictionalizing aspect of storytelling are hinted at : *'There is nothing to beat this solace which is what Piedade's song is about, although the words evoke memories neither one has ever had : of reaching age in the company of the other; of speech shared and divided bread smoking from the fire; the unambivalent bliss of going home to be at home – the ease of coming back to love begun.'* (Morrison, 1999 : 318)

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[6] A notion highly emphasized by Zygmunt Bauman in *Liquid Life* as a defining feature of modern society, a world that values speed, change, adaptability and where narrating life is telling the story of successive endings and new beginnings.

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