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The Flow of (Re)Memory in African American and Nubian Egyptian Literature: Morrison, Oddoul, and Mukhtar

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A Thesis Submitted by

Bushra Hashem

to the

Department of English and Comparative Literature

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Under the supervision of

Dr. Ferial Ghazoul

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In Fond Memory

of my late grandmother, Hanem Shallaly, who always remembered the palm trees in her house by the Nile in Old Nubia; of the Nubian woman on Heissa Island who, when she found me crying and overwhelmed by the experience of my first visit to a Nubian village, comforted me and said in the little Arabic she knew, "الدم بيحن" (blood nostalgia).

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This thesis is dedicated to the African peoples, whose heritage and memory are hopefully revived in my work.

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to define the term *rememory*, which Toni Morrison coins in her novel *Beloved*, and explore its interplay with water imagery in the novel and in two Nubian short stories, namely Haggag Oddoul's "The River People" and Yahya Mukhtar's "The Nile Bride." The three narratives have core common features: they centralize water bodies as key sites of events, they depend heavily on the retelling of history and mythology, and they are told predominantly from the perspective of women. How do the writers weave *rememory*, history, and mythology to produce these narratives? Are they attempting to rewrite history through storytelling? How does communal trauma affect the collective memory of indigenous Africans as well as those in diaspora? Why are women the main storytellers in the three narratives? And finally, why is there an overwhelming presence of water in these African myths and stories? What can be uncovered by delving through the symbolism of water and water bodies? The thesis utilizes theories of memory studies, gender, and psychology to decipher the work of *rememory* in the three narratives and give a fresh account of indigenous and diasporic African cultural expression.

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Chapter I: The Flow of Rememory

Africa my Africa
. . . . . .
Africa of whom my grandmother sings
On the banks of the distant river
I have never known you
But your blood flows in my veins

David Diop, "Africa" (Moore and Bierre 58)

"All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was."

Toni Morrison ("The Site of Memory" 17)

Memory is a limitless reserve that connects individuals and communities with their past, influences their present, and shapes their future. At the root of all stories, myths, songs, art, and other forms of creative expression, is the muse of memory and its powerful inspiration. There is a mysterious mnemonic force which drives storytellers to extract and communicate stories that they may have never actually lived but can somehow remember. Storytelling is not only a craft of novel creativity, but it also stems from personal, generational, and collective memory. Stories are abundant in myths, religious narratives, history, heritage, and inherited traditions and reflect the culturally specific elements of an author's background and reality. Such stories are especially important for societies that were oppressed, displaced, or have gone through collective suffering and trauma. In such cases, storytelling is a means for reclaiming a painful past, lamenting an unjust present, and expressing shared wounds.

Memory is, additionally, an integral part of writing history, or rather, history functions as the preservation of memory. However, as history itself shows, the angle through which these memories are told can significantly alter their value. The victorious, invader, or colonizer aims to belittle or even erase the history of their subject, while the colonized fight to preserve their undermined memories. Memory is therefore a more fluid and authentic form of preservation, as it involves societies' own representation of themselves and is connected to

how their presence is manifested historically. The historian Pierre Nora points this out in his article "Between History and Memory: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," attesting that "memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present . . . History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it" (8-9). Even though Nora presents history as the enemy of memory, I argue that storytelling is a medium that uses memory to document untold history, especially for the communities that must reclaim how history represents them and come to terms with their present existence, among which are the forcibly displaced Africans who were enslaved and brought to the New World and indigenous Nubians who had to relinquish their villages that were flooded by new dams.

The African diaspora is collectively traumatized by the aftermath of slavery, colonialism, and displacement. Many authors from this diaspora use stories to reconcile their communal memory and rewrite their history. Toni Morrison (1931-2019) is a prime example of this; she has revolutionized African American literature by retelling the atrocities of slavery which African Americans suffered over the course of centuries throughout in her novels. She "fostered new understandings of the black self, bringing it to the fore and reimagining its representation" (Seward and Tally 155). In this thesis, I examine Morrison's masterpiece, *Beloved* (1987), while specifically focusing on the notion of *rememory* which she coined. In *Beloved*, the Ohio river is a site of key events, such as Sethe's escape from the horrors of slavery at Sweet Home plantation, the birth of her daughter Denver, and the emergence of the spirit of her dead daughter, Beloved, from one of its streams. Morrison's representation of the Ohio River stems from the historical and cultural significance this river has for African American history, both as a path for slavery and a gateway for escape, as it separates the abolitionist north and the antebellum south. Moreover, Morrison moves beyond the history of African Americans and uses her narrative to delve into West African

mythology and the abundance of water figurations encompassing it, in which the Yoruba female deities, Oshun and Yemaja, also emerge out of water. Thus, bodies of water play a vital role in Morrison's novel, as they combine their powerful forces to create pathways for memory, remembrance, mourning, healing, and forgiveness.

I build on this creative literary theory to investigate the work of memory and rememory in selected Nubian Egyptian literature, where authors also express the collective trauma Nubian people went through due to their forced displacement and migration in the twentieth century. Specifically, I work on the short stories "The River People," or "*al-Ruju' ila Nas al-Nahr*" which appeared in *Nights of Musk: Stories from Old Nubia* or *Layali al-misk al-'atiqah* (1990) by Haggag Oddoul (1944-) and was translated by Anthony Calderbank in 2008 and "The Nile Bride" or "*'Arus al-Nil*" (1973) which appeared in a collection with the same title by Yahya Mukhtar (1936-).

Oddoul's "The River People" narrates the story of a young woman, Asha Ashry, which translates to 'the beautiful girl' in Nubian language, who is awaiting her lover's return. Her fiancé had travelled north to Alexandria from their Nubian village in the south of Egypt in search of employment. Many Nubian villages were starting to drown due to the Aswan High Dam which was built on their lands over the course of the twentieth century. This affected the livelihood and economy of the area, leading most men to look for any job they can find up north. Loyally and patiently waiting for his return, Asha Ashry witnesses the surrounding villages drown under the Nile River, and soon enough, the water starts to reach her hometown as well. When her fiancé is finally expected to return, Asha Ashry receives the unfortunate news that the boat he is on has drowned, and that he was one of the victims. In despair, Asha Ashry adorns herself in her wedding jewelry and intentionally strides into the depths of the Nile, aiming to reunite with the spirit of her beloved among 'the river people.'

"The River People" evokes in its title the myth of the river people, or *amon nutto* in Nubian, which originates from Nubian mythology and refers to the good spirits that are believed to inhabit the bottom of the Nile River. The stories of *amon nutto* are abundant in Nubian oral literature, from bedtime children's stories to mythological cosmogony. Oddoul chooses to retell this story at a critical moment; the High Dam project is in progress and Nubians are being evicted from their homeland. Is Oddoul trying to evoke a certain rememory in this specific space and time? What role does water play in this narrative? Is Asha Ashry's suicide an attempt to reunite with her lover, or with the land she was soon to leave behind? My analysis of this story will consider the answer to these questions while tracing the narrative's origin in Nubian mythology and uncovering its specific cultural elements.

In Yahya Mukhtar's "The Nile Bride," Farida is a young Nubian girl who goes on a boat ride with her father, Abdelrahman, across the southern streams of the river. The narrative delves into the depth of Farida's memory and tells of a painful trauma she experienced at the hands of the village women. She vividly remembers the day she was pinned down by women in her Nubian village and was forcibly aborted. As her father paddles their way through the dark river, he also remembers how he was kidnapped from his native land and taken away from his mother. He was sold into slavery and finally reached the hands of a Nubian Sheikh who freed him, but the stigma of his past as an enslaved man continued to cast him at the lowest level of the village's social hierarchy. The journey they are on, however, is not a pleasant father-daughter stroll down the precious river. We learn that Farida has been defiled and impregnated by the *'omda's* (the mayor) son and that Abdelrahman's family is now exiled from the village because of the shameful scandal. Abdelrahman is torn between drowning his daughter in the waters of the river to 'cleanse his honor' and the memories he has of her as the little girl he coddled and protected. Before he can make up his

mind, the river is enraged, and Farida makes a rapid decision to jump into the depths of the water. Frantically calling his daughter's name, Abdelrahman swims in search for Farida, but the Nile has already claimed her as his bride.

Mukhtar, despite being a male writer narrating a female experience, is able to sensitively comment on topics that are rarely spoken about in the Nubian community. His narrative delves into the psyches of both Farida and her father and weaves them into the climactic memories in their lives. Abdelrahman is an *osheh*, an enslaved man, who comes to terms with his distant past through this narrative. As their memories overlap, the story mirrors a myth from Ancient Nubian and Egyptian culture, the everlasting Nile Bride. There is a complex interplay in this brief narrative. Mukhtar deploys a fluid style and narrates the story as a stream of consciousness which blends the father-daughter memories. Rememory, the feminine body and its oppression, water, and myth, are all major motifs in this short story that I will uncover in my analysis. Because this short story was written in Arabic and no translations of it have been published till this point, I quote directly from the Arabic and supplement it with my translation below each quotation.

The narratives by these authors–Morrison, Oddoul, and Mukhtar–have common thematic features: they draw on indigenous mythology, focus on the perspective and experience of women, and centralize water bodies as symbols of African diasporic cultures and histories. How do the writers weave rememory and mythology to produce these narratives? Are they attempting to rewrite history through storytelling? How does communal trauma affect the collective memory of indigenous Africans as well as those in diaspora? Why are women the main storytellers in the three narratives? And finally, why is there an overwhelming presence of water in these African myths and stories? What can be uncovered by delving through the symbolism of water and water bodies? There is an intriguing literary interplay that intertwines mythology, history, culture, and gender in the selected texts through

the metaphorical and ecological imagery of water. In this thesis, I aim to explore and analyze this interplay, with the intention of finding an African (diasporic) commonality that transcends geographical borders while commenting on the specificity of African American versus Nubian Egyptian experiences.

Toni Morrison's novels are undoubtedly among the most studied and analyzed in contemporary scholarship. Morrison also wrote extensively on literary criticism and theory, whether about her own novels or other African American writers. The notion of *rememory*, which she introduces in *Beloved* is a widely discussed term that has been defined and interpreted in a variety of ways. I argue that rememory does not only refer to suppressed, painful, or traumatic memories. Rememory, as Morrison creates it, is engrained in space and time. The main character, Sethe, explains:

> I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. (Morrison, *Beloved* 43)

Rememory is thus tightly connected to the spatio-temporal aspect of memory; in fact, rememory is the preservation of memory in a certain space, no matter how much time passes by it. When a rememory is triggered, it takes one through memories from the past in the original space where they had happened, and it is unaffected by the linear passing of time. These are memories that may have been repressed and forgotten yet stored in the crevices of one's brain, memories that may have taken place at a site that no longer exists, yet their essence remains.

This thesis centralizes the notion of *rememory* as its main theoretical framework of preservation for communities that have lost the space to practice their cultures and manifest

their identities, whether this space is physical or metaphorical. While memory and rememory are closely connected terms, they differ in several ways. A fundamental difference between the two notions is that memory, on the one hand, is a faculty of the human mind. It operates on conscious and subconscious levels, and is manifested as personal or collective memories. Additionally, memory is susceptible to forgetfulness and fades away with the passing of time and the withering of human brain functions. Rememory, on the other hand, is an imaginary, creative concept. As Morrison asserts, it is engrained in the physical space of the original event, rather than in the limited capacity of the brain. Moreover, it is not affected by the chronological passing of time, but rather, it operates in a different temporal plane, one that is cyclical, repeating, and returning. This timeframe has no marked beginning or end, and therefore seamlessly weaves the past with the present. Finally, while memory, as Nora illustrated, is in conflict with history because of the suspicion between the two notions, the recurring, repetitive quality of rememory creates an imaginative space where history can be retold through storytelling. In the case of *Beloved*, where the notion of rememory is first established, the character of Beloved reappears in several forms to represent different pivotal moments in history. I read her as a reincarnation of Sethe's murdered baby girl, a rememory of Margaret Garner's dead children who were dismissed and dehumanized by American history, a firsthand witness of the horrors of the Middle Passage, and a revival of indigenous African mythology through her mirroring of the Yoruba goddesses Oshun and Yemaja. By revisiting, reinterpreting, and retelling these marking points, Morrison illustrates that an alternative narrative exists, and must be subversively told. Thus, rememory is also an act of resistance against the oppression of history and its representation of people of color in general, and Africans in particular.

The manifestation of Yoruba mythology in *Beloved* has been previously explored by researchers such as Tiffany Hinton in her dissertation titled *Water, Perfect Memory*. She

explains how water figurations pave the way to forge the connection between African American experiences and the legacy of African heritage in Toni Morrison's novels. She emphasizes "the power with which water and watery fluids are invested in the cultural traditions of West and Central Africa" (8). My thesis expands this connection beyond to the Nubian region in East Africa. Water and fluid figurations have an extremely powerful presence in Nubian culture. The Nile River, which was once the source of life for Nubians, as their villages lay on its banks and their livelihood depended on it, became a burial site for these villages after the establishment of the High Dam and Lake Nasser in 1960. The Nile is also the birthplace of Nubian mythology and oral literature. In the selected Nubian stories, water and fluids carry significant connotations that revive the drowned Nubian history and heritage. I argue that Oddoul and Mukhtar are also writers of rememory. Following the footsteps of the Nubian literary pioneer, Muhammad Khalil Qasim, author of the first Nubian epic novel, *al-Shamandurah* or The Buoy (1968), the two writers aim to revive the drowned Nubian ecological landscape and its cultural heritage through storytelling. Additionally, the mythological origin of their stories has been documented in writing by the Nubian heritage expert Ibrahim Sha'rawi, whose work on cultural mythology is integral to analyzing these stories. The three narratives are abundant with references to ancient Nubian mythology and culturally specific elements while simultaneously expressing the post-displacement Nubian reality.

Alongside rememory, this thesis foregrounds the theme of water bodies in analyzing the selected narratives. These works do not only use water imagery as linguistic and metaphorical tools, but their plots also take place in and around rivers: the Ohio River and the Nile River. Rivers, thus, are part of the landscape as well as key metaphors in the fiction. Water is also the metaphorical medium through which these rememories travel and take shape. By water, I do not only mean the liquid molecules formed of two atoms of hydrogen

joined by one atom of oxygen; I mean the fluid force that exists within our perishable bodies as well as mother nature, including the force that carries nourishment and sensations, the force that can give life or cause destruction. Hinton remarks that "Morrison is said to evoke 'the presence of that terrifying [rememory] journey through . . . amniotic fluids, blue water, spring water, milk, blood, hot rain, sea, oceans, rivers, and streams'" (6-7). Water is a medium in which the flow of memory abounds. In the novel, it triggers the most important events as well as the rememories of different characters. Through water, Sethe rebirths Beloved, and Beloved journeys through her mother's womb to the belly of the slave ship, only to reemerge out of the stream of the Ohio River.

In her essay, "The Site of Memory," Morrison connects water bodies with the act of remembering and reimagining:

> Imagination is bound up with memory. You know, they straightened out the Mississippi River in places, to make room for houses and livable acreage. Occasionally the river floods these places. 'Floods' is the word they use, but in fact it is not flooding; it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be. All water has perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was. (17)

I find that Oddoul and Mukhtar also use water and fluids in constructing their narratives and that these water figurations carry immense literary, cultural, and historical signification which I aim to uncover through my research. The *flooding* of the Nile that drowned their lands is not merely flooding, rather, as Morrison puts it, "it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be." Oddoul and Mukhtar utilize the *perfect memory* of the water to recreate and remember the cultural features of Old Nubia and erase the gap between the past and the present, preserving the image of the old villages in eternal waters.

Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes wrote the poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" when "the sight of the Mississippi River inspired him 'to think about other rivers in

our past—the Congo, and the Niger, and the Nile in Africa—and the thought came to me: 'I've known rivers'" (Dworkin 633). In this poem, Hughes uses the imagery of rivers to merge several sites of African American memory:

> I've known rivers:
> I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the
> flow of human blood in human veins.
>
> My soul has grown deep like the rivers.
>
> I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
> I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
> I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
> I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
> went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy
> bosom turn all golden in the sunset.
>
> I've known rivers:
> Ancient, dusky rivers.
>
> My soul has grown deep like the rivers. (36)

Hughes' poem represents the epitome of transcending geographical borders and finding a common collective memory. "As it traverses major waterways on three continents" (Dworkin 631), Hughes creates a moment of rememory, in which he remembers being at the banks of each river, witnessing moments from the dawn of civilization to its "golden sunset." The waters of Euphrates, the Congo, the Nile, and the Mississippi intertwine with one another, creating a long stream of rememory that Hughes visits and knows by heart. This vividly fluid imagery of flowing waters reinforces the powerful effects that water retains. Not only does water have the forceful power to flood, create, and destroy, but its memory, "ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins," has the ability to store and revive pivotal events. Through recounting such events in his poem, Hughes crystallizes the imagery of water as the perfect medium of rememory, and the authors being studied in this thesis, namely Morrison, Oddoul, and Mukhtar, further intensify this imagery in their narratives by setting them inside and around Hughes' "ancient, dusky rivers."

This thesis is also informed by multiple theories concerned with memory studies, mythology, philosophy, and gender. It utilizes critical concepts devised by Walter Benjamin concerning space, time, and narrative as well as their implications on history and memory. Lindroos states that "Benjamin's claim describes the movement between chronologically conceived history and the cairo-logically characterized present, [creating opportunities] between totality and singularity, and he actualises their collision in the space of emerging historical or cultural ruptures" (13), and I find this to be truly relevant to Morrison's concept of rememory and its manifestation in Nubian literature. I supplement this analysis with the work of Gilles Deleuze on time and memory in the novel and the terminology he creates, such as the "pure events" and the "involuntary memory," as well as the historical angle of memory Pierre Nora provides in the aforementioned article.

I also find the work of the Egyptologist and cultural theorist Jan Assmann particularly useful in relating rememory to the cultural identity of diasporic peoples who struggle to preserve and recreate their history, especially in the case of Egyptian Nubians, and how Haggag Oddoul represents their memory in "The River People." In the book *Cultural Memory Studies*, Jan Assmann illustrates that "memory is the faculty that enables us to form an awareness of self-hood (identity), both on the personal and on the collective level" ("Communicative" 109). Assmann makes a clear distinction between two notions, namely the more general "collective memory," which can include any events experienced by a group of people and stored in their memories collectively, and the more specific term "cultural memory," which is closely connected to specific events, symbols, and places that contain cultural signification for a group of people. He defines cultural memory as "a form of collective memory, in the sense that it is shared by a number of people and that it conveys to these people a collective, that is, cultural, identity" ("Communicative" [*Cultural Memory*] 110). Moreover, "it is exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic formats that . . .

may be transferred . . . from one generation to another" ("Communicative" [*Cultural Memory*] 110-11). Memory, therefore, exists only in constant interaction not only with other human memories but also with "outward symbols" ("Communicative" [*Cultural Memory*] 111). While "things do not 'have' a memory of their own, . . . they may remind us, may trigger our memory, because they carry memories which we have invested into them, things such as dishes, feasts, rites, images, stories and other texts, landscapes, and other '*lieux de mémoire*'" ("Communicative" [*Cultural Memory*] 111). Therefore, Nubians have been able to preserve their collective cultural memory and evolve its meanings and significations through time because they were in direct proximity with the symbols and the spaces that carry these memories, with the ultimate *lieux de mémoire* being the Nile River.

In developing the theory of cultural memory, Jan Assmann also addresses cases in which "change in constellations and [cultural] frames brings about forgetting; the durability of memories depends on the durability of social bonds and 'frames'" ("Communicative" [*Cultural Memories*] 18). He clarifies that these cultural frames include the "landscape or townscape in which people grew up, the texts they learned, the feasts they celebrated, the churches or synagogues they frequented, the music they listened to, and especially the stories they were told and by and in which they live" ("Communicative" [*Cultural Memories*] 18). In the case of the Nubian cultural memory, the physical space and landscape are now lost, and the "change in constellations" and the collective universe centralizing the Nile, which Nubian people inhabited, start a process of gradual forgetting of the shared cultural memory they had valued for centuries. The three elements which Jan Assmann has emphasized must go hand in hand for the survival of the cultural memory of a community, namely the landscape, cultural frames, and the social bonds, are completely distorted for Nubians since the start of the twentieth century. As the historical cultural space and the communal bonds are gone, the only way that the cultural frames can survive is through the remains of intangible collective

memory found in the stories and myths about the old land, and the symbols that allude to the culture, traditions, and rituals that Nubians practiced. Preserving these elements that construe the Nubian identity is challenging, but Nubian artists both in the *tahgir* villages and the diaspora have taken this duty upon themselves. Their productions weave elements of cultural memory and nostalgia that lament the lost past while trying to make sense of the present and envisioning a blurry future.

The theory of cultural memory involves a thorough discussion of the notion of time. Jan Assmann establishes his view of cultural time frames by referencing a study on "oral societies in Africa [and] . . . the form in which they represent the past" ("Communicative" [*Cultural Memory*] 112). He observes that in African historiographical practices, which dismiss the conventional notions of time, the "historical consciousness . . . operates in oral societies on only two levels: the time of origins and the recent past" ("Communicative" [*Cultural Memory*] 112). While "the recent past" is stored in the short-term collective communicative memory, which lasts for no more than a hundred years, "the time of origins," or "the remote past," informs the cultural memory and supplements it with "a profusion of information dealing with traditions about the origin of the world and the early history of the tribe" ("Communicative" [*Cultural Memory*] 112). Additionally, cultural memory plays a major role in constituting one's identity, and this "identity, in its turn, is related to time. A human self is a 'diachronic identity,' built 'of the stuff of time.' . . . This synthesis of time and identity is effectuated by memory" ("Communicative" [*Cultural Memory*] 109). By relating cultural memory with the remote past, Jan Assmann finds that "in the cultural memory, the past is not preserved as such but is cast in symbols as they are represented in oral myths or in writings, performed in feasts, and as they are continually illuminating a changing present" ("Communicative" [*Cultural Memory*] 113).

Time, in this context, is rid of its linear and progressive qualities. Conventional historiography aims to shed light on the past to record and document it or to highlight certain moments of victory and establish a discourse of memory "in which past events are selected, reconstructed, maintained, modified, and endowed with political meaning" (Said 185). Oral histories of indigenous societies involve a "flow of time [which] is brought into a pattern that combines the irreversible and the reversible, the passing time and the returning time. Human life and social institutions are thereby rescued from just passing away, decaying, and vanishing; they are integrated into the natural cycles of regeneration" (J. Assmann, "Communicative" [*Cultural Memories*] 24). This cyclical return of time, which involves cultural rituals and traditions, preserves the valuable symbols of these oral societies' beliefs from disappearing into the chronological passing of conventional time that aims to leave tradition and ritual behind. Their history and traditions are not written on paper, they are practiced through rituals that are periodically repeated and remembered. Through the elaborate and vivid descriptions Oddoul embeds in his short story, the cultural memory of Nubian people is reimagined and retold and an opportunity for rememory is created.

Furthermore, the concept of a *flow* of rememory is directly related to the term "stream of consciousness," and how this affects the way humans remember and relate to the past. The theory of the "stream of consciousness" is especially relevant to my analysis of Mukhtar's "The Nile Bride," because the entirety of the short story is told through the innermost thoughts and memories of its two protagonists. The psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud explains in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams* that there are two "trains of thought" which simultaneously exist in the human mind, one on the surface (conscious) level, and the other covered up (subconscious). From there, a person's "recollection" of these thoughts resembles the way a "bowl of a fountain collects the water that flows into it. From this point the dream-thoughts flow along the following channels" (Freud 332). The pioneering philosopher and

psychologist William James developed these ideas into the notion of the "stream of consciousness" which he coined in his monumental work *The Principles of Psychology*. He stated:

> Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as 'chain' or 'train' do not describe it fitly as it presents itself in the first instance. It is nothing jointed; it flows. A 'river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. *In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life.* (239, emphasis in the original)

In his book, James dedicates a chapter to memory, where he explains how the stream of consciousness is an act that weaves together the thoughts and emotions currently being experienced by an individual with various memories from the past. He explores this curious phenomenon by asking an important question: why do some memories come to the surface and interact with the current stream of consciousness? He explains that these specific memories recall primary, pivotal moments in an individual's life. Because of its importance, such an "object of primary memory is not thus brought back; it never was lost; its date was never cut off in consciousness from that of the immediately present moment" (James 646). Such memories are integral to a person's identity formation, and hence, in the stream of consciousness, "memory requires more than mere dating of a fact in the past. It must be dated in *my* past" (James 651, emphasis in the original). The thoughts that flow through the stream of consciousness are, therefore, weaved with critical memories of the past, memories that are so fundamental to one's being and existence that they feel like they are not located in a distanced past, but are constantly recurring in the here and now.

Henri Bergson, the French philosopher who was James' contemporary and was majorly influenced by his work, thoroughly studied and expanded on the concept of the stream of consciousness by relating it to memory, space, and time. Both scholars rejected the

idea that logical and analytical methods can adequately explain the workings of the human mind, and instead they focused on understanding real human thoughts, emotions, and experiences, while admitting that the complexity of their eternal overflowing exceeds any fixed explanations. Bergson found that the stream of consciousness is directly linked to the space and time in which they originally took place, as well as the dimensions of the memories and recollections streaming in the individual's consciousness. In his book *Time and Free Will*, Bergson explained the new concept of *durée*, "which stands for psychological time or inner duration, and which does not lend itself to any logical, quantitative or intellectual analysis" (Sánchez-Vizcaíno). For Bergson, physical space is not necessarily important to this psychological formulation of events through the stream of consciousness. In one's stream of consciousness and innermost thoughts, "space would be reduced to an abstraction, or, speaking more correctly, an extract; it would express the common element possessed by certain sensations called representative" (Bergson, *Time* 92). Physical space stops functioning in a logical way, and instead becomes a symbolic representation that triggers and enhances the stream of consciousness. Bergson admits that "we are compelled to borrow from space the images by which we describe what the reflective consciousness feels," connecting once again the notion of space with the powerful force of memory (*Time* 91). The intermingling and co-dependent relationship between memory, time, and space in the stream of consciousness mirror Morrison's description of 'rememory' in *Beloved*. Because of this narrow proximity, the stream of consciousness can be a suitable medium for casting and expressing traumatic rememories. Such rememories that transcend logical time and space are the essence of what Mukhtar creates in "The Nile Bride."

Last but not least, my perspective on gender in the selected texts is shaped by the writings of the feminist thinker and writer Hélène Cixous. Her seminal essay, "The Laugh of the Medusa," where she introduces the theory of *écriture féminine* (women's writing) is an

insightful lens through which I look at how the female body and its fluids appear in writing by and about racial minority women. In *Beloved*, Morrison weaves together fluids of the feminine biological body (blood, tears, amniotic fluid, breast milk, or "white ink") and sets it against ecological bodies of water (rivers, streams, oceans, rain) found in the critical geographical locations of the Ohio River and the Atlantic Ocean, and beyond through the Niger River. Because Oddoul and Mukhtar are both male writers who are crafting narratives that centralize a female experience, I find it critical to deploy a gendered lens in analyzing their short stories. In perhaps the only published study that comparatively looks at these two short stories, Ghada Abdel Hafeez observes that the

> Nile Bride myth, in particular, along with the male writers' telling and retelling of it . . . is embedded with gendered and patriarchal images and points of view. These images and points of view mold women's realities, fix their values, and limit their vision of individual possibilities. (171)

Abdel Hafeez seems to confuse the writers, who aim to represent and voice a female experience in an indigenous society that has been underrepresented, with the patriarchal male characters these very writers expose in their short stories. This might be stemming from the exclusively Western feminist perspective she uses without looking at any contextual or cultural information available on Nubian women, or Nubian people for that matter. She admits, "I use the critical tools of feminist theorists like Simon de Beauvoir, Adrienne Rich, Helene Cixous, Sharon Friedman, Alicia Ostriker, Mary Daly, and Kate Millett" (167). While she aims at "challenging the internalized patriarchal manifestations in Mukhtar and Oddoul's 'retellings' that have imprisoned women in their norms and symbolic moral legalities" (167), she seems to not recognize the dangers of merely *applying* western feminist theory to Third World contexts, and especially to indigenous communities. Such theories do not necessarily take into account women of color or

minorities, and possibly participate in the very *imprisoning* that Abdel Hafeez vehemently stands against by deploying a *white savior* perspective. Hence, to ground the feminist perspective from which I view these stories in the cultural context of the Nubian Muslim community, I refer to scholars who specialize in these areas, such as Deniz Kandiyoti and Fatima Mernissi. I also rely on Anne M. Jennings' anthropological survey of Nubian women to enhance the contextual understanding of how gender relations operate specifically in Nubia. Rather than just *applying* either Western or local feminist perspectives, I utilize both as I find fit, and attempt to interpret the way in which womanhood and gender relations are represented in *Beloved*, "The River People," and "The Nile Bride."

This thesis is comprised of three body chapters alongside this introductory chapter, which maps out the conceptual and theoretical frameworks utilized. Chapter II discuses Morrison's *Beloved*, Chapter III looks at Haggag Oddoul's "The River People," and Chapter IV analyzes Yahya Mukhtar's "The Nile Bride." Finally, the conclusion reflects on the interplay of the three narratives in relation to the motifs of water, fluidity, and rememory. Throughout the thesis, I read *Beloved* as a literary as well as a theoretical text that defines the term 'rememory' in the context of diasporic African writing by and for women. I also trace the mythological roots in *Beloved* and the selected Nubian texts, and explore how they revive the roots of their diasporic cultures.

Chapter II: Rememory, Mythology, and *Beloved*

In the depths of the ocean
there is a palace
where Oxum [Oshun] lives
[there] lives the mermaid
[there] lives Iemnaja [Yemanja]
[there] also live her children
who have nowhere else to stay

Traditional Yoruba Song (Murphy and Sanford 213)

My mother had two faces
and a broken pot
where she hid out a perfect daughter
who was not me
I am the sun and moon and forever hungry
for her eyes.

Audre Lorde, "From the House of Yemanjá"

In 1619, the first slave ship arrived in Jamestown in the Colony of Virginia in the United States or, as it was called then, the *New World*. Upon arrival, the Dutch shipmaster sold twenty-some Africans to the white settlers in Virginia, and they would be the first Africans to step on American soil in recorded history. These men and women would also be the first among millions who would cross over the Atlantic Ocean on board slave ships and delivered as cargo to endure the institution of chattel slavery (Craven 416-17). A series of laws would be established to manage this flux of enslaved humans that both shaped and were shaped by the newly founded country and its internal and external conflicts. The enslaved men and women, whether still on-board ships through the Middle Passage or already sold into slavery in America revolted against their subhuman treatment in numerous ways. On slave ships, native Africans repeatedly mutinied and took control of their captors. More often, enslaved people on board of slave ships liberated themselves by the most accessible means, which was either refusing to eat or drink until they died or throwing themselves into the waters of the Atlantic Ocean. In both cases, they subversively denied their captors the profits gained from selling them, and the remains of their black bodies still lie at the deep bottom of the Atlantic Ocean.

The Middle Passage, which is the founding stage of the slave trade and African American existence, has been understudied and underrepresented in American history for centuries. This shameful chapter of world history has been increasingly difficult to address or speak about, but the laborious work of African Americans to grant themselves freedom as full civil citizens of the United States and the recent turn in American culture to start studying and recognizing their pain and endurance revived the study of the transatlantic slave trade and the Middle Passage. In his book, *The Slave Ship: A Human History*, Marcus Rediker thoroughly studies historical accounts of enslaved Africans and their few surviving stories while centralizing their role as active agents and humans in contrast with the way they were viewed by their captors and enslavers, as subhuman chattel and profitable property. He stresses the inaccuracy of estimated numbers of enslaved Africans, whether survivors or martyrs, due to the lack of reliable historical accounts at that time:

> Over the almost four hundred years of the slave trade, from the late fifteenth to the late nineteenth century, 12.4 million souls were loaded onto slave ships and carried through a "Middle Passage" across the Atlantic to hundreds of delivery points stretched over thousands of miles . . . Yet even these extraordinary numbers do not convey the magnitude of the drama . . . the lack of records makes it impossible to know their precise numbers. (5)

The slave trade would finally be abolished in 1808, almost two hundred years after the arrival of the first Africans in America, and after decades of abolitionist work by freed ex-slaves in Northern states aided by Christian Quakers and the Committee for the Abolition of Slavery during the eighteenth century. However, great perseverance and resistance from African Americans continued their quest for freedom and emancipation. During the antebellum period, between 1800 and 1860, the Southern states which mostly consisted of plantations and an agrarian society remained firmly grounded in the institution of slavery.

The American South was a horrific place for a black person to exist, where the cruelty of enslavers reached its climax and the beating, flogging, torturing, branding, and physical and sexual abuse of enslaved men and women were regularly practiced. During this time, free African Americans in the North along with white abolitionists and sympathizers established what became known as the 'Underground Railroad,' which consisted of secret routes and hiding places that paved the way for those enslaved in the South to escape to liberty (*The African*). Among the 'conductors' who facilitated the freedom of enslaved blacks was the renowned Harriet Tubman, who was named the "Moses of Her People" because of her keenness on freeing as many enslaved people as she could. Another conductor, William Still, recorded his liberation trips on the Railroad in his book *The Underground Railroad: A Record of Facts*, where he stated that "these facts must never be lost sight of. The race must not forget the rock from whence they were hewn, nor the pit from whence they were digged" (5). Toni Morrison is vehement in her efforts to not allow the plight of her people to be forgotten, which is evident in *Beloved* as well as in her other fiction and nonfiction writings.

When the Fugitive Slave Act was passed by the American Congress in 1850, black leaders and abolitionists in the North were outraged that their efforts to free themselves and their fellow African Americans could go in vain. The law allowed any enslaver who could hunt down and find runaways to claim them and return them into slavery. The horrible experience of captured enslaved people and those fearing for their lives inspired the white abolitionist Harriet Beecher Stowe to write the foundational novel *Uncle's Tom Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly*, which was considered to be one of the factors that triggered the Civil War (1861-1865). This law and other conflicts between the Northern and Southern states triggered the American Civil War of 1861, which ended with the victory of the North and forced Lincoln to sign the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, granting all those enslaved in Southern states freedom. Between 1865 and 1870, three amendments would be made to the

Constitution of the United States that granted previously enslaved blacks and other people of color American citizenship, the right to be protected by law, and the right to vote. The following period, known as the Reconstruction period, also carried great challenges for African Americans due to the vile hostility of southerners against this newfound equality and freedom (*The African*). Nonetheless, African Americans persevered and continued to fight for their rights against the oppressive, white supremacist systems in power. "Opening in 1873 and situating itself within the epistemic and political history" (Gordon 139), Morrison sets the narrative of *Beloved* at a fundamental moment of African American history and depicts the laborious process of escaping the slavery in the South to the free North, as well as the journey previously enslaved men and women must embark on to define themselves as African Americans during and after the Civil War.

By the turn of the new century, new black voices emerged to stand against the accumulation of injustices they had endured. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was established in 1909 by a group of African American civil rights activists including the prolific thinker and writer W. E. B. Du Bois and renowned journalist Ida B. Wells. The Association worked vehemently to redeem the rights of African Americans and stand against the anti-black violence that spread in the nation. The Association revived black activism, and more African American figures emerged who built schools and colleges, advocated for black rights in political arenas, and excelled in sports and arts. The Harlem Renaissance which spanned the 1920s and 1930s was a cultural movement that centered in Harlem, New York, through which numerous black artists, writers, poets, singers, and dancers emerged to rectify the wrongs done to their culture and revive their activism. This era is foundational to African American history and culture and would shape black artistic expression for long decades to come. Among the notable figures of the Harlem Renaissance was the brilliant poet Langston Hughes, the 'laureate' of black poetry, and the

renowned novelist Zora Neale Hurston, author of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The artists of Harlem and their various creative works stood against racial stereotyping of black people in the American imaginary which had thus far viewed them as incapable of producing refined arts. It also established a collective creative identity that was uniquely their own and built the foundation of black artistic expression that survives to this day. The black arts movement is also believed to have ushered the next decades' revolutionary acts of the civil rights movement (Hutchinson).

The 1950s and 1960s witnessed a revolutionary upsurge in African American activism that led to profound social change in the United States. In 1954, the supreme court case 'Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka' would finally rule the segregation of schools as unconstitutional and acknowledge the detrimental effects it had on black children. A year later, in 1955, Rosa Parks, a member of the NAACP, would refuse to give up her seat for a white passenger on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Rosa's action led to her arrest, which would inspire other black activists such as Martin Luther King Jr. to start acts of civil disobedience such as boycotts, strikes, and demonstrations. The tension caused by the resistance of African Americans and the refusal of southerners to accept them as full citizens culminated in the massive march in Washington D. C. The march was attended by more than a quarter million activists of different races, and it was there at the Lincoln memorial that Martin Luther King Jr. gave his iconic "I have a Dream" speech in 1963. After the long resistance of African Americans, "the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act in 1965 helped bring about the demise of the entangling web of legislation that bound blacks to second class citizenship . . . Together these acts reinstated and reinvigorated the African Americans' right to full citizenship" (*The African*). It is from this foundation of powerful African American solidarity movements that Toni Morrison's writing emerged when she published her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, in 1970.

Despite the fact that African Americans are now full, equal citizens, the legacy of their painful history haunts their existence. Writers and artists of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries depict these adversities creatively in their works. Black Americans still suffer from racism, prejudice, gentrification, economic limitations, and police brutality until today. To further reflect on the historical roots of these adversities, more scholars continue to focus on the Middle Passage to understand the complex intersectionality that African Americans and the descendants of slavery experienced worldwide. "Intersectionality" is a term which African American lawyer and activist Kimberlé Crenshaw coined to note the layered system of oppression that includes racial, political, gendered, historical, and geographical factors. In her own words, she aimed "to focus attention on the vexed dynamics of difference and the solidarities of sameness in the context of antidiscrimination and social movement politics . . . including the road intersection, the matrix, and the interlocked vision of oppression" (Cho et al. 787). This intersectionality of suffering at the hands of oppressive powers relegated Africans to the bottom of global and regional hierarchies finds its roots in the transatlantic slave trade, and specifically in the Middle Passage.

Among the scholars who looked at the Middle Passage as a defining moment in black culture and history is Paul Gilroy, whose groundbreaking book *The Black Atlantic* drew back the attention of theorists, historians, and writers to the imagery of the slave ship and cultural and historical legacy of the transatlantic slave trade. Gilroy affirms:

> I have settled on the image of ships in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean as a central organising symbol for this enterprise and as my starting point. The image of the ship—a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion—is especially important for historical and theoretical reasons . . . immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the

> circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artefacts. (4)

The return to the very beginning of the slave trade and the image of the slave ship crossing the waters of the Atlantic Ocean is now a direction many black creative artists are moving towards to foreground the legacy of their ancestors' experience and prevent it from being forgotten or erased. In these works, water is considered an ultimate medium for remembering. For example, Ta-Nehisi Coates' novel *The Water Dancer* reimagines American history from the perspective of a slave ship survivor. Similarly, Hannah-Jones and Watson's *1916 Project: Born on the Water* retells the history of how African Americans came to be through rooting black history in the Middle Passage and depicting it as the birthplace of African American history. Additionally, M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!* recounts the real incident of 150 enslaved Africans being thrown from the board of a Dutch slave ship in a book-length poem. In this book, Philip does not only deploy the archival legal texts that document this incident, but she also shapes her poetic narrative through the imagery and movement of water. She invents a fluid language that enables her to tell "a story that cannot be told" (190). This return to water, the original medium that transported Africans from their mother land to the various places where they will be enslaved and dehumanized, allows black and African American writers to reclaim their origins and remember their roots, their history, and their ancestors.

Beloved is a narrative that centralizes water figurations and is fueled by memory. The memory of Margaret Garner, to whom Morrison pays tribute in the foreword to the novel, is central to the story. Garner was an enslaved woman who escaped captivity along with her family. She crossed the waters of the Ohio River to ensure the freedom of her children, but her enslaver followed her and tried to capture her. In fear of being returned to the plantation under the Fugitive Slave Act, she killed her daughter and tried to kill more of her children. What was more absurd about this story is the calmness and assurance with which Garner was

said to have carried herself after this incident. This shocking story was spread with "great excitement" according to the 1856 issue of the *Anti-Slavery Bulge* abolitionist newspaper in which this report originally appeared (Salamon). Garner's horrific life in captivity and fierce love for her children which led her to commit infanticide were reduced to a few lines in this news announcement. She is viewed as subhuman, an object of amazement and perhaps some sympathy, but not as a fully fleshed out person with a complex story to tell. Morrison explicitly points out that she aimed to "relate her story to contemporary issues . . . [and] represent the unapologetic acceptance of shame and terror; assume the consequences of choosing infanticide; claiming her own freedom" (*Beloved* xi). In her book entitled *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon reveals that Garner did not give up on her plan even as she was being sent back to the plantation in Kentucky: "On the way, the ship carrying the Garners was involved in an accident and Margaret Garner fell (or jumped) into the water with her child in her arms. Margaret Garner was rescued, but the child drowned . . . nothing was ever heard of Margaret Garner again" (158). Garner's child joined many others who met their fate while crossing the Ohio River, whether escaping slavery or being forced back into it. The water of the river, like that of the Atlantic Ocean, became the resting place of thousands of unnamed and forgotten African Americans, a legacy that Morrison foregrounds in *Beloved* through weaving water elements into the narrative.

In *Beloved*, Morrison recreates and complicates the untold story of Margaret Garner. Sethe is an enslaved woman who was brought on a plantation ironically called Sweet Home when she was thirteen. The Garners, who owned the plantation, had an unusual philosophy in dealing with their slaves. They were "allowed, encouraged to correct [Mr.] Garner, even defy him. To invent ways of doing things; to see what was needed and attack it without permission" (147). Sethe accompanied Mrs. Garner and attended to her as a replacement for Baby Suggs, an elderly enslaved woman and the mother of Halle. Halle is one of the enslaved

men owned by the Garners, and he buys his own mother out of slavery by working every Sunday–his only day off–for five years, which is a special favor granted to him by Mr. Garner. Sethe chooses Halle to be her husband and together they have three children, Howard, Buglar, and a baby girl. When Mr. Garner dies, the ailing Mrs. Garner calls on her brother-in-law, Schoolteacher, and his children to take over the plantation. For the first time, the Sweet Home men are beaten, degraded, and denied food and drink as punishment. Sethe also experiences one of the most traumatic events of her life; after she gives birth to her first baby girl, Schoolteacher watches as his boys pin her down, and sexually assault her by suckling on her nursing breasts and *stealing* her milk.

Sethe has a profoundly deep connection with her motherhood. Her love for her children is fierce and powerful. When her breastmilk is stolen, her protective motherly instinct is triggered, and she is driven to take her children to a safe place. Halle and the now pregnant Sethe decide to run away when they learn about an Underground Railroad agent who guides slaves in Kentucky. On the Sunday they agreed to escape on with the agent, Sethe waits for Halle to meet her by the Ohio River, but he never shows up. Determined to save her children, Sethe sends them with the agent to Baby Sugg's house in Cincinnati and waits behind for Halle, but he still never shows up. Sethe then sets out to Cincinnati by herself, and meets an escaping white woman, Amy Denver, who helps her deliver the baby she is carrying on a boat in the Ohio River. Finally, Sethe arrives to house 124, Bluestone Road, and is reunited with her children and mother-in-law. For 28 days, the family lives in peace and harmony with the community of freed and escaped slaves. Baby Suggs throws a festive celebration where everyone eats, dances, and socializes; but on that same day, Sethe recognizes Schoolteacher's hat on a wagon approaching the house. She gathers her children and rushes to the woodshed, and when Schoolteacher enters to capture her, he finds her

covered in blood, with a slaughtered baby girl in her arm, another by her feet, and two little boys hidden under the wood shavings.

Sethe is sent to jail on account of murdering her baby and escaping from her enslaver. When she is released and comes back home, she finds that the community has shunned Baby Suggs and 124, Bluestone Road; the crime she committed became a famous scandal. Later on, Baby Suggs passes away and the two boys, Buglar and Howard run away from the house at age thirteen because they start feeling the malevolent, eerie presence of a baby ghost in the house; mirrors start to shatter and baby footprints are found where they shouldn't be. Sethe and her daughter, Denver, now have no company but each other. One day, however, an old friend shows up at their door. Paul D was one of the Sweet Home men who had escaped and somehow found his way to Sethe's house. When he enters it, he feels the spiteful and sad presence of a spirit; the spirit of Sethe's dead baby girl which has been wreaking havoc over the house and its inhabitants. When Paul D appears and a romantic relationship develops between him and Sethe, the baby's spirit becomes angry and demands her mother's undivided attention. While Paul D and Sethe share an intimate embrace, the house starts shaking violently, personally attacking Paul D who fights back by "wrecking everything, [and] screaming back at the screaming house" (22). Suddenly, the spirit seems to disappear, surrendering to Paul D's dominant presence. For a few days, Paul D, Sethe, and Denver seem to live peacefully in the house and resemble somewhat of a 'normal' nuclear family. This changes when a "fully dressed woman walked out of the water" of the Ohio River stream (60). The spirit of the baby girl is incarnated; Beloved enters their lives.

Just before Beloved appears in her human form, Denver encounters her spirit which appeared to be holding on to Sethe as she kneeled down to pray. Denver thought to herself that this must mean that "the baby ghost had plans" (42). When Denver asks her mother what

she was praying for, Sethe explains that she was talking to God about time and goes on to introduce an essential concept in the novel, rememory:

> I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened. (43)

Unlike memory, which implies remembering something that happened and ended in the past and is stored in one's mind as such, rememory suggests continuity. The prefix 're', according to *Oxford English Dictionary*, signifies coming "back from a point reached . . . towards the starting point . . . [or] the original place or position . . . implying restoration to a previous state or condition . . . [while] the action itself is performed a second time" ("re-prefix"). While memory stores past events, rememory conveys a constant state of returning to the event in its original, pure form.

Moreover, memory distorts the image of past events. Because memory is a faculty of the human mind, it is bound to be affected by other faculties, such as desire. The desire to forget an event can erase its details, and the desire to return to it can paint an unrealistically pleasant picture of it. Mishra points out that "memory is a textual-imagistic device through which an event may be grasped, but never as it happened in its pure form" (20). This distorted, impure image is also the result of the passing of time. Just as time passing alters humans—ageing, illness, experience—the events that are stored in memory change over time. Al-Saji explains that humans are "beings who do not merely act in the punctual and self-

contained instant, but for whom the past bears on the present, and for whom the present passes, making a difference in the past" (207). Forgetting is another factor that plays a major role in the memory's inaccurate remembrance of the past, which is also the result of memory being a faculty of the mind and the fact that time passes by it in a linear form. Thus, the relationship between memory and forgetting is directly proportional; the more time passes, the more likely it is that the event in its original form becomes distorted and forgotten.

Rememory, besides having the qualities of continuation and recurring, is also bound in space and time. It refers to memories that are never gone, even if one seems to forget them, because their essence is still stored in the original place and remains so even as time passes. These rememories are significant because they are related to major traumatic events, ones that are so grave and powerful that they carve a mark in the spaces where they happened, and time never seems to wear these marks off. Rememory preserves what Gilles Deleuze calls the "pure event," which he defines as "an incorporeal, complex and irreducible entity, at the surface of things, a pure event which inheres or subsist in the proposition" (19). Patton clarifies that in creating this concept, he "drew a fundamental distinction between two realms of being, a material realm of bodies . . . and an incorporeal realm of events . . . Pure events are [therefore] both the expressed of statements and the 'sense' of what happens." Sethe also differentiates between the picture 'floating' in her head, the one that she might forget and would die with her mortal body, and the one that continues to exist in the space where it happened. While the former is the work of memory, the latter is the work of rememory.

Through rememory, Morrison creates a special temporal plane in which the past, present, and future have a complex, interdependent relationship. Deleuze's philosophical understanding of time can aid in understanding rememory's temporal dimensions. In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze demonstrates that there is a division between "two readings of time, each one of which is complete and excludes the other: on the one hand, the always limited

present . . . (Chronos); on the other, the essentially unlimited past and future . . . (Aion)" (61). For Deleuze, there is a paradoxical narrative of time. The events which happen in the "Chronos" dimension of time are different from those that happen in the "Aion" dimension because the latter does not happen at a specific moment. Rather, it is the essence of the event which can shape-shift between the past and future and return in an uncanny manner. Rememory, therefore, belongs to the timeline ruled by "Aion," a timeline that is not linear or *chronological*, but one that is cyclical, continuous, and returning.

When Sethe explains to Denver her perspective on time, place, and rememory, Denver observes that "if it's still there, waiting, that must mean that nothing ever dies," and Sethe affirms that "nothing ever does" (Morrison, *Beloved* 44). This is why Beloved, the baby girl's ghost, has accompanied her mother and sister in spirit for numerous years. Denver once again senses an event that will take place in the future, but this time she verbalizes this. She tells her mother, "Well, I think the baby got plans," and when Sethe asks her what she means, Denver replies, "I don't know, but the dress holding on to you got to mean something" (Morrison, *Beloved* 45). Here, Denver demonstrates a specific quality of the pure event. Since Beloved's death is a pure event that happened in the "Aion" dimension of time and is stored in rememory, it is also "eternally that which has just happened or that which is about to happen" (Deleuze 8). The presence of Beloved, until her emergence as a woman from the water, is suspended in space, time, and rememory. She exists in the "Aion" dimension of time, and her spirit looms over the house and its inhabitants, waiting for the perfect moment to return in the flesh.

Furthermore, rememory challenges conventional history and its temporal dimensions. The historian Pierre Nora mentions in his article, "Between History and Memory: *Les Lieux de Mémoire,*" that "memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present . . . History is a representation of the past [and is] perpetually suspicious of

memory . . . its true mission is to suppress and destroy it" (8-9). Memory and history are, thus, in conflict; each belongs to a different temporal dimension, and they cannot meet or reconcile. History documents that which happens in an abstract past, while memory is the distorted recollection of that past, but in a present moment. Memory mingles with human emotion and experience and narrates a different story from that documented by the rigid historicization. There is distrust between the two notions. In examining this phenomenon, "Benjamin . . . searched for a new concept of history, one based on temporal discontinuity and rupture, and defined in the collision point of history and the present" (Lindroos 14). Walter Benjamin's essay "Theses on the Philosophy of History" challenges the "homogenous and empty time . . . [which constructs] the homogenous course of history" (Benjamin 262-63). He observes that "historicism contents itself with establishing a causal nexus of various moments of history" (263). This universal concept of history, however, dismisses memory and its continuation from the past to the present moment. It regards history as an abstract past and does not consider its effect on the present.

Benjamin believed in a version of history that links the past events with the present moment and integrates the work of memory. He states that "to articulate what is past does not mean to recognize 'how it really was.' It means to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger" (255). This abrupt, flashing moment disrupts the universal, chronological timeline. It creates an opportunity for a present moment that also delves into history and opens what Lindroos calls the 'cairo-logical' dimension of time. In analyzing Benjamin's theses, Lindroos identifies "the moment of Kairos, as opposing the universal idea of time and history, which is conceptualized as Chronos" (43). When Sethe mentions that it is hard for her to believe in time, she is thus referring to the homogenous, chronological time. Her description of rememory as a retelling of the past that transcends this empty time and integrates space invites a moment of Kairos, an opportunity of retelling the past that is

manifested in the present moment. Just then, when Sethe starts giving in to "the temptation to trust and remember" (Morrison, *Beloved* 46), the spirit of the baby girl starts to be reincarnated as Beloved and the journey of rememory begins.

In essence, Morrison's retelling of Margaret Garner's story and her creation of *Beloved* is an attempt at the deconstruction of the homogenous time that the universal history documents. In her essay, "The Site of Memory," Morrison acknowledges her agency as a black female novelist and the intersectionality of gender and racial discrimination that informs her writing. She affirms that her goal through storytelling is to "rip that veil drawn over 'proceedings too terrible to relate.' . . . [which is] is also critical for any person who is black, or who belongs to any marginalized category, for, historically, we were seldom invited to participate in the discourse even when we were its topic" (91). *Beloved* subversively participates in this historical discourse by embedding an imagined version of the untold story of Margaret Garner in space and time. Similarly, the reincarnation of Beloved in a moment of Kairos allows Sethe to reclaim her role as a mother of her dead baby, and Denver to bond with the sister she never got to know. Morrison's concept of rememory creates a moment in time where this subversive retelling of history is possible, where returning to the past occurs in the present, and forgotten stories can be remembered and rewritten.

In the epigraph of *Beloved*, Toni Morrison dedicates the novel to "*Sixty Million and More*" (italics in the original). Mandel reports that, when asked about this dedication while "speaking to Newsweek on 28 September 1987, Morrison explained that the figure of sixty million is what she believes to be 'the best educated guess at the number of black Africans who never even made it into slavery—those who died as captives in Africa or on slave ships'" (582). While the story is about the experience of slaves who escaped a plantation in Kentucky through the water of the Ohio River, it is also intended to honor the unknown, nameless martyrs of the Middle Passage and the Transatlantic slave trade whose 'black

bodies' drowned, and their remains lie at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. The waters abundant in the sites of these pivotal events preserves the memories of these forgotten people in its depths, and Morrison delves into these fluid imageries to depict them in the rememory of Beloved.

Morrison is strongly aware of the cultural lineage that links Africa and its various traditions to what she refers to as "American Africanism" in her book *Playing in the Dark*. By Africanism, Morrison means the "denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people" (Morrison, *Playing* 6). While Morrison's writing is mainly concerned with American Africanism and what it means to be black in America, she knows that "the growth of a writer . . . is connected not only to some purely local and localized sets of stimuli but also to memory" (Morrison, "Memory" 385). *Beloved*, therefore, is not only a story about slavery and freedom in America, but it is also connected to a larger sphere of African collective (re)memory.

Olick and Robbins trace the first known use of the term 'collective memory' in their article "Social Memory Studies: From 'Collective Memory' to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices," in which they cite the Austrian novelist Hugo von Hofmannsthal "who referred to 'the dammed up force of our mysterious ancestors within us' and 'piled up layers of accumulated collective memory"' (106). This ancestral force is especially powerful for societies that have little or no other way of relating to their cultural heritage, or whose history has been deliberately undervalued and dismissed. This is the case for African peoples in their various post-colonial homelands or those scattered in the diaspora. Morrison declares that she treats this subject in *Beloved*. In her essay "On *Beloved*," she states that

> The silences regarding certain populations (minorities) when finally articulated are still understood to be supplementary accounts of a marginal experience, a

> supplemental record, unassociated with the mainstream of history; an expanded footnote, as it were, that is interesting but hardly central to the nation's past … And here again the silences of historical accounts and the marginalizing of minority peoples in the debate claimed my attention and proved a rich being to explore. (*The Source* 418-19)

Accordingly, she aimed to give a voice to these silenced narratives, to imagine and complicate them, to bring them from the margin of history to the center of her novel. Through rememory, Morrison creates an opportunity for these narratives to be revisited and retold.

Besides being the main linkage between displaced Africans and their homeland, memory is also the most trusted source of cultural knowledge available to African Americans. At numerous instances, Morrison reiterates her distrust of the traditionally available resources on African(ist) American history and culture. Instead, she reveals, "I depend heavily on the ruse of memory . . . because I cannot trust the literature and sociology of other people to help me know the truth of my own cultural sources" (Morrison, "Memory" 386). The battle of distrust between memory and history is complicated because of the suspicion that Eurocentric historization has about the ability of non-Europeans to produce a cultural legacy worth documenting. This endangers the connection of African diasporic communities to the larger body of collective memory, because not only is their history poorly—if at all—documented, but they have also lost contact with their homelands due to slavery and displacement. What aids in repairing this and creating a new realm of creative cultural conservation is storytelling, specifically storytelling that deploys rememory: "rememory as in recollecting and remembering, as in reassembling the members of the body, the family, the population of the past" (Morrison, *The Source* 481). Using rememory, Morrison is able to summon an ancestral collective memory to delve into the unspeakable stories of African American slaves and connect them to the forgotten African culture and

history. Along with imagining and retelling the story of Margaret Garner, Morrison also engages in *Beloved* with a larger body of oral and folkloric literature that originated in West and Central Africa and traveled with enslaved peoples to North and South America.

A true genius of the creation of *Beloved* is that it, at once, laments and celebrates the legacy of Africanism. *Beloved* represents multiple interconnected spirits; the dead baby girl, the souls of those who died during the Middle Passage, as well as West and Central African religious deities and mythological archetypes. Beloved represents multiple beings that narrate African American history: she emerges from the stream of the Ohio River, is rebirthed from Sethe's womb and its waters, is resuscitated from her sinking aboard a slave ship in the Middle Passage, and finally, is an allusion to West African archetypal deities and mythology. Throughout the novel, Morrison weaves these elements with the powerful presence of water, both within the human, specifically female, body and in the ecological landscapes surrounding them. The water of the Ohio River, where major scenes of the novel take place, is connected to the saltwater of the Atlantic Ocean where the bodies of countless forgotten African slaves lay. Beloved "rememories" the journey of the Middle Passage; she narrates episodes of being on a slave ship and encounters the spirits of the "sixty million and more" who were victims of the slave trade. Moreover, there are numerous symbols and patterns in *Beloved* that coincide with African peoples' spiritual beliefs and mythology, and an especially significant resemblance with those of the West African Yoruba tribes that also have a deep connection with waters.

To understand the relevance of Yoruba mythology to *Beloved* and to African diasporic culture, we must first recognize some of its origins. Yoruba cosmogony starts with the genderless superior God, Olodumare (or Olorun), who is the creator of the universe and ruler of the heavens. Olodumare created numerous deities, or *Orishas* (also spelled *Orisas*), to rule different elements and populate the earth. Olodumare had first created sixteen male

deities and one female deity, *Orisha* Oshun (or Osun). A well-known myth about these deities tells that Olodumare created the *orishas* and ordered them to cooperate in ruling the different regions of Yorubaland and complete his work of populating the land. The male deities, however, ignored their female companion (Oshun) and "her suggestions on how to make life beautiful, meaningful, and sweet, failing in their mission" (Mark). Moreover, "they snubbed her because she was a woman. And Oshun sat down, and watched them, and laughed. Instantly their luck turned. Instantly people shivered with a first attack of fever. Semen dried up and men became impotent . . . The men had learned the meaning of her laugh" (Murphy and Sanford 252). When they realized they could not complete their work without her, the male deities begged for her forgiveness and "Oshun agreed and brought forth her sweet and powerful waters, bringing life back to Earth and humanity and other species into existence" (Jeffries).

Since then, Oshun's abilities have ruled the realm of rivers and fresh waters, including streams, lakes, and rainwater. She is viewed as an essential force of life and is still worshipped and honored to this day in the coastal town of Oshogbo, Nigeria, where thousands of devotees go on pilgrimage to be blessed by the water of her river (Jeffries). Furthermore, Adekunle observes that:

> The significance of Òsun can be seen In the Yoruba concept of orísun or orírun (the source of the stream of life), accentuating why the deity is widely worshiped throughout Yorubaland. This river connection also proves how water is essential to human survival and why Òsun has traveled successfully from West Africa to the Americas. (121)

Oshun's essence is also intertwined with themes of motherhood, which enhances the qulaities of life-giving she is associated with. She "is the owner of female genitalia and the female egg.

For this reason, she assists women who wish to become pregnant and helps them to deliver their babies," rendering her an ultimate mother figure (Murphy and Sanford 44).

Another popular deity of the Yoruba pantheon is Yemaja (also spelled Yemaja, Yemonja, or Yemanja), a female *orisha* that is manifested in both Africa and the New World. There are various myths about the origin and role of Yemaja, as myths change function and meaning as they travel through oral transmission, but it is well-known among Yoruba devotees that Yemaja also carries powerful motherly connotations and is strongly associated with water. One of those origin myths about her describe that "Olorun (God) divided the waters in two: into the salty and sweet water realms of Yemoja (Yemayá) and Osún (Ochún), respectively" (Otero and Falola 86). Yemaja is said to be mature, wise, and universally powerful because she rules larger and older water bodies that connect different continents and merge with many of the river streams of Yorubaland.

Moreover, there is a maternal relationship between Yemaja and Oshun, but "variations exist in Yoruba mythology, ritual, and belief as to whether it is Yemoja (Yemayá) who gives birth to Osún (Ochún) or if it is Osún (Ochún) who gives birth to Yemoja (Yemayá)" (Otero and Falola 87). Their fluid relationship emphasizes the importance of intergenerational and ancestral influence in Yoruba culture. While there is fluidity and interchange between them, both goddesses are sought after by worshippers to facilitate pregnancy and birth. Yemaja is especially associated with female bodily fluids that are connected to ecological water bodies through her mythology. A myth about her reveals that "Yemoja's body . . . swelled to an incredible size, and two streams began to flow from her breasts, forming a lagoon" (Otero and Falola 134). Furthermore, "*itans* (Yoruba stories) also describe her as having long breasts as a result of the many children she nursed. Her sensitivity and embarrassment about her long breasts are consistent throughout the stories"

(Canson). Her milk nourishes the earth as well as its people, and she is thus regarded as an ultimate maternal figure.

Like water, which can be healing and quenching but also forcefully destructive, both Yemaja and Oshun can shapeshift and represent contrasting dualities. Yemaja is perceived to be a fierce and protective mother, thus, she is also linked to amniotic fluids which, according to Canson, renders her "temperamental and [she] can be soothing or unpredictably violent." In *Oṣun Across the Waters*, Murphy and Sanford remark that

> Oṣun can be old and young, rich and impoverished, loving and spiteful. At every turn she is something that the devotee does not expect. She cries when she is happy and laughs when she is sad. She is a powerful sovereign and a master of domestic arts. She heals with cool water, and destroys life in raging flood. She is a loving mother and a leader of vengeful spirits who can take anyone's child away. (7)

Therefore, the two motherly figures have violent as well as nurturing attributes; they can be loving but also overbearing. Their fierce maternal instincts can sometimes take over and cause chaos. This is also manifested in the devotional tradition of Oshun and Yemaja, where "a negative manifestation of the motherhood motif is possible in Yorubaland . . . A biological mother could curse a child with the same elements used in blessing, nurturing, and caring for the child (breast milk, and the blood shed at childbirth)" (Olajubu and Olupona 17). A complex intermingling can be found in the myths and manifested motifs of the two Yoruba goddesses. The formidable forces of water, both constructive and destructive, are weaved with the intuitive and potent motherly instinct, especially between mother and daughter.

Motherly forces and elements drive the narrative of *Beloved*. The most powerful scenes in the novel are intertwined with motherly emotions, maternal body fluids, and water

figurations. As the readers embark on the journey of *Beloved*, one of the first images they encounter is that of Sethe's milk being stolen. Sethe narrates to Paul D this terrifying incident:

> I had milk . . . I was pregnant with Denver but had milk for my baby girl . . . Anybody could smell me long before they saw me. And when he saw me he'd see the drops of it on the front of my dress. Nothing I could do about that. All I knew was I had to get my milk to my baby girl. Nobody was going to nurse her like me. Nobody was going to get it to her fast enough, or take it away when she had enough and didn't know it . . . Nobody knew that but me and nobody had her milk but me. (*Beloved* 19)

Sethe's motivation to escape Sweet Home and follow her children to Cincinnati was to deliver her breast milk to her baby girl. This compelling instinct is emphasized not only to highlight Sethe's intense connection to her motherhood and her children, but because it also contrasts the harsh reality of enslaved mothers who had no authority or agency to claim their motherly intuition or their black bodies.

In her essay "On *Beloved*," Morrison comments on the issue of motherhood during slavery and how she depicted it in the novel. She writes,

> suppose having children, being called a mother, was the supreme act of freedom—not its opposite? Suppose instead of being required to have children (because of gender, slave status, and profit) one chose to be responsible for them; to claim them as one's own; to be, in other words, not a breeder, but a parent. Under U.S. slavery such a claim was not only socially unacceptable, it was illegal, anarchic. (*The Source* 419)

Morrison here is referring to the legal doctrine that controlled the reproductive system during the era of chattel slavery which states that "*Partus sequitur ventrem*—the child follows the belly" (Hartman 166). This means that the child born from the womb of an enslaved woman is automatically a slave (regardless of who the father is), and the child of a free woman is also automatically free. To the slaveholder, a black woman's womb was a tool of profit. The process of childbearing, from sexual intercourse to pregnancy, labor, breastfeeding, and parenting a child, was rid of its emotional, spiritual, and humanistic value and reduced to a material investment for increasing the owner's property and gain.

Sethe "rememories" a time when she was not allowed to drink her own mother's milk. When Beloved asks her what she remembers about her own mother, Sethe tells her "I don't remember. I didn't see her but a few times out in the fields . . . she must of nursed me two or three weeks—that's the way others did it. Then she went back in rice and I sucked from another woman whose job it was" (Morrison, *Beloved* 72). Baby Suggs was also an example of a mother who was not allowed to love or parent her children. She had told Sethe about her first-born child: "All I can remember of her is how she loved the burned bottom of bread . . . eight children and that's all I remember" (Morrison, *Beloved* 6). Except for Halle, "the last of her children, whom she barely glanced at when he was born because it wasn't worth the trouble to try to learn features you would never see change into adulthood anyway . . . all seven [children] were dead or gone" (Morrison, *Beloved* 163-64). Thus, for Sethe to love her children so fiercely, to be a protective and nurturing mother who allowed her maternal intuition to take over in this driving manner, Sethe was reclaiming her freedom as a black woman and mother. Morrison reaffirms that this "was also an expression of intolerable female independence. It was freedom. And if the claim extended to infanticide (for whatever reason—noble or crazed) it could and did become politically explosive" (*The Source* 420).

The analogy of reclaiming *écriture feminine*, or women's writing, and the use of breast milk as "white ink" is a crucial concept coined by the French feminist theorist and writer Hélène Cixous. In her seminal essay, "The Laugh of the Medusa," Cixous reinterprets the myth of Medusa from the shunned, victimized woman to one who rewrites history and freely expresses her experience. She asserts that women "have only to stop listening to the Sirens (for the Sirens were men) for history to change its meaning? You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing" (Cixous 885). Like Oshun's laugh, which wreaked havoc on the world and scared the other male deities, but reinforced her own powers, Medusa's laugh is a form of reclaiming her story after she has been silenced by Zeus and Athena. Cixous believes that for women to reclaim their experience, they ought to delve into their maternal emotions, for the notions of womanhood and motherhood are closely intertwined. She writes: "woman is never far from 'mother' (I mean outside her role functions: the 'mother' as nonname and as source of goods). There is always within her at least a little of that good mother's milk. She writes in white ink" (Cixous 881).

Sethe's love for her children and her urgency to bring her milk to her youngest baby is an assertion of her freedom, motherhood, and agency of her own narrative. In contrast, at Sweet Home, Sethe had witnessed how her narrative was being falsely written for her. She remembers the instance when she made the decision that she, Halle, and her babies had to escape; she discovered how Schoolteacher had experimented with them. She narrates,

> he liked the ink I made . . . and it was important to him because at night he sat down to write in his book. It was a book about us but we didn't know that right away. We just thought it was his manner to write questions. He commenced to carry round a notebook and write down what we said (Morrison *Beloved* 44).

Later on, she continues,

> Schoolteacher made his pupils sit and learn books . . . He'd talk and they'd write . . . But I couldn't help listening to what I heard that day. He was talking to his pupils and I heard him say, "Which one are you doing?" And one of the boys said, "Sethe." That's when I stopped because I heard my name . . . I heard him say, "No, no. That's not the way. I told you to put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right. (*Beloved* 227-28)

In contrast with Schoolteacher's ink, which Sethe also made herself, her 'white ink' of breastmilk writes an authentic narrative. Schoolteacher's methodology mirrors Morrison's allusion to "the Age of Scientific Racism . . . [which] had documented that blacks were incapable of intelligence" ("The Site" 85). When Sethe learned how Schoolteacher measured her, how he viewed her as subhuman with animal characteristics, she knew that they could not stay in Sweet Home any longer. After she sends her babies to Cincinnati with the Underground Railroad agent and stays behind to wait for Halle, her motivation to bring milk, or 'white ink,' to her baby compels her to travel through the Ohio River all alone. She tells Beloved, "I walked right on because only me had your milk, and God do what He would, I was going to get it to you" (Morrison, *Beloved* 233). Sethe indeed writes her narrative in 'white ink' and refuses to be reduced to an enslaved woman whose offspring are considered chattel or property.

Besides being inherently feminine and rooted in motherliness, "white ink" is also invisible which adds another layer of creative contrast. On the one hand, Schoolteacher's narrative is written in bold, authoritative ink—made by those he considered subhuman— and carries the invented and oppressive perspective of conventional history. On the other, Sethe's—and Morrison's—story is written in the white, invisible ink of motherhood which foregrounds the female body, creating a maternal lineage of memory. Morrison continues to assert the contrast between history and memory in *Beloved*. The visible ink that dominates

history stands against the "white ink" of memory and lineage, and the conflict and distrust between the two notions intensifies. This conflict, which Pierre Nora has previously articulated in "*Les Lieux de Mémoire*," is a key point of departure for Morrison because it affirms her reliance on the "ruse of memory" of her people rather than any other form of recorded history. Like Cixous, Morrison writes in the inherently feminine, "invisible ink" of memory, and it is through this ink that she connects African American memory with a longer lineage. This lineage extends from the atrocities African American slaves endured in America, to their ancestors who survived or lost their lives during the Middle Passage, and culminate at the matrilineal societies of West Africa and their cultures, traditions, and mythology. Morrison asserts in her essay "Invisible Ink" that her writing aims at "disqualifying the notion of a stable text for one that is dependent on . . . invisible ink" (*The Source* 518). Morrison further emphasizes the narrative of this invisible ink by depicting this lineage in *Beloved*. Sethe rememories that "Nan had to nurse the whitebabies and me too because Ma'am was in the rice. The little whitebabies got it first and I got what was left. Or none. There was no nursing milk to call my own" (Morrison, *Beloved* 236). Like Yemaja, whose breastmilk created ponds for all of the Yoruba people to drink from, the strong presence of motherly milk as 'white ink' in *Beloved* emphasizes the ancestral linkage of African Americans to their collective homeland and its various, yet shared, cultural traditions.

Cixous also makes a shrewd correlation between *écriture feminine* through the female body and its fluids and the term "dark continent," a patriarchal labelling of both Africa and female desire. Born in Algeria and well-versed in the oppressive heritage of European colonialism of Africa, its culture, and history, Cixous describes the suppression of feminine writing and the female body: "as soon as they begin to speak, at the same time as they're taught their name, they can be taught that their territory is black: because you are Africa, you are black. Your continent is dark. Dark is dangerous. You can't see anything in the dark,

you're afraid" (Cixous 877-78). The idea of the dark, dangerous place and its barbaric culture is echoed in *Beloved*:

> Whitepeople believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle. Swift unnavigable waters, swinging screaming baboons, sleeping snakes, red gums ready for their sweet white blood . . . But it wasn't the jungle blacks brought with them to this place from the other (livable) place. It was the jungle whitefolks planted in them. And it grew. It spread. In, through and after life, it spread, until it invaded the whites who had made it . . . so scared were they of the jungle they had made. The screaming baboon lived under their own white skin; the red gums were their own. (Morrison, *Beloved* 234)

As a black woman writing a narrative about the experience of slavery, especially that of female slaves, Morrison is overtly subversive about her reimagining of the "dark continent's" culture and how it is represented in history. *Beloved* is at once a rememory of the history of slavery, the slave trade, and the cultures of the African "jungles" too "dark" to explore. As Cixous reiterates, "The Dark Continent is neither dark nor unexplorable.—It is still unexplored only because we've been made to believe that it was too dark to be explorable" (884-85).

The waters of the Ohio River are intertwined with the waters of the female body as well as with those of the "dark continent" in *Beloved*. When she first sets eyes on her daughter who came back from the dead in the shape of a "fully dressed woman [who] walked out of the water . . . Sethe's bladder filled to capacity . . . she had to lift her skirts, and the water she voided was endless" (Morrison, *Beloved* 61). Beloved's appearance from a stream of the Ohio River gave Sethe a flashback to the rememory of "flooding the boat when Denver was born . . . there was no stopping water from breaking water from a breaking womb and there was no stopping now" (Morrison, *Beloved* 62). It was as if Sethe had rebirthed her dead

daughter. Beloved's return further mirrors Sethe's journey through the Ohio River. Once she arrived at 124, Bluestone Road, Beloved "gulped water from a speckled tin cup and held it out for more. Four times Denver filled it, and four times the woman drank as though she had crossed a desert" (Morrison, *Beloved* 62). When escaping Sethe was rescued by the waterman at the bank of Ohio River with newborn Denver in her arms: "she begged him for water and he gave her some of the Ohio in a jar. Sethe drank it all and begged for more" (Morrison, *Beloved* 106). The mother-daughter relationship between Sethe and Beloved is fluid; it is as though they mirror one another on the clear surface of the water.

The Ohio River is especially significant in African American history. Crossing it signifies a liberation from the cruelty of enslavement in the Deep South to emancipation in the free North, and with it came a sense of rebirth and redemption. Like the Atlantic Ocean, the bottom of the Ohio is a graveyard for countless fugitives escaping slavery. The weary journey was full of danger: the thick woods and the creatures inhabiting it, the possibility of being caught and returned for money, and drowning in the depth of the river. Morrison situates the pivotal scenes of the novel on different banks of the Ohio River. Beloved's emergence, Sethe's escape, and Denver's birth are all marked by its waters. To protect the baby from the "bloody side of the Ohio River" (*Beloved* 37), Sethe turned the "the pure clear stream of spit that the little girl dribbled into her face to her oily blood" (*Beloved* 111). When Beloved descends into the realm of the dead, she joins the millions who had collectively suffered in captivity and bondage to finally rest their *black bodies* at the bottom of the ocean.

In this journey, Beloved recalls the plight of her ancestors. In two chapters in the middle section of the novel, she recounts her firsthand experience on board a slave ship. To tell this unfathomable story, Morrison utilizes a language that defies the known rules of English; she creates a new grammar breaks the boundaries of the traditional one and attempts to interpret the "unspeakable" horrors Beloved experienced on the slave ship. In this

linguistically mysterious interlude, she is able to narrate in detail what it was like being in the belly of a slave ship:

> there will never be a time when I am not crouching and watching others who are crouching too I am always crouching the man on my face is dead . . . some who eat nasty themselves I do not eat the men without skin bring us their morning water to drink we have none . . . we are all trying to leave our bodies behind the man on my face had done it it is hard to make yourself die forever . . . those able to die are in a pile . . . they fall into the sea . . . they are not crouching now they are floating on the water. (Morrison, *Beloved* 248-50)

Morrison reveals in an interview that Beloved "is also another kind of dead which is not spiritual but flesh, which is, a survivor from the true, factual slave ship. She speaks the traumatized language, of her own experience . . . [of] what it was like being where she was on that ship as a child" ("In the Realm" 247). The crouching she mentions is the manner in which slaves were stacked tightly next to one another; the 'nasty' is the feces and stench of dead bodies that fostered deadly diseases among them. Finally, those who are successful in freeing themselves by refusing to eat and drink till they die of starvation and thirst are thrown into the Atlantic Ocean, where their remains continue to haunt its deep bottom until now.

The inside story of Beloved onboard the slave ship is rooted in factual history. One of the most significant acts of slave resistance against bondage was suicide through self-starvation—they were then thrown into the water by their captors—or jumping into the Atlantic Ocean. In the article "Crossing the Lake of Fire," Bly confirms that "many slaves often resisted their enslavement by refusing to eat, throwing themselves overboard, or committing suicide" (181). This was not only a means to escape from the atrocious fate that awaited them; but many Africans also sought spiritual relief as "most slaves saw their suicide as a means by which to return home" (Bly 181). In his article, Bly quotes Olaudah Equiano

who stated in his slave narrative that his people "believed that, once drowned, a man would return to his village and family . . . The men saw the ocean sparkle in through the gap between the ship and blown-out net, and they jumped into it" (181). In the heart-wrenching account of the slave ship, Beloved sees that after they push the dead people into the water, "they do not push the woman with my face through she goes in they do not push her she goes in . . . she goes in the water with my face" (Morrison, *Beloved* 251). "The woman with her face" can be interpreted as her mother, who is at once Sethe and the enslaved girl's African mother. In the water, where Oshun and Yemaja's spirits intermingle as mother and daughter, so does the souls of Beloved, Sethe, the little slave girl, and her drowning mother, and so does their rememory.

Beloved triggers Sethe's rememory and forces her to recall instances from a time before Sweet Home. She suddenly remembers what Nan, the one-armed slave wetnurse from Sethe's childhood, had told her about her own mother:

> "Telling you. I am telling you small girl Sethe," . . . She told Sethe that her mother and Nan were together from the sea. Both were taken up many times by the crew. "She threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw away on the island . . . You she gave the name of a black man. She put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around. Never. Never. Telling you. I am telling you, small girl Sethe." (Morrison, *Beloved* 74)

Once again, Morrison foregrounds the legacy of the Middle Passage because Sethe herself is a direct descendant of it. She is the only one who was not thrown in the water because she was not conceived from rape. The mother throwing the other baby in the water, however, mimics the image of Sethe slaughtering the baby girl, and that of Margaret Garner killing her child. This fortifies what Morrison says about *Beloved* in another interview: "the past, until you confront it, until you live through it, keeps coming back in other forms. The shapes

redesign themselves in other constellations, until you get a chance to play it over again" ("Author" 241).

Morrison defies the linear time and space that are standard in narrating conventional history. Instead, she writes a story that delves into memory and takes the shape of its cyclical nature. The memories ingrained in our brains are the ones we return to the most, but they are never the same when we recall them; they are altered by our realizations, experiences, and the knowledge we gain. This is also the manner of the traditional African narrative. In the article "The River that Crosses the Ocean," Chirila observes that "the orishas can , and do, travel even across oceans . . . Osun is a child of the sea. She tore free of her mother's [Yemaja's] womb and became the source of all the rivers that run with cool water. You can go to any river and find Osun" (143). The regenerative and cyclical nature of water bodies is mirrored in the relationship between the two aquatic *Orishas*. Chirila accordingly states that:

> To outsiders conditioned to think linearly about the greater narrative . . . it may seem that African traditions are left behind . . . [In] non-Western indigenous traditions . . . the past is recalled to reinforce the significance of the present as a moment *within* a narrative unfolding towards a promised terminus . . . the mythic past of the Orishas is constantly reenacted in the present. (145, emphasis in the original)

Instead of looking at the distrusted memory of Eurocentric history, Morrison roots her imaginative memory in the impeccable and eternal memory of the ecological environment as well as the biological rememory imprinted within her characters as manifested in their varied bodily fluids. She challenges traditional time, space, and history, and creates the new dimension of rememory, where time and space reshape and move in concentric circles to centralize a narrative rooted in authenticity. Moreover, she utilizes the abundance of water

figurations in African mythology to weave the African American experience in *Beloved* with a history that directly stems from the narrative of the 'dark continent' and its people.

Chapter III: The Nubian Rememory: “The River People”

Since antiquity, the Nile River has been an abundant source of inspiration for the societies that inhabited its basin, and especially for the Nubians of Egypt. It was also one of the main sources of livelihood for these societies which further intensified the spiritual relationship they had with it. In both ancient Egypt and Nubia, numerous deities and cults were dedicated to worshipping various elements of the Nile in the indigenous belief systems of these regions. While in Egypt, such practices diminished overtime, in Nubia, however, the divine attributes of the Nile continued to shape the cultural practices of Nubian indigenous people. This spanned from ancient religions practiced during the Kingdom of Kush and throughout the era of the Christian Kingdom of Makuria, and then their embracing of Islam after the Islamic conquest of Nubia. The various beliefs of Nubian people over hundreds of years continued to centralize the Nile as the ultimate mystical source of divine blessings, which only strengthened the spiritual bond they shared with its waters.

Until their forced removal from their homeland and their migration to various Egyptian cities in the twentieth century, the Nile was still the most important source of spiritual and creative inspiration for Nubians. After the establishment of several dams over their ancestral land, Nubian villages were flooded by the Nile and Nubian people were displaced to other remote villages in Aswan. Many of them also sought livelihood in different cities in Egypt and abroad, rendering them a diasporic minority. The same river that was their source of life became a burial ground for their drowned homes, and their relationship with the mighty river grew deeper and more complex. Nubian artists in the diaspora reflected this relationship in their creative expressions. Their poetry, prose, music, and visual arts are imbued with memories of a peaceful land centered around a flowing holy river to which the Nubian people were tied in an eternal bond. It also depicts the confusion, rage, and

melancholy they hold as they struggle to re-narrate their history and find their place in the Egyptian imaginary.

Over the course of the twentieth century, the identity of Nubian people which has been shaped by various historical eras as well as their physical and spiritual proximity to the Nile River would change forever. The future of their homeland, community, and culture would be threatened by the establishment of a succession of dams on the Nile. The British occupation planned for Egypt to be an agricultural state that would benefit the empire's economic returns, but they came to the conclusion that a water control method must be implemented. They studied the geography of Egypt and found that the Nile should be controlled from its southern basin. Thus, "The idea of erecting a dam across the river at Aswan was put into effect in 1889," and later on, "the dam was subsequently raised twice, in 1912 and 1933, in order to meet Egypt's growing demands for water" (Fahim, *Dams* 10).

In 1903, the Nubian Kenuz (or Matokki) people who inhabited the region of the first Nile cataract were endangered by the Aswan Dam reservoir lake because it flooded several farms and homes, yet they "refused a government proposal to relocate them away from their homeland and instead rebuilt their villages [e.g., Gharb Sehil, Heissa, Elephantine, and West Aswan] on top of the rocky banks of the Nile" (Fahim, *Dams* 96). These communities still live in very close proximity to the Nile and their rebuilt homes carry many of the features of their original drowned ones. However, due to the disruption of their agricultural lifestyle, hundreds of Nubian men had to further relocate and seek work in the capital, Cairo, and other cities. The tightly woven fabric of Nubian society began to change as the women, children, and elders were left behind in the villages and the family unit was fractured. This abrupt shift left no time for Nubian villagers to learn useful trades in the North, and many found themselves employed in positions of servitude—*bawwabin* (doorkeepers) *sofrageyya*

(butlers), and *labbissa* (valets)—in the mansions and homes of wealthy British and Turkish aristocrats, which fit the image these aristocrats had of black people serving them.

When Egypt gained its independence from the British in 1952, the sensational military officer Gamal Abdel Nasser led the country into a new era. A vision for a unified, prosperous Arab postcolonial state, with its working class and peasants finally reclaiming their lands and rights from colonizers and aristocrats, was at the forefront of Nasser's agenda as the new president. His projects advocated for an Egypt that served its own people and aimed to utilize the country's wealth to the benefit of the whole population. At the top of his agenda was the establishment of an electrical power source that modernizes Egypt and catalyzes an industrial revolution. Enter the High Dam, which Nasser described as "the 'dam of glory, freedom, and dignity' that would 'eradicate the dams of humiliation and indignity'" (qtd. In Abubakr 75). With a loan of 400 million Soviet rubles and 30,000 workers, Nasser embarked on a journey to erect "an enormous wall rather like a magnified Great Wall of China blocking the course of the Nile River" (Fahim, *Dams* 14). Behind this wall, he would create a lake named after himself, the glorified "Lake Nasser, the largest man-made reservoir" (Shadid), whose "very name seems to taunt the local people and remind them of all that's been lost" (Shenoda 44).

A nationalist discourse was deployed to convince Nubians to move from their homeland to the new, isolated villages in the desert east of Kom Ombo. In the 1960s, President Nasser and his Vice President Anwar al-Sadat visited the isolated Nubian villages that were going to be flooded. Nubians, located on the literal and imaginary periphery of Egypt, have never experienced being centrally included in the Egyptian narrative before. As far as they knew from colonial times, the land in the north is where the men go to work as servants and doorkeepers and get ridiculed by Egyptians for their broken Arabic accent and their dark skin. The new nationalist discourse of Nasser addressed Nubians directly, giving

them agency as Egyptian citizens and promising them a bright future in which they are integrated in the larger Egyptian society. In his visit, al-Sadat told the Nubians, as reported by Fahim:

> If the Nubian people are leaving their smaller home of Nubia for the prosperity of the republic and the realization of the great hopes pinned on the High Dam . . . then the bigger home, their own country, will open its arms to welcome them in one of the new districts in Kom Ombo. There they will find stability, prosperity and a decent life. (*The Egyptian* 36)

Having been in despair since the start of the century, with the men constantly moving to the north, the economic and agricultural conditions deteriorating, and the land partially flooded by the Aswan Dam, many Nubians, especially in the northern Kenzi villages, believed that this relocation to Kom Ombo would help solve their problems.

In order for this project to be successfully completed, the indigenous Nubian people inhabiting the banks of the Nile had to be evacuated. Unlike their Kenuz counterparts who had relocated three times, the Fadija people in the southern villages have never migrated from their homeland. As Fernea mentions, "Southern Nubia was quite different … [and] the traditional pattern of life had not been changed by the Aswan dam" (67). Thus, when they heard of the plans of their resettlement "in the mid-1950s, they rejected as not true the first rumors that the construction of a High Dam would inundate all of Egyptian Nubia" (Scudder 18). Unfortunately, it was true, and the Fadija Nubians were devastated with the rushed and unorganized process of moving them from their native land to newly built houses in remote villages east of Kom Ombo, Aswan "in a treeless desert area away from the Nile" between October 1963 and June 1964 (Scudder 37). The area was named 'New Nubia,' but Nubians until today subversively refuse to call it that because it does not resemble their homeland in any way. Instead, they called it '*Nuba al-Tahgir*,' the Nubia of displacement (Agha; Scudder

19). In the *tahgir* villages, Nubians found themselves in houses that were significantly smaller than their old ones, with ventilation systems that trapped the scorching summer heat, undeveloped sewage systems, defects in the structures of the houses, and an uncultivatable, barren land (Scudder 25-26). Moreover, "because most of the Kom Ombo resettlement area was located several kilometers inland, Nile rituals that were of previous importance to women were dropped" (Scudder 27). Nubians were not only faced with the loss of their homes, lands, farms, and palm trees, but their culture that has been so closely connected with the Nile was also now endangered.

In a conversation with Elizabeth Fernea recorded in *Nubian Ethnographies*, the French archeologist John Gaudet stated that "Nubia is a versatile treasure house of the past. . . Pharaonic, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Islamic, the entire panorama of history before the Middle Ages left its traces here" (Fernea and Fernea 31). While this is also the case of the overall landscape of Egypt, the seclusion of the Nubian region and specific cultural features that mark it intensifies this panoramic exhibition of history. However, the people, the gatekeepers of these ancient cultures and practitioners of these surviving traditions, are largely absent from this history. As the Sudanese historian Bayan Abubakr points out, "archeological projects initiated before and after the construction of the Aswan High Dam focused more on the loss of Nubian antiquities and relics than they did on the forced displacement of Nubians from their ancestral lands and heritage" (75).

Until the anthropological fieldwork conducted by a team of American and Egyptian researchers under the Social Research Center at the American University in Cairo between 1961 and 1963 took place, next to no information was known about the Nubian people of Egypt (Hopkins and Mehanna 22). Some accounts of Nubian customs and traditions are found in travel memoirs such as Johann Burckhardt's *Travels in Nubia* (1819). Nonetheless, most memoirs dismissed the humans that inhabit this region and only viewed it as a land

containing ancient monuments. Amelia Edwards' *A Thousand Miles Up the Nile* (1891) and Youssef Kamal Pasha's *A Journey in Egypt and Sudan* (1914) are examples of such accounts. Kamal Pasha, for instance, admitted that:

"أما البلاد التي من جنوبي الشلّال الأول الى حلفا فليس فيها الآن ما يستحق الذكر سوى آثارها" (30).

meaning that the land south of the first cataract of the Nile has nothing worth noting except its antiquities. The Orientalist gaze of historians and archeologists studying this region was overwhelmingly present in most of their writings. They viewed Nubia as a mysterious land of ancient antiquities, and its people, like their fellow Africans, as primitive and simple. Absent from these generic and racist perspectives is any exploration of how Nubians viewed the world or themselves, or how they told their own story which had evolved over the course of millennia.

When the artifacts of Nubia were about to be flooded, an unprecedented effort was made to preserve them from getting lost under water. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) launched an international campaign to uninstall several temples from the drowning region and reinstall them on safe grounds; "According to the UNESCO's 1958-1961 Director-General Vittorino Veronese, Nubian heritage no longer belonged to Nubians, but was a 'treasure of the universe [that was] entitled to universal protection"' (Abubakr 76). While the UNESCO and the international teams completing this project admitted that these 'treasures' are Nubian, they "described them as if they were not the belongings and livelihoods of living Nubian communities" (Abubakr 76). Abubakr points out that "when Nubia and its artifacts are relegated to the ancient world, the reparations and rights owed to Nubians are more easily dismissible" (76-77). The Nubian people's physical removal from their homeland and their displacement in a habitat completely foreign to their traditions, in addition to the removal of the antiquities they had protected and lived among for so long further diluted their cultural identity. Their customs

and traditions are now only existent in their collective memory, and it is only a matter of time and turn of generations before that is forgotten. After its geographical drowning and erasure, Nubia now exists in the complicated liminal space of memory. Because this space is forcibly dislocated from the physical site of Old Nubia and its villages, the memory of Nubia is also endangered.

Many Nubian writers emerged during and after the displacement to creatively record their experience in poetry and prose. Along with narrating this experience, Nubian writers also aimed to preserve authentic Nubian culture, language, mythology, and folklore in their cultural memory which is on the verge of extinction. Haggag Oddoul, the Nubian writer and activist, published one of the few critical studies on Nubian literature entitled *أدباء نوبيون ونقاد عنصريون* (Nubian Writers and Racist Critics) in which he traces three waves of this body of literature. It started with Muhammad Abd al-Raheem Idris's poetry book *ظلال النخيل* (Palm Shadows) in 1948. The second wave was inaugurated by Muhammad Khalil Qasim's epic novel, *al-Shamandurah*, which "minutely describes the life of a Nubian village submerged by the rise in the level of the Aswan Dam in 1933" (Jacquemond 181). Qasim was also a "communist activist whose fifteen years of imprisonment between 1948 and 1964 were the probable cause of his premature death only a few months after the appearance of his major work" (Jacquemond 181). *Al-Shamandurah* is marked by its realist tone and complex human relationships. It depicts the undergoing challenges and changes Nubians went through as they transitioned from the traditional Nubian landscape, culture, and social codes to an identity that was metamorphosing during the displacement era. After *Al-Shamandurah*, there was a considerable gap of twenty years in Nubian creative writing, but in the late 1980s, several Nubian writers started to revive the literature, including Oddoul himself among other writers like Yahya Mukhtar, Idris Ali, and Hassan Nour (Oddoul, *أدباء*). These writers are from the diasporic generation of Nubians who had either witnessed the displacement as children or

were first-generation migrants to Cairo and other cities of Egypt. Qasim continued to have an immense influence on the writers of the third wave of Nubian literature, and they collectively referred to him as their teacher and the 'dean' of Nubian literature.

In his book, Oddoul discusses a controversial question among Nubian writers, which is whether or not a distinctly 'Nubian' literature exists. In answer to this question, Yahya Mukhtar asserts that there is no such thing as a 'Nubian' literature, and that it should be included under the umbrella of Arabic literature because it is mostly written in the Arabic language. Oddoul disagrees and mentions that many culturally specific literatures are labeled after their cultural, ethnic, or geographical associations and not merely the language in which they are written like Latin American literature, for example, which is predominately written in Spanish and Portuguese. Mukhtar's opinion views the issue at surface level and reflects an anxiety experienced by many Nubian writers about their cultural belonging and identity. Idris Ali, for example, wrote one of the most explosive Nubian novels, *Dongola*, which was outspokenly political and addressed issues of race, gender, and cultural and historical erasure of Nubians in Egypt. Nonetheless, he also wrote in a newspaper article that there is no such thing as a Nubian cause, and that Nubians are not a minority that faces any form of discrimination. The problem of Nubians is only an issue of sentiment and nostalgia, which completely contradicts what is expressed in his creative writing. In answer to the aforementioned question, he says:

> هذا التيار الأدبي الجديد رافد من روافد الأدب المصري لأن هؤلاء جميعا كتبوا نصوصهم باللغة العربية وبالتالي فهو أدب مصري بصرف النظر عن المصطلح المصطنع الذي يوحي بغير ذلك بعكس مزاعم الانتهازيين الذين يتاجرون بمشاكل النوبة فالنوبي لا يعاني في المدن والقرى من تفرقة عنصرية بسبب اللون أو بأي شكل من الأشكال. (35)

In this article, he states that he believes that Nubian writers contribute to the body of Egyptian literature because they write in Arabic, and *othering* them indicates a kind of

distinction belongs to opportunists who aim to exploit the problems of Nubians. He sees that Nubians face no discrimination in Egypt whatsoever. His main character in the novel, however, constantly criticizes the racism he faces in Cairo. The confusion and ambiguity among Nubian writers are clear. They are struggling to honestly voice their political opinions, and with the exception of Haggag Oddoul, they mostly keep their subversive perspectives implicitly embedded in their creative writing.

Edward Said shrewdly remarks that "memory and its representations touch very significantly upon questions of identity, of nationalism, of power and authority" (176). Said, whose seminal book *Orientalism* and work on postcolonial theory popularized the term *othering*, believes that minorities have a "right to a remembered presence and, with that presence, the right to possess and reclaim a collective historical reality" (184). Because Nubians are unable to exercise this right, Nubian literature evidently cannot find its place within the body of Egyptian and Arabic literature. The dispute between Nubian intellectuals and writers about labelling the literature that belongs to their cultural tradition and portrays the legacy of their displacement as distinctly 'Nubian' mirrors the uncertainty and anxiety they experience within the Egyptian intellectual scene. Moll illustrates that "the high price Nubians paid in lives, property, and intangible heritage 'for the prosperity of the republic' is erased from the official historiographic celebration of the Aswan High Dam as the crowning achievement of the postcolonial state" (82). This erasure immensely enhances their feelings of not belonging and not being welcomed into the Egyptian cultural imaginary, and hence, this feeling of 'otherness' is reflected in the subversive literature they produce. Moreover, "the state reacts dismissively, if not with suspicion of secession, to Nubian demands to return to their original land on the fertile shores of Lake Nasser, and to their attempts to revive their cultural heritage and language" (Youssef 77). This suspicion of secession is why many Nubian intellectuals such as Qasim, Mukhtar, and Hassan Nour stand out at a time when

Egypt's regime had a strong nationalist postcolonial agenda, which—to borrow Said' words– tended to "glorify only the big deeds of big people and neglect to mention what happened to the small ones" (176-77). Moreover, the 1960s were marked by "the unitary fiction of Egypt's Arab identity was intentionally cultivated by the ideology of Arab nationalism in the postcolonial period which effectively excluded minority identities from the Egyptian national imaginary" (Gilmore "A Minor" 54). Consequently, the Nubian cultural memory is not only imbued with the distortion of identity which they experienced due to the prolonged process of forced displacement during the twentieth century, but also because of the lack of recognition and the 'othering' of their ethnic and cultural presence in Egyptian history and consciousness.

In the previous chapter, the term "*lieux de mémoire*" was referenced to explain the complexity of space and memory in telling and retelling history. By coining this term, Pierre Nora problematizes the linearity of conventional historization by engraining it in a spatial setting. Additionally, "Nora proposes that *lieux de mémoire* emerge from a context where a unitary national history has fragmented into atomized local heritages claimed and sustained by regional, social, ethnic or religious groups" (Smith 34). Such local heritages utilize their physical space—homeland, landscape, environment— to store the essence of their cultural memory. Jan Assmann affirms that cultural memory is rooted in rituals and symbols specific to diverse ethnic and indigenous societies, while Nora's *lieux de mémoire* highlights the importance of landmarks for the preservation of their cultural memory. The symbols are engrained in the immediate space, and the space is where the cultural memory is stored. The three concepts are, therefore, inseparable. Cultural memory also operates in its own temporal plane of cyclical time that contests and transcends the linear timeline of history. Therefore, there is a consensus among these cultural theorists and historians about the importance of both space and time for storing the cultural memory of ethnic groups, such as Nubians. Because these factors were available for them in the homeland, Nubians were able to

maintain their authentic expression of cultural memory and cast it into their future. The seclusion of their space enabled them to view time in the cyclical manner that suited their cultural identity and honored their memorial practices embodied in ceremonies, rituals, and myths. As Jan Assmann illustrates, in the context of such practices, "it is the temporal horizon of cultural memory which is important. Cultural memory reaches back into the past only so far as the past can be reclaimed as 'ours'" ("Communicative" [*Cultural Memory*] 113).

Since the successions of forced displacement and the prolonged flooding of their homeland over the course of twentieth century, Nubians were no longer able to claim their past as *theirs*. The repetitive defeats they experienced as an indigenous community, first from the Aswan Dam established by the British colonizer, then its elevations during Ottoman rule, and finally the nationalist High Dam project, triggered a cultural amnesia that stands in clear contrast with the cultural memory that Nubians had preserved over centuries. In response to this cultural defeat, Nubian writers attempted to reconcile with their past and continue the work of their ancestors in preserving their cultural memory. 'Rememory,' which Toni Morrison deployed in her creative writing to bridge the gap between African Americans' present and their African cultural memory, is also at work in the fiction of Nubian writers like Haggag Oddoul and Yahya Mukhtar.

In an unknown Nubian village, before the dam was built, a young girl named Asha is lost. Her little sister, Korty, "insisted that her sister had gone to the River People" (Oddoul, *Nights* 89). To soothe her longing for her missing sister, Korty assures herself that Asha will "come back. She's happy with them now, in bliss among people whose waters know no end of joy; their tambourines are never silent; they are untroubled by fear of a future that will drive them away; their constant ululations surge with the perch dance and never end" (Oddoul, *Nights* 89). Years later, Korty would exclaim when her own granddaughter emerges

from the waters of the womb, “Asha, Asha, Asha has returned” (Oddoul, *Nights* 93). She tells her granddaughter, “you’re the exact image of her [your grandaunt], so I called you Asha and the people of the village added the second name [Ashry or beautiful in Nubian]. Your name became the same as that of your . . . [grandaunt]: Asha Ashry” (Oddoul, *Nights* 93).

In his short story, “The River People,” Haggag Oddoul alludes to a myth that is engrained in the consciousness of Nubians who had lived in the old villages: the myth of the river people. The ethnographic study *Nubian Ceremonial Life* explains that Nubians believed in the existence of “Nile spirits, which are not only associated with rituals of birth, circumcision, marriage and death, but were also the concern of many other rituals in Old Nubia” (Kennedy 129). The presence of these river people was extremely strong in the life of Nubians. For example, “whenever any Nubian . . . crossed the river [Nile] he recited the *Fatiha* to the river beings” (Kennedy 108). Moreover, many women “visited” the river beings every morning as they filled their tins of water from the river; they threw pieces of candy, lumps of sugar, some perfume, or some henna into the river (Kennedy 108). There are “two major classes of supernatural beings in the Nile: the beneficent ‘water angels,’ and the dangerous and ugly ‘water monsters’ (Kennedy 104). Among the Fadija-speaking people, the water angels were called *aman nutto* or *essi nutto* (literally meaning good people or good water people), while their name was Arabized among the Kenuz people, and they called them *malayket al-bahr* (water angels).

Throughout the short story, Asha Ashry shows an intense spiritual connection to the river people. It seems that she is one of the “women . . . who reports seeing and conversing with them” (Kennedy 129). Kennedy adds, “since it is among women that beliefs in them are most clearly conceived and strongly held” (104). Because women are the ones who travel daily to the Nile’s banks in the early morning hours, they are considered to have the closest proximity with the river people. Thus, the stories about *amon nutto* are predominantly crafted

and told by women, and the myth of the river people is intimately associated with femininity. Asha Ashry inherits her fascination with the river people from her grandaunt, Anna (grandma in Nubian) Korty's sister, and this maternal lineage affirms the overtly feminine connection with the river people. Anna Korty recalls that her late sister was "madly in love with the River People. She used to love sitting on the bank, her gaze wandering over the smooth surface of the water" (Oddoul, *Nights* 91). Anna Korty narrates, "I would always hear her sharing her thoughts with them, and when I warned her about her infatuation with them, she would smile and say, 'Korty, my dear sister, don't be afraid. The River People are kind and peaceful. Korty, don't give my secret away"' (Oddoul, *Nights* 91). Anna Korty feared that her granddaughter would meet the same fate as her own sister and always warned little Asha Ashry from getting too closely acquainted with the aquatic beings. She told her granddaughter, "beware, Ashry, don't stick too close to the river. Don't wander along the bank at the time of the flood when the water gathers and flows into the farky [a Nubian word meaning a depression in the river stream]. Don't go down there on your own" (Oddoul, *Nights* 93). However, Asha would "while away the time playing with the River People" because she was "under the protection of the perch, the protection of the River People" (Oddoul, *Nights* 103). Asha's relationship with the river people mirrors that of her grandaunt's, and the generational bond of the two Nubian women is, thus, transcending space and time.

Young Asha Ashry is born the same year the dam is built. Although it is unclear which dam, it can be argued that it is the Aswan Dam and not the High Dam because not the entirety of Nubian villages has drowned yet in the short story. The flood is still flirting with the land, coming and going at different times, but the men have begun their season of migration to the north in search for livable wage. Furthermore, Asha narrates that some villages have begun the process of displacement: "we moved out, leaving behind our cool

spacious houses for cramped sweltering ones that hung on the side of the mountain like carbuncles" (Oddoul, *Nights* 96). These are all features of the aftermath of the Aswan Dam. Asha is equally concerned with the displacement of her people and the cursed spell this dam casts on her beloved river people. She says "People of the River, they have hurled a dam into your vast body and bruised it. They have raised it up over your solemn timeless melody. Be strong, mighty meandering river, for I am like you. The dam destroyed my life. I was born the year it was built, and what an evil omen that was" (Oddoul, *Nights* 105).

As it has been established in the previous chapter, rememory is a framework that indicates the continuity and returning of memory. Rememory engrains memories in the physical space where they originally happened, regardless of the passage of linear time. While rememory in the case of *Beloved* carved a mark in the significant physical spaces of the novel—Sweet Home, the Ohio River, the Atlantic Ocean—rendering them as sites of memory, "The River People" deals with a space that is literally submerged underwater and can no longer be retrieved. The Nile River is thus the focal site of memory; it is where the drowned Old Nubian villages lay and where the cherished river people live. Moreover, the cyclical recurring time frame, which Gilles Deleuze and Walter Benjamin believed in, is a foundational element of rememory. Oddoul also starts the story by establishing this cyclical, intergenerational time frame as the main temporal plane of Nubian culture through the reincarnation of Asha Ashry's spirit in her grandniece. "The River People" is, therefore, a narrative of rememory, where the cultural memory of Nubians is revived and retold. In the story, Oddoul documents and integrates a plethora of features of Nubian heritage and culture. These features are what mark the cultural memory of Nubians, as Jan Assmann explained in his theory of cultural memory. While Assmann noted that the cultural space, the traditional symbols, and the social bonding of communities is necessary for the continuation of cultural memory, Nubians now do not have any of these elements. Nonetheless, the endangered

language, the spiritual and traditional practices of Nubians, the natural landscape, gender relations, and the music, dance, and customs are all abundant in Oddoul's writing in an attempt to recreate this cultural memory through storytelling. This recreation allows for a return to the past, to the original site of memory, where the *picture*, as Sethe says, of these memories remains. By weaving these symbolic elements into the narrative, Oddoul creates a rememory that centralizes the Nile River which had surrounded Nubians for thousands of years and is the very core of their cultural practices, and, in fact, their existence.

The plot of the "The River People" revolves around Asha Ashry patiently waiting for Siyam, her childhood love and fiancée, to return to the Nubian village and marry her at last. We learn of the reason why Siyam is absent when Asha's "soul peers out toward the sea, and sniffs its salty Alexandrian breeze. There Siyam is anchored" (Oddoul, *Nights* 95). Siyam is one of the "men [who] went north to work as servants, and around their waists they wore cummerbunds that were red like the faces of their English masters and the [Turkish] beys" (Oddoul, *Nights* 96). Because of their displacement and the disruption of kinship and family structure in Nubia, Asha observes that women's "only job then was meeting the men who had migrated, when the season of their return came around. Then everyone would be together again, and the weddings would start" (Oddoul, *Nights* 99). The phenomenon of men migrating to the north has been researched in anthropological studies on Nubia, and Oddoul depicts a very realistic image of how it was socially perceived by women and elders. To understand this phenomenon and how it affected the Nubian community, a closer investigation must be done to uncover the various factors that shape how men and women are expected to act in this context.

As a Muslim society, Nubians believe in the importance of protecting women and the practice of male guardianship, where the male is expected to take responsibility of many aspects of a woman's livelihood and wellbeing. This practice has been labelled by many

western feminists as ‘oppressive’ and ‘patriarchal’ without looking contextually at how this notion is manifested in the real life of different Muslim societies as well as the advantages and disadvantages it has for both men and women. Deniz Kandiyoti’s article “Bargaining with Patriarchy” acknowledges that “patriarchy is probably the most overused and, in some respects most undertheorized” (274). She adds:

> As a result, the term *patriarchy* often evokes an overly monolithic conception of male dominance, which is treated at a level of abstraction that obfuscates rather than reveals the intimate inner workings of culturally and historically distinct arrangements between the genders. (Kandiyoti 274-75)

She highlights that despite the limitations this male guardianship puts on the mobility of women, many women in these societies are able to successfully navigate these limitations through different routes. For example, such women create alternate realms which they rule almost exclusively, including material and spiritual realms that transcend the dichotomy of public and private spheres. Many of them also find immense value in the communal relationships they are responsible for establishing whether as wives and mothers, clairvoyant and spiritual mediums, or cultural liaisons that pass down tradition and mythology from one generation to the next.

In her book *The Nubians of West Aswan*, anthropologist Anne M. Jennings thoroughly studies the religious, cultural, and societal implications of female and male experiences in post-*tahgir* Nubia. Like Kandiyoti, she contests the generalization of Islamic societies as ‘patriarchal’ and instead deploys her fieldwork among Nubian women to shed light on the real experience these women had during a time of displacement and adversity. She observes that in Old Nubia, “men and women are approximately equally dependent upon each other economically, socially, politically, or in other important ways [and] … because the two sex groups are mutually dependent, neither can be more autonomous than the other” (138). In the

pivotal moment when Oddoul's story takes place, this balanced structure is on the verge of changing. The Nubian women who are doing nothing but 'waiting' for the men are not doing so because they are helpless or awaiting *saving*; it is because their lifestyle is undergoing forced change and they are still confused as to how to pass through this stage. The strong family unit which has been central to Nubian life for so long is fractured, and the Nubian community is experiencing anxieties that are brand new to them.

Later in the "River People," Asha Ashry discovers that Siyam "works in a mansion by the sea and has a Greek girlfriend. They say she's a children's nanny. She doesn't know the meaning of the word shame. Siyam drinks alcohol like the beys and the foreigners, and then staggers about and falls into bed with the Greek girl" (Oddoul, *Nights* 104). This unravels one of the most vexing fears for the Nubian community, the men being tempted by the women and wealth in the north and leaving their native villages and people behind. Asha Ashry perfectly communicates this perspective:

> You've abandoned our gallabiyah and got yourself all dressed up in a northern suit. You've thrown away the skullcap and the noble turban and on a red fez the color of a monkey's backside . . . You're neither a southerner nor a northerner, neither one of us nor one of them" (Oddoul, *Nights* 106).

Historically, Nubian women marrying foreign or non-Nubian men is actually more accepted than men marrying non-Nubian women. Because women are a pillar of the Nubian village, men are expected to settle down with them, which has been the case for Arab and Turkish men who intermarried and integrated within the Nubian community for hundreds of years since the Mamluk and Ottoman times. Nubian women are thus a catalyst for the assimilation and expansion of Nubian society. Additionally, because they are the carriers of culture, language, and mythology, they are able to pass down this knowledge while raising their

children which further grounds the Nubian community in their homeland and shapes the new generations' relationship with Nubia (Jennings, *The Nubians* 19-28).

On the other hand, men marrying non-Nubian women are viewed as deviation from the accepted cultural and communal norm. Because of the powerful and magnetic effect Nubians believe that women have on men, the men will naturally follow women and assimilate into the cultural sphere to which their wives belong. When the new phenomenon of men migrating to Northern cities emerged, more men started to abandon their roots, forget about their family and kin in the secluded village, and become tempted by the capitalist city, where less value is given to community and more value is given to materialism. This anxiety is portrayed in Oddoul's imaginary Nubian village:

> The omda's [mayor] son went to the north. He disappeared. News arrived that he had married a girl from by the sea. His mother slapped her cheeks with grief for the loss of her son . . .The omda was greatly saddened. His head hung low. Whenever the men offered their condolences, he would croak, "My son's dead and I will accept no solace." (*Nights* 102)

Asha Ashry is equally grieving her lover's temptation by the Greek nanny. Her longing drives the narrative forward and strengthens her relationship with the Nubian land and the river people.

Asha Ashry is aware of the critical moment that is about to change her community forever. Her character is explicitly linked with the dam, as she is born the same year it is built. She feels that it controls the fate of her personal life and love story along with controlling the future of her people. She says;

> Dam piled high, you are the same age as me. You split up lovers. They dumped you in the way of the mighty river. You have blocked the life-flow of water. Behind you it has built up and drowned half the land. The river is good like its

> people, but the dam confined the water in a huge lake. The water swelled up like boiling milk, and as it rose it swallowed up half the green valley and destroyed it. It drowned lines of palm trees and polluted the sweet water. It ruined the time of peace and purity. (Oddoul, *Nights* 96)

Asha at once laments her personal pain, the loss of her community, and the deep sorrow they carry for the land they will leave behind. Oddoul utilizes the voice of Asha to document the landscape as well as the cultural practices that will perish in a matter of years. The short story is abundant with references to nature and its importance for the Nubian community, customs, and tradition. Moreover, he weaves these elements seamlessly within the fabric of his tale, which revives the scenery in the imagination of the reader and foregrounds the memory of the land and its people. Asha's memories are grounded within the landscape and natural elements surrounding her which mirrors how Morrison roots the (re)memories of her characters in physical places. The Nile, the villages, and scenery surrounding Asha become a crucial site of memory, a site that is on the verge of being drowned and lost forever.

The love story between Asha and Siyam is rooted in the environment and natural elements surrounding Nubia. As a child, she falls in love with him when she is playing with the fish by the river, and he saves her from the fisherman who was chasing her. Asha Ashry tells the story from her memory, with Siyam being completely absent as a character and only revived through her imagination. She recalls,

> Siyam, your father's house clung to the house of Anna Korty and my heart clung to yours. You were a few years older than me, and much taller. We grew up together, Siyam, like the palm tree lovers; two palm trees, a medium one leaning against a tall one, like a young woman resting her head on the chest of her tall, young man. I said the shorter one was me, Asha Ashry, and the tall one was

> you, Siyam. The two palm tree lovers . . . just like you and me. (Oddoul, *Nights* 93)

The palm trees are not only central to Asha's love story, but they are also the cornerstone of the Nubian community. Nubians cherished the palm tree and its resourceful abundance. As Taha points out:

> Date palms were the Nubians' most valued and cherished possessions. Every village, every household and every individual owned at least one palm tree or a share of a tree. They were the backbone of their local economy, a steady source of cash return and undoubtedly the only sign of wealth.

Moreover, the date palm held a special communal significance. The date-picking season was considered a time of celebration and dates were a staple of Nubian kitchens and social gatherings. The palm tree was also the center piece of every house's inner courtyard, where women would gather daily underneath its shade to prepare food for the family, play with the children, or converse and gossip with one another. Additionally, palm stalks were used in a versatile manner, whether in making the most important piece of furniture in the house, the *angareeb* (a bed or couch made of palm stalks), weaving baskets and containers, or to fashion colorful decoration plates to be hung on walls or used as trays. Their versatility and essentiality for Nubian life "suggests that 'perhaps no tree in the history of horticulture has ever penetrated into the social and economic life of a region as deeply as the date tree did in Nubia" (Taha). Therefore, Oddoul sets out the narrative by tying the main event driving the short story with the traditional landscape of Old Nubia.

While waiting for Siyam, Asha Ashry attends the weddings of one Nubian generation of young men and women after the other. The abundance of wedding descriptions that Oddoul narrates in "The River People" and other stories in this collection are an attempt to document Nubians' cultural memory. Oddoul ties together the elements of space and

landscape with the traditional customs of weddings and their vibrant sounds to create a form of rememory through his narrative. He paints a picture of the weddings in the original space where they happened, even though this space has ceased to exist decades ago, rendering these weddings a rememory that is rooted in their original physical space and immune to the passing of time. Weddings are among the most significant communal events in Nubian society; they "symbolize happiness to Nubians, and these rituals constitute a kind of prototype or model for Nubian ceremonialism . . . any other ceremonies . . . were modeled on weddings, and all the basic symbols of Nubian ritualism were brought together at the event of marriage" (Kennedy 172). The elaborate ceremony lasted for two weeks and continued for up to a month, with different stages of preparation and celebrations that had their distinct customs and traditions (Kennedy 175). Therefore, it was not only a celebration through which the bride and groom embark on a new life journey, but also a chance for the entire community to bond and come together. The people of the native village of the bride and groom gathered to help with the preparations along with the numerous surrounding villages who were also always invited to this large ceremony. Moreover, weddings were an excellent chance for eligible bachelors to set their eyes on a future fiancée, as it was impossible for that many Nubian young men and women to intermingle at such close proximity in any other occasion.

Music and dance were the core of Nubian weddings and continue to be significant cultural symbols that survives in the memory of Nubians in the *tahgir* villages and in the diaspora. While weddings all over the world are always coupled with dance and music, the case in Nubia is quite unique. Among the many Nubian customs and traditions that are almost extinct now among displaced communities both in the *tahgir* villages and the diaspora, the distinct Nubian music and dance in weddings are the most regularly maintained. Nubian anthropologist Fayrouz Kaddal observes this in her thesis "On Displacement and Music in

Nubia," where she mentions that "songs are what unites Nubians all over the country, or probably everywhere in the world" (101). Haggag Oddoul echoes this universal sentiment when he says: "there isn't a Nubian on earth who would miss a wedding" (*Nights* 35). Oddoul vividly encapsulates the essence of Nubian weddings through an audio-visual narration in *Nights of Musk*. In the short story "Nights of Musk," he narrates:

> A wedding party draws the whole village. Even the River People, inhabitants of the cool depths, emerge dripping from the water alone and in groups . . . We call to them "Welcome amon nutto, welcome People of the River." The dance flares up and draws us into intense rhythmic passion, drowning in the thunderous roar of the tambourine *dum-taka dum-tak* and the explosion of clapping palms *taraaak trak-trak taraaak*. (35-36).

Here, Oddoul weaves the wedding ceremony with the mythical presence of the river people. The real Nubians and the imaginary river people unite, and the proximity between them intensifies. The "roar of the tambourine" and the "explosion of clapping palms" merge with the scenery, the landscape, and the river that flows alongside the Nubian villages.

Kaddal's survey of anthropologist studies in the area highlights a lack of "visualisation of sound" (68). She points out that the sound elements in Old Nubian weddings and gatherings are extremely central and in need to be documented, which Oddoul successfully attempts to do in his short story collection. The use of onomatopoeia in "Nights of Musk" is complimentary to his description of another Nubian wedding in "The River People":

> The weddings come one after the other. At night, the villages are lit up with lamps and torches. Double-barreled shotguns are fired into the air. The men have the fire of aragi [alcoholic spirit distilled from dates] in their veins. They

beat the tambourines and clap and stamp the ground with their feet in proud rhythmic steps. The virgins' hearts are aflutter, and their very cells dance to the flood of hot southern songs. (99)

Oddoul brings the sound of Nubian weddings to life. His depiction is so richly intense that it makes the reader feel and experience the vibrant ambience of a Nubian wedding and evokes the memory of how vivid the weddings used to be in Old Nubia.

Along with 'visualizing' the sounds of Nubian weddings through the use of onomatopoeia, Oddoul also supplements his description of Nubian weddings with music lyrics from specific songs that are popular in Nubian weddings until today. A key feature of singing in Nubian weddings is the communal engagement of all the guests with the music and songs. Kaddal notes through her fieldwork in Nubia that "the music is mostly learned [and performed] through communal participation" (68). Additionally, she points out that "the musician as well as the audience are participants in the creation of music" (Kaddal 16). Nubian music is designed and performed in a way that invites this participation: the audience are expected to clap at certain beats to compliment the music, the women's ululations are integral to the performance, and most Nubian songs have complete verses of lyrics that the audience are supposed to repeat after the main singer. Oddoul depicts this communal practice:

Every night a procession escorting the bride to the groom's house, the women and the girls in rows behind the men, sprinkling salt, rose water, and Daughter of Sudan perfume. They sing in their soft, delicate voices:

To the Prophet we give praise على النبي صلينا

The lover of the Prophet we praise عاشق النبي صلينا

We give praise and ask protection. صلينا واتولينا

(*Nights* 100)

The verses uttered by the women are important because they reference two things: firstly, they are the lyrics from a well-known song with the same name, "To the Prophet we give praise," and second because these three lines are some of the most common responses an audience would utter during the gaps between the verses of a song. In addition to repeating song verses after the singer, there is a communal tradition that entails the audience uttering specific verses or phrases, many of which are considered a kind of *dhikr* or Divine remembrance. These would include prayers to the Prophet Muhammad, praising Allah, and remembering Him with some of the ninety-nine names He is ascribed, of which the verse mentioned in this specific song by Oddoul is an example.

Furthermore, Oddoul makes another direct reference to a popular Nubian wedding song called "*al-Leyla al-Henna*," meaning tonight is the henna night. In this song, "the men carry each groom, and each groom waves his sword in the air, and the men sing to him: *Raise up, O groom, your sword for your guests*" (Oddoul, *Nights* 101). The inclusion of specific lyrics from well-known songs commonly played in Nubian weddings is not only an attempt to evoke the memory of this joyful occasion and connect to traditions of Old Nubia, but the style with which Oddoul tells the story is also distinctly Nubian. Oddoul's interruption of the flow of the story to include verses from Nubian music is what Ibrahim Sha'rawi highlights as a specific feature of Nubian storytelling. In his book The Myth and the Legend in the Lands of Nubia, he illustrates that:

> وهذه الأغاني التي تكون أجزاء أساسية من كل حكاية من نوعها تمنح الحكاية طاقة نغمية وتعمق الصور وتمنح الخرافة ظلال الواقع الحي فأنت لا تسمع عن شخص قد يكون وهمًا بل تسمع صوته وهو يغني بكلمات معينة ليست من حديثنا اليومي فكأنما تستحضره في هذه الكلمات المنغومة..(86)

these songs, which constitute main features of each mythological story, give the narrative a melodic energy and renders the myth a reflection of lived reality. For you are not listening to potential imagined narrators, but you are hearing

> their voice as they sing specific words that are not from everyday speech, so it is as if you are evoking their presence through the musical lyrics.

Oddoul's integration of music and lyrics in the narrative places it within the tradition of oral and mythological storytelling in Old Nubia, a tradition that is disappearing with the fading memories of elders who had witnessed it in its native habitat. He is reviving this tradition by recreating it in the physical, Nilotic space where it originally happened, despite the long decades that had passed since then. Thus, Oddoul continues to reinforce his narrative as a rememory of Nubian culture, one that encapsulates the Nubian myths and legends that are intertwined with the Nile. As Gilmore observes,

> Oddoul's writing also challenges the language of the modern (implicitly urban) subject of mainstream Egyptian literature by emphasising popular mythic and allegoric narrative modes like the *haddutah* (folk tale) that draw from Nubian collective memory and suffuse the everyday with fantastical elements, blurring the boundaries between the natural and supernatural worlds. (*Dams* 133)

Nubian dancing, especially by women, has been a subject of anthropological and cultural study for decades. This is because women of darker skin have been depicted as dancers on ancient Egyptian reliefs and tomb decorations. African American Egyptologist Solange Ashby notes that "earlier Egyptologists reveal a racism that disparaged the type of dance performed by the Nubian women as 'wild' and described the women as wearing 'barbarous' clothing" (63). Ashby gives an example of this from an account by an Egyptologist stating that "only as an exception, though, do Negro girls dance in a way that assimilates Egyptian sophistication" (63). Orientalist Egyptologist Leslie Greener also echoes this racist sentiment in his observations of Nubians in the pre-*tahgir* villages:

> 'Nubians are still savages *au fond*,' wrote Amelia Edwards in 1874; but one sees little evidence of it now. Barbaric dances by Nubians are drawn on the

> walls of ancient Egyptian tombs . . . The only dancing that went on in our village was done by the poor fisherman's little girl, who used to entertain her parents in front of their house in the twilight. Yet the little imp had some residue of Africa in the way she moved, uninstructed but fascinating. (41)

The dancing with 'some residue in Africa' is a Nubian tradition sustained proudly by Nubians till today. Dancing is the heart and soul of the Nubian culture both in the *tahgir* villages and in the diaspora. It is distinctly different from other kinds of Egyptian and Arab dancing, and its moves are inspired by the Nilotic environment of Old Nubia.

Oddoul describes one of the dances traditionally performed by women, the *firry aragid*, or perch dance. *Firry* in Nubian means the perch fish, a kind of fish that is commonly eaten in Egypt but was considered holy in Old Nubia. Asha Ashry narrates dancing like the *firry*, which is inspired by the rapid and fluidly smooth movement of fish in the water of the Nile River. In one of the weddings she attended while waiting for Siyam, she says "I dance the perch dance: fast, flirtatious steps, both arms outstretched, one in front, one behind. The men can't take their eyes off me, and the girls are delighted . . . The dance is a gift from the River People, from the perch, who taught me how to dance their dance the correct way" (Oddoul, *Nights* 100). The *firry* is distinctly Nubian because it reflects the cultural and spiritual proximity of the Nubian people to the Nile River and its inhabitants. The river people and the fish are both spiritually valuable for Nubians. The Nile River is thus a source of inspiration not only because it is economically valuable, but because it is a sacred and divine source that influences the traditions of Nubians in various realms. The dance is also described in detail by Ibrahim Sha'rawi in one of the Nubian folkloric tales he narrates in his book. He mentions:

> وكادت عيناه تخرج من محاجرها وهو يتابع فتاة ترقص رقصة السمك الرعاش ونهودها تتطاير مع حركاتها الساخنة الملتهبة ووشاح السردحان الحريري يزيد من بهاء الرقصة وجلالها والفتاة تحرك قدميها

ويديها تتحرك إلى الأمام والخلف متخلعة وتدور حول نفسها ثم تتقدم فتاة أخرى أجمل من الأولى فتعدو خلفها في رقصة لا يستقر فيها جزء من الجسد في مكانه والحلي الذهبية تحدث مع الحركات السريعة موسيقى راقصة. (160)

His eyes almost popped out of their sockets as they followed the girl dancing the *firry* dance, her bosom fluttering with her hot, passionate moves. Her silk scarf only makes her dancing more exquisite and glorious. The girl is moving her feet while her arms flirtingly swing back and forth. She spins around, and then another even more beautiful girl takes over, she runs around her so that not one part of her body stays in place, and the gold jewelry creates with the swift movements a rhythmic music.

Both Sha'rawi and Oddoul brilliantly demonstrate the spirit of the *firry* dance, its musical intensity, and its importance as a celebration ritual that brings the community together.

The *firry aragid* is also communally important because it is a dance that passes down from one generation to the next as well as facilitates the courtship between young men and women in weddings. As described by Kennedy, the *firry* dance is where "the elderly women of the immediate families of the marriage then dance between the two groups [of men and women]" (187). He adds that "wedding dancing . . . acts as a kind of showcase for potential partners and as an opportunity for restrained courtship and display" (Kennedy 195). Oddoul also underscores this function of *firry* dancing in "The River People," where Asha Ashry witnesses "a new generation [that] is looking forward to its destiny" (102). Asha Ashry, "the perch princess," is responsible for teaching the generation of girls how to dance the flirtatious *firry* dance to lure suitors and lovers. She says:

Come on, Fatim, I'll teach you the rules of the perch dance. This is the turn, the winding movement, the affected shyness in the poise of the neck, and the tilt of

> your head, your arms outstretched in front and behind. Straighten your back. Hide half of your face with your maiden's veil, then uncover it. Move toward the sea of eager men, as if you're going to drown in them, and then slip away and let them lick their lips. Clever girl! Don't be too suggestive, for that's thought distasteful and brings gossip. (Oddoul, *Nights* 103)

By illustrating the vitality of the *firry* dance as a Nubian, feminine, communal act that is rooted in the landscape and culture of the land, Oddoul subversively contests the eroticized and orientalist manner in which the dance has been perceived. Along with Ibrahim Sha'rawi, he reclaims the women's *firry* dancing as a Nubian tradition and shows the beauty, tastefulness, and uniqueness of the culture, in contrast with the racist view of it being a 'barbarous' and 'wild' dance with a 'residue of Africa,' as if the dance being 'African' is an insult to Nubian culture. There is no 'residue' of Africa in the *firry*; Nubian dancing is fully African not only because Nubia is geographically located in the heart of Africa, but also because the essence of the dance is loudly and organically African.

Asha Ashry imagines what her wedding would be like when her love, Siyam, finally comes back and in doing so, she references the significance of the Nile River in marriage rituals. After the magnificent wedding celebrations, she would say to him, "the following morning we will bathe in the river, a purification, so that God will kindly bless us and grant us children" (Oddoul, *Nights* 101). Bathing after sexual intercourse is an obligatory practice in the Islamic faith, and so it is expected that a bride and groom would bathe in the Nile after their first night as newlyweds to perform this act of ablution. This purification is also important because of the blessings and fertility the Nile is believed to grant to the bathers. Moreover, bathing in the Nile to Nubians is a form of baptism, which is traced to be one of the cultural legacies of the Christian past of Nubia. For example, newborns' heads were submerged in the Nile, and the water was used to draw a cross on their foreheads—a custom

which went on for a long time even after Nubians embraced Islam, and the bride and groom's bathing in the Nile carried a similar spiritual significance (Jennings, "A Nubian" 545-47). The Nile symbolizes a rebirth and renewal that the holy water grants to its people. Hence, the ceremonies of birth and marriage are closely intertwined with bathing in the Nile, where in each occasion those desiring the blessings of the holy river must bathe in it daily for a week to obtain its gifts of fertility and good fortune. Oddoul brilliantly illustrates this unique Nubian custom in another short story, "Nights of Musk," where the bride and groom narrate their ritual bathing in the Nile:

> In the darkness before dawn, we jumped into the celestial Nile to perform our ablutions in its pure and holy water. It flows from the springs of Salsabeel in Paradise. The rippling water has its effect. It passes over our bodies and we absorb its silt and fertile mud. My pores draw it into my bones, into my marrow, and it kisses the water of life and gives it its dark color. It embraces your sweet body slowly and deliberately and seeps inside until it rests in the womb, enfolding the tiny beginning, giving it color. There it grows and curls up. And outside, the belly looks like a soft, round sand dune. And on the day God wills, our love comes out to us, a blessed child with the sun in his face, crying. (40)

The imagery of the Nile being a giver of fertility is rooted in the fact that its silt is what literally provides the soil with the minerals that nourish plants and grows luscious, healthy crops. Since ancient times, the Nile has been depicted in such imagery. The Nile deity in ancient Egypt was represented by the god Hapi (also spelled Hapy), who also ruled environmental and physical fertility. Seawright observes that "Egyptians showed Hapi as having rather large breasts, like those of a mother with a baby." The swelling, elongated breasts simulate Yemaja's overflowing breasts from which the streams of the Niger River poured. Like Yemaja, the depiction of the long breasts is "an allusion to the nourishing effect

of the flood" that irrigates the land of Egypt (Kákosy 290). Hapi "was thought to have lived at the 1st Cataract" (Seawright) and "was worshiped throughout Egypt, but was particularly popular around Aswan" (Hill). Moreover,

> The ancient Egyptians believed the Nile to be the center of the world and that the source of this great river lay in a narrow rocky gorge near Aswan. Within the gorge, the myths say, the mysterious Spirit of the Nile, the god Hapy, unleashed the miraculous waters which flooded the land with rich loam and "divine sweat" and allowed men to survive in the desert. (Fernea and Fernea 27)

Hapi's cultic influence was thus most widely assimilated into lower Nubia, and the association of the Nile with fertility is strongest among Nubians. This belief has infiltrated most of their cultural practices since ancient times and was preserved and integrated over the centuries. Nubian indigenous culture has progressed with each era that marked it with special rituals and traditions, yet their features continue to centralize the Nile and its holy, abundant water. From the Hapi cultic rituals and sacrifices in ancient times, to Christian baptism and purification practices, and Islamic ablutions and obligatory cleansing, the spiritual significance of the Nile as a site of blessings and abundance is a common feature of the progression of religions and cults in Nubia, which continues to reaffirm Nubians' connection to the river.

Besides the river water being necessary for the daily ablutions of Muslim Nubians, the Nile, as Oddoul imagines, is believed to flow "from the springs of Salsabeel in Paradise" (*Nights* 40). Rivers have a significant value in the consciousness of Muslims because they are repeatedly described in the Quran as one of the defining features of heaven. The description of the heavens in the Quran is almost always coupled with reference to "flowing streams" abundant in its gardens. One of the most illustrious portrayals of heaven in the Quran occurs

in Surat Muhammad, verse fifteen: “here is a picture of the Garden promised to the pious: rivers of water forever pure, rivers of milk forever fresh, rivers of wine, a delight for those who drink, rivers of honey clarified and pure, [all] flow in it” (Abdel Haleem, trans. 15). The imagery of lavish, infinite rivers in the gardens of heaven only amplifies the holy status of the Nile River in Nubian culture and renders it an extension of the opulent rivers of heaven that Muslim Nubians find spiritually valuable.

According to Kennedy, the people of Old Nubia practiced a form of Islam called ‘popular Islam,’ where the beliefs and customs native to the region are incorporated into the orthodox beliefs and requirements prescribed by religion (10). He points out that “Islamists . . . tend to devote their exclusive attention to exegeses of the texts of great philosophers, theologians, legalists, and poets of the Middle Ages. How Islam is lived and practiced in the village of the Middle East is not generally regarded as a meaningful subject for study” (Kennedy 5). Hence, the study of these lived Islamic practices is crucial to understand the culture of Nubia. The version of popular Islam prevalent in Nubia is highly associated with the Islamic science and practice of Sufism, which rests on the belief that the individual self and the ego must be esoterically transcended in order to come to a communal union with God and His universal powers. Thus, the focus of Sufism was to achieve “psychological and spiritual satisfactions” through divine proximity and to go beyond fulfilling physical Islamic obligations and reach a higher state of spirituality (Kennedy 99). The practice of Sufism includes *dhikr* rituals of collective remembrance and praise of Allah and visitations (*ziyara*) to the sacred tombs of Sufi saints, or sheikhs. The saints “possessed baraka (grace, power to bless) and were capable of performing miracles (karamas)” (Kennedy 65). Visitations to the saints usually occurred on the sheikh’s *mawlid*, which is “a special festival held in commemoration of him by his adherents” (Kennedy 67).

Oddoul depicts the journey to a *mawlid*, where Asha Ashry and her family traveled by boat to visit one of the nearby villages that contained a shrine of an important sheikh:

> On Sheikh Shebeyka's birthday people came in droves, some riding donkeys and camels, crossing the sand, passing through the hamlets and villages on their way to his shrine . . . On the hill in front of Sheikh Shebeyka's mausoleum, we complained to him of our confusion amid sighs of despair, and we muttered nervously our fears of the future. (Oddoul, *Nights* 97)

The communal therapeutic effect of the visitation is expressed by Asha. Sufi rituals had this effect not only because the spiritual relief they provided for the believers, but also because it "brought members of the tribe from the city and the village together, at a special time for reaffirmation of tribal solidarity" (Kennedy 99). Moreover, the "members of the tribe shared the belief in the *baraka* and *karamas* of one particular sheikh and a sense of possession of these traditions, as well as of the shrine itself" (Kennedy 99). The Nile was also central to the Sufi practices of Nubians. Its sacred water was considered a medium that facilitated interactions with the sheikh's spirit; its water was sprinkled on the tombs and shrines and a special garment that was worn by the sheikh, called the *keswa,* was washed in the river to insure the fertility of the land (Kennedy 95). In referring to the Sufi practices of Nubians, Oddoul once again attempts to preserve elements of native Nubian culture through his writing to consolidate rememory and contest the death of this culture as a thing of the past.

Nubians are often depicted as illiterate people who do not know much about their history. This is reflected in "how history has been rewritten to either to distort the role they played in the history of Egypt, or to bypass it altogether . . . As if Nubians are a thing of the past" (Ezzidin 44-45). To remedy this, Oddoul reclaims Nubian history and heritage through the narrative of "The River People." While Asha Ashry and her family are on their way to the *mawlid*, she narrates that,

> Opposite the temple of Abu Simbel, in front of the statues of the most beautiful of all women, our princess Nefertari, princess of the south, we clapped to the rhythm and sang of her beauty and of ours. We were happy . . . But at the four statues of Ramses, mighty conqueror from the North, we did not sing. We looked at him in silence and disapproval, and we smiled at the monkeys that climbed up his mountain. (Oddoul, *Nights* 97)

Oddoul here refers to the popular belief that Queen Nefertari's origin was from the south of Egypt, which is referenced in traditional Nubian songs. King Ramses II, one the greatest kings of the New Kingdom in ancient Egypt, led many battles in Nubia and built the famous Abu Simbel temple around 1270 BCE, which is considered the best architectural feature of ancient Egypt after the three pyramids of Giza (Fahim, *Dams* 125). His image as the conqueror of the south was carved in a large relief depicting him on a chariot, aiming his bow and arrow at the dark-skinned Nubians kneeling before him. Oddoul illustrates that the propagated discourse of Nubians being ignorant of their history is false, and that Nubians are consciously aware of their history to the extent of having critical thoughts and opinions, which is why they look at Ramses with 'silence and disapproval.'

Nubians have been the keepers and protectors of a plethora of ancient monuments for millennia. The way Nubians understood and assimilated the rich history of their land was through practice and oral accounts rather than the documenting process of historicization. As a people whose customs and traditions are interwoven with these monuments and the mythological and cultural significance they hold, Nubians are well aware of their history and are able to integrate it within their own stories, myths, and practices. The harmonious existence with history which Nubians enjoyed was interrupted by the succession of dams erected on their land. After the High Dam was built, Nubians were expected to melt into the social fabric of Egypt and adapt to the nationalistic current of the country which was pushed

forward during the time of Nasser. In her dissertation, Claire Nicholas examines the cultural and educational discourse on Nubians in Egypt through museums or school curricula after the displacement of Nubian people. She concludes that there "are strong indications that Nubian people's rights to access their history are not being recognized" (210) and that school curricula "has not concentrated on any aspect of Nubian history other than the period they were invaded and ruled by the Ancient Egyptians" (180). As a post-displacement writer, Oddoul protests this erasure by integrating elements of informal history along with the mythological and cultural elements that are foregrounded in his narrative.

Oddoul's use of the imagery of Ramses II can also be read as an implicit reference to Gamal Abdel Nasser, whose iconic 1961 speech promising Nubians dignity and prosperity in return for their ultimate sacrifice of their land was given in front of the temple of Abu Simbel. As Gilmore remarks:

> Choreographed with grand rhetorical and visual symbolism, Nasser's appearance at the temple is designed to reinforce the redemptive symbolism of his rule and by extension that of the dam itself, by portraying him as a modern pharaoh and modernisation as the new religion of the state which alone has the power to make the nation great again. (*Dams* 104)

Oddoul makes no explicit political remarks throughout the short story. He continuously utilizes the landscape and the mythology of Nubians, relying only on cultural memory as the main force that drives the narrative. While Jacquemond also points out that Oddoul "tended to separate his political views from his literary work," his political opinions actually seem to be written in between the lines (183). His story is supposed to be set before the establishment of the High Dam, but the disapproval of Asha as she passes by the grand statue of Ramses II could reflect Oddoul's own viewpoint of the High Dam and Nasser's policies. It can be interpreted as follows:

> Tying together notions of political, divine and imperial authority, this symbolism clearly equates Nasser's rule with that of the resurgent Egyptian nation whose peerless strength would be confirmed by the completion of that great pyramid of modern times, the Aswan High Dam, which was both the world's largest dam and whose reservoir – Lake Nasser – constituted the largest ever man-made body of water. (Gilmore, *Dams* 105)

Towards the end of the short story, generations of young men and women have married and had children, while Asha still awaits the return of Siyam. Her only solace is her love for the Nile and her friendship with the river people. She says,

> I sit by the river. The sacred Nile flows unceasingly like an endless dream. Fine delicate whirlpools are on the surface of the water like the generous dimples on the plump bronzed body of a girl sauntering shyly along. All around our Nile is a translucent halo, and the tips of the waves are gentle like the steps of a tender young child. Its perfumed breeze diffuses throughout the universe, and I take great drafts through my nose, my eyes, my pores. (Oddoul, *Nights* 105)

Asha absorbs the essence of the river and allows it to permeate her being. She is starting to belong less to the land, which she witnesses as it withers and drowns, and more to the water and its swift yet powerful force. To her, the river is a safe refuge that preserves Old Nubia. The land, however, represents danger, uncertainty, and fear. As she looks at the houses stranded in the desert sand, she asks, "what has become of our villages where the Nile reigns? What has happened to our villages where the wolf roams in the mountains, the scorpion scurries over the sand, and the snake crawls? Our villages were once so safe" (Oddoul, *Nights* 112). Asha seems eager to leave behind the doomed village and join her beloved river people in the depth of the Nile, which foreshadows the tragic end of the story.

Asha learns through "Klow To, the Well Child," that she should expect news from Siyam soon. The myth of Klow To says that

> a small child, only a babe in arms, fell into the well, and the guardian at the bottom touched his mind. He became known as Klow To, . . . and was ever after slightly unhinged. Squint-eyed, he rode a stick that he pretended to be a donkey, and with his gaping mouth he would make predictions. (Oddoul, *Nights* 104)

Ibrahim Shaʿrawi refers to this myth in his book and explains that attributing such metaphysical powers to mentally challenged people, especially children, helped them integrate and find purpose within the Nubian society. For years, Klow To has been bringing good news to the girls of the village. Every time he would address one of them, she would get married, have a child, or receive parcels and money from a husband or son in the north. Fortune smiled upon all of Asha's friends when they received omens from Klow To, but she still waited for her turn. Finally,

> Klow To came running up on his stick donkey. He was waving a piece of paper. He stopped in front of me panting . . . My heart fluttered: good news. He gave me the paper. It was wet. He didn't utter a word. The joy carried me away. I laughed and I spun around and around and hugged the paper. At last . . . Siyam . . . Siyam. How happy I was . . . I swam to the River People to tell them the news. The perch danced and cavorted. (Oddoul, *Nights* 109)

A week later, instead of welcoming the men coming back on the post boat, and Asha finally reuniting with Siyam, the village receives terrible news. The boat Siyam was on drowned in the Nile, and many men died in the accident. Siyam was one of them. The women of the village fell into deep despair: "They wept at the fate of their husbands and sons in exile. Terrified of an unknown future, they bemoaned their lot, the migration of the men to the north" (Oddoul, *Nights* 112). Upon hearing the news, Asha started acting insane. Instead

of dancing the sacred and solemn dance of bereavement which Nubians traditionally performed during funerals, Asha was dancing the vibrant *firry* dance of celebration. In denial, Asha stated that Siyam "knows the village has had the life sucked from it. He went over to the River People where every pleasurable delight is seen and heard, where aragi flows in abundance . . . I'll wait for him. He spends the night dancing with the water genies. I won't join in the funeral dance" (Oddoul, *Nights* 113). Asha was not able to cry, eat, or sleep. She lost weight drastically and her beauty, for which the people of the village called her Asha Ashry, withered away. She was locked at home because her family feared that her irrational behavior might cause her to harm herself, and she fell into deep depression. The wedding season of the village was delayed, but a few weeks later, the men who had survived the accident had to go back to the north, so they had to hold the weddings for the ones who were engaged. While everyone was at the wedding, and after her mother and grandmother fell asleep, Asha was able to sneak out from her confinement and go vent about her sorrows to the river people.

At the riverbank, Asha sat by "the drowned valley eaten up by the flood" of the Nile (Oddoul, *Nights* 115). As she plunged into the water, she looked at

> the eternal hamboul ['river course' in Nubian] amid the shallow lake. I can still make it out. It is like molten gold flowing inexorably northward, with the stars reflecting upon its surface like silver turbans. They are the turbans of the River People. A winter mist passed beneath the stars and shrouded the thigh of the western mountain, as it bent down to drink from the water. The turbans vanished . . . The lid was taken off the river, the translucent sheet removed . . . The River People were calling me, and Anna Asha, … and Siyam. (Oddoul, *Nights* 115)

Upon the lid of the river being removed for her, Asha knew it was her turn to join the river people and her loved ones who lived amongst them. For her lover, Siyam, she wanted to enter

the world of the river people as a beautiful bride. She went to her grandmother's house to find her old bridal ornaments:

> In Anna Korty's room was the inlaid chest. I opened it and pulled out from among the gold objects the disk of the Almighty. I fastened it so it hung in the middle of my forehead. The necklace came down to my waist. The gold covered me. Ah, a perfect bride I was. I laughed with joy. "Tonight I will be married to proud Siyam." I went over to the bed, kicked off my sandals, and climbed up to take the sword off the wall. I brandished it in the air and sang in a hoarse voice choked with salty tears, "Raise your sword, O groom. Raise up your sword for your guests. Raise up, O groom, your sword for your guests." (Oddoul, *Nights* 115-16)

When Anna Korty woke up and could not find Asha in the house or the courtyard, she knew in her heart that her granddaughter was about to meet the same fate of her sister. She screamed the same words she had over twenty years before, "Asha Ashry has gone to the River People" (Oddoul, *Nights* 117).

The story culminates in a final, ultimate act of rememory. The events are taking place in the timeline of "Aion," where the past and the present are constantly shifting and melding into one another, and the linear passing of time is distorted. As Asha enters the river, she becomes the embodied reincarnation of her grandaunt, and her grandmother who once lamented her sister is now wailing for her granddaughter. The timeline of "The River People" is not moving forward, the events take Asha back in time so that she can undo the disastrous past and recreate a future that is abundant with memory. The scene of rememory challenges the historical past, the one in which the Nubians' culture is irrelevant and dismissible in the face of the modern, progressive High Dam and its industrial goals. Moreover, this grand scene of rememory is ingrained in the sacred space of the Nile, a space that represents

immense cultural signification for Nubians and from which the myth of the river people emerges. The realization of the myth of the river people in Asha's narrative foregrounds cultural (re)memory in the face of homogenous history. Jan Assmann asserts that "in the context of cultural memory, the distinction between myth and history vanishes. Not the past as such, as it is investigated and reconstructed by archaeologists and historians, counts for the cultural memory, but only the past as it is remembered" ("Communicative" [*Cultural Memory*] 113). Oddoul is rewriting the history of his own people through the rememory of the river people and Asha, a history where authentic mythology, culture, and rituals of Nubians are prioritized.

Asha's voluntary entrance into the river to join its people and her beloved grandaunt and fiancé is what Walter Benjamin had termed the moment of Kairos. In this moment of Kairos, Asha's personal past, the past of the people of her village, and of Nubians at large, is resurrected:

> Asha Ashry neared the deep hamboul. The water reached the tops of her thighs. She dragged her legs through the flood water and the smothered fertility of the thick silt. Her hand was raised, waving the sword, and she sang mournfully, "Raise up, O groom, raise up, O Siyam . . ." She stumbled, then righted herself, laughing and weeping and continuing her song, ". . . your sword for your guests," The reflection of the stars on the water sparkled in her eyes . . . The Great Star was the disk of the Almighty on the brow of the water. "The River People will sing our wedding song . . . The perch himself will dance for us, Siyam." (Oddoul, *Nights* 117-18)

Jan Assmann states that the "actualization of the most remote past [from which cultural memory originates] requires certain occasions, such the gathering of the community for some celebration or other" ("Communicative" [*Cultural Memory*] 112). Therefore, the moment of

rememory, where Asha is celebrating her wedding in the midst of the Nile with the company of the river people and the *firry* fish, is the perfect opportunity for the narrative of Nubian history to be revisited, restored, and retold in the present. The rememory of the personal, the collective, and the cultural are welded into one in the story of Asha and the river people. Asha's reunion with Siyam and the *amon nutto* under the Nile is the metaphorical reunion of indigenous Nubians in the *tahgir* and the diaspora with their drowned villages and distorted cultural memory.

Chapter IV: The Rememory of "The Nile Bride"

Yahya Mukhtar's short story "The Nile Bride" is a journey of deeply personal memories that takes place on the surface of the Nile River. Unlike Oddoul, who frequently advocates for Nubian rights through his creative and non-fictional writings, Mukhtar believes that the writer's only duty is to pen narratives that reflect universally humane concerns without explicitly voicing political or personal opinions. His fiction, however, reveals that his primary interest is the Nubian cause and the revival and preservation of its cultural memory. The prominent Egyptian writer and literary critic Gamal al-Ghitani wrote a foreword to Mukhtar's short story collection, The Nile Bride. He stressed in it that despite his focus on the Nubian collective memory, Mukhtar was also invested in writing about the human psyche and its complex intricacies. He states that Mukhtar captures the experiences of marginalized people in Nubian and southern societies: the poor, the enslaved, and the outsiders (al-Ghitani 5). Mukhtar was born in the Old Nubian village 'al-Genina wa al-Shibbak,' where he lived before coming to Cairo with his parents as a child. He witnessed the cultural practices of the village long before the High Dam was built, and the essence of Nubian heritage was therefore engrained in his young memory (Mukhtar, "Nubia"). Nonetheless, Mukhtar's writings do not depict this essence vibrantly like Oddoul's style. Mukhtar's Nubia, which he remembers and writes about, centralizes the experience of individuals and shows their pain and struggles.

The title of Mukhtar's collection, The Nile Bride, alludes to the ancient Egyptian myth of the Nile bride, which is still abundant in the Egyptian cultural imaginary to this day and it is manifested in modern films and music. The origins of this myth are controversial. The popular version of this myth narrates that one year in ancient times, the Nile did not flood as it did every year. This hindered the agricultural production in Egypt and left the people on the verge of famine. After numerous failed attempts by ancient Egyptians to ask for Hapi's blessings through offerings and prayers, one of the high priests of the Nile cult

received a revelation from Hapi himself in which the Nile deity demanded to be wed to a beautiful maiden; only then would the curse be lifted, and the awaited flood would return. Since then, during the summer of every year, a fair maiden would be chosen from among the most beautiful girls of Egypt. The maiden would be dressed lavishly, adorned with jewelry, and perfumed in preparation for this celebration. Before the Nile was expected to rise in its yearly flood, an extravagant festival took place where the royalty and commoners would witness the Nile bride being thrown alive into the river from a luxurious boat to be the god Hapi's bride (Salah El-Din).

This fantastical story has no evidence in ancient Egyptian history. Egyptologist Hind Salah El-Din locates the origin of the human sacrifice version of the myth in the Pseudo-Plutarch historical traditions of the second century CE:

> On which account the river Nile was not increasing, the Egyptians were oppressed with famine. Upon which the oracle made answer, that the land should be again blessed with plenty, if the king would sacrifice his daughter to atone the anger of the Gods. Upon which the king, though greatly afflicted in his mind, gave way to the public good, and suffered his daughter to be led to the altar. But so soon as she was sacrificed, the king, not able to support the burden of his grief, threw himself into the river Melas, which after that was called Aegyptus. But then it was called Nilus upon this occasion. (Plutarch 497)

Salah El-Din demonstrates that the actual Nile cult of the god Hapi, which was most active in Aswan, honored the river because they believed in their cosmogony that the Nile was the original water from which the land of Egypt appeared and that the flooding of the river each year was a recreation of this original phenomenon. The priests of this cult celebrated Hapi twice every year by thoroughly preparing offerings of various vegetables, fruits, and animals, as well as various male and female figurines depicting Hapi and his nymphs made from

different valuable materials and thrown into the river. Furthermore, the priests prayed to Hapi by signing the ancient "Hymn to the Nile" that invocated the blessings of the river and its flood and was also written on papyrus and thrown into the river. Salah El-Din provides that evidence for these celebrations has been found in large ancient Egyptian reliefs inside the temples of Gebel el-Silisla in Aswan, dating back to 1225-1300 BCE.

The myth of the Nile bride was revived in the histories written after the Islamic conquest of Egypt. Ibn Abd al-Hakam (803-870) narrated a version of this story in The History of the Conquest of Egypt, North Africa and Spain. He says that the Copts of Egypt had come to 'Amr ibn al-'As, the conqueror and governor of Egypt during the Caliphate of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, to ask his permission to continue their tradition of throwing a maiden into the Nile in order to get the river's blessings and ensure its yearly flood. In response to this, the Caliph 'Umar sent a note addressed to the Nile River, in which he prayed to Allah that the river floods and asked 'Amr ibn al-'As to throw it in the Nile instead of the maiden, after which it flooded, and the Egyptians stopped their sacrificial practice (Zikri 114-16). However, Ibn Abd al-Hakam's account was written over two centuries after the conquest of Egypt, and there is much doubt regarding the historical accuracy of his story. Additionally, before Egypt became a Muslim state, the Nile's magical powers have been emphasized in the imaginary of Egyptian Copts and "the beliefs concerning the Nile were, at least on the surface, Christianized. The Nile rises through the power of Christ and at the intercession of angel Michael and the saints" (Kákosy 297). For example, in the Byzantine era "under emperor Mauricius (582-602) . . . a miracle generated a great excitement in Egypt. Two gigantic creatures of human form emerged from the Nile, one resembling a man, the other a woman," which Egyptian Copts had attributed to demons living under the river, or to a manifestation of the Nile as a god with his wife (Kákosy 298). Kákosy also observes that "Coptic art with its Nile representations may have contributed to the survival of the memory

of the Nile-God and his sort, but the folk-tales about the Nile and Euthenia, handed down from generation to generation, probably had a greater effect on the popular mind" (298). Later on, more Egyptian historians like Qalqashandi (1355-1418), Maqrizi (1364-1442), and Ibn Taghribirdi (1411-1470), would write about lavish Nile festivals that took place every year in Egypt in which the Fatimid, Mamluk, and Ottoman rulers and elites would participate, citing its origins in the account of Ibn Abd al-Hakam. Thus, the myth of the Nile bride has continuously existed in the consciousness of Egyptians, from past practices in the temples of Aswan and Nubia, to its association with Coptic rituals of Christianity, and finally its Islamic retellings and celebrations.

Mukhtar's allusion to the myth of the Nile bride through the title is a form of intertextuality. Julia Kristeva coined the term 'intertextuality' in her essay "Word, Dialogue and Novel," where she stated that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (qtd. in Moi 37). Based on Bakhtin's concept of the "carnivalesque," she explained that a literary piece is not a stand-alone creative work, but its elements, and especially its language, are in constant conversation with the cultural context and literary traditions from which it emerges. The writer's intertextual work, therefore, challenges and recreates the norms set by these previous traditions. Kristeva puts forth that "the only way a writer can participate in history is by transgressing this abstraction through a process of reading-writing . . . through the practice of a signifying structure in relation or opposition to another structure" (Moi 36). Intertextuality is also a mode of memory. In rewriting and recreating existing narratives, authors who deploy intertextuality are also inevitably utilizing the faculty of memory. Their recasting of these narratives, as Kristeva understands, "entails a study, through language, of the novel's space and of its transmissions, thereby establishing a close relationship between language and space" (Moi 59). Space, time, history, language, and memory are all factors that play major roles in a

writer's intertextual work. Mukhtar's choice of retelling the myth of the Nile bride--a story that evokes ancient Egyptian ceremonialism and the imagery of a beautiful, adorned bride awaiting her catastrophic fate--as the grim story of a family's demise in an Old Nubian setting is indeed a channel of intertextuality that demands thorough analysis and unpacking.

The story of "The Nile Bride" starts on a boat that departs from the Western bank of the Nile on a dark, moonless night. On the boat, the young woman, Farida, and her father, Abdelrahman, sit opposite one another. The father violently strikes the water surface with the boat paddle. From the very first few lines of the story, it becomes clear that the water of the Nile and its sounds and movements are a significant motif. Mukhtar writes:

> النيل مترع الحوافى بماء الفيضان الداكن السريع الجريان .. ومع ضربات المجداف كانا يسمعان ولولة الدوامات عند جذوع النخل الغرقى المنتصبة في الظلام كالأشباح المردة، بسعفها المدلى في سكون كاسف حزين .. سواد الليل الثقيل الساكن بلا نسمة يحط على قلب عبد الرحمن وابنته فريدة، وعلى النيل والنخيل وبيوت القرى والنجوع المرصوصة. (*The Nile* 14)
>
> The brimful Nile is streaming swiftly against the paddling of the boat … they could hear the swirling sound of the water current around the drowned palm trees that stand like giant ghosts in the dark with their fronds hanging in dimmed melancholic stillness … The night's darkness is heavy and unstirring, without a single breeze, it falls upon the hearts of Abdelrahman and his daughter, and on the Nile and the stacked houses of the villages and the hamlets.

Mukhtar's language and style weaves the surroundings of the plot, especially water figurations and their fluid features, with the characters' innermost emotions, a feature that will persist till the very end of the story.

It has been established that the Nile is the core of Nubian life and memory. As a Nubian writer, Mukhtar deploys this significance in situating his Nilotic narrative at the heart of Nubian culture. The entirety of "The Nile Bride" takes place on the boat as the river drives

both the boat and the plot forward. The story is told through the memory of Farida and her father which are continuously stimulated by the movements, sounds, and sensations of the water. Moreover, the narrative is heavily built on the style of the "stream of consciousness," a concept that originated from the field of psychology and became a main feature of modern and post-modern writing. Mukhtar uses flowy, fluid language that literally and metaphorically captures the essence of the "stream of consciousness." In "The Nile Bride," Farida and Abdelrahman recall foundational life events that crystallize the features of Old Nubia and its society.

In the short story, time ceases to function in a chronological order, and instead, an inner *durée* dominates the narrative; a temporal dimension brings forth past memories and integrates them with the present moment. Bergson explains this encompassing timeframe by saying that "we perceive duration as a stream against which we cannot go. It is the foundation of our being, and, as we feel, the very substance of the world in which we live" (*Creative* 39). This eternal *durée* defies linear time and allows central memories to repeatedly return, like the natural cycle of water, which never ends, but continuously returns to where it originally was. The stream of consciousness is, thus, also closely tied to space, because the temporal returning of time requires a continuous returning to the original space where these memories originally happened, and where their picture and essence still remain. This bonding with physical space and the recurring, cyclical *durée* is also a manifestation of rememory. The powerfully ethereal space of the Nile, on which the narrative takes place, is a representation of the rememories of Farida and Abdelrahman.

The way Mukhtar uses the eternal flow of the Nile and its liquid qualities in "The Nile Bride" highlights how water is universally viewed as a loaded symbol. In the book *Thinking with Water*, Chen et al. observe that

> water brings a powerful and varied repertoire of emotional, cultural, and sensual associations to its role as metaphor . . . When water appears in a metaphor, its material properties inform our understandings of the concepts it helps to signify. The material and sensual qualities of water, in turn, are always mingling with individual and collective associations. (40)

Mukhtar is aware of the signification of water as an elusive matter that has the ability to connect, merge, permeate, flood, and flow, and he utilizes these qualities in his choice of language and narrative style. The culturally specific Nubian symbolism of the Nile River is coupled with the universal liquid qualities of water recognized and studied by renowned thinkers and writers further intensify the depiction of the Nile as an ever-present force in "The Nile Bride." The waters of the Nile and the flowing of the stream of consciousness will also carry gendered elements that will come to light as the story progresses from the binary male and female perspectives narrating the plot.

Farida is the first character to begin a continued gushing of the stream of consciousness in "The Nile Bride." As she sat at the end of boat in the dark night, she feels a stirring wave of fear that engulfs her stomach and crushes it in pain. She looked around in search of her father and can barely make out his large silhouette in the darkness. To her, he looks like a ghost, a monster that frightens her with his powerful strikes of the paddle in the Nile. She sees him as the *irkaby*, the ghoul that Nubian mothers and grandmothers warn naughty children of in their traditional stories. She is confused. Her father, who used to be her source of love and security is now the one she fears the most. She thinks:

> كانت تريد أن ترى أباها .. أن ترى وجهه الأليف بقسماته المحببة. لا ذلك الوجه الأسود الكبير المتغضن الذي بدا لها ـــعلى ضوء الظل الخافت الذي ألقاه طرف سيجارته المشتعلةـــ غريبا لم تألفه وهي التي صحبت وجهه طوال عمرها .. ولعبت بأصابعها على شاربه وشفتيه .. وتحسست ذقنه ... لم يخطر على بالها قط أنها ستشعر بالوحدة وهو معها، أو أنها ستخاف وهي معه .. عندما كانت تضربها أمها كانت

تجري إليه .. تلجأ الى صدره العريض بذراعيه الكبيرتين يلفهما عليها ورائحة عرقه وتبغ سيجارته يملأ انفها .. ما كانت تنام إلا في حضنه .. تتحسس بأصابعها نعومة أذنه وتسكن كفرخ اليمامة هادئة في منجاة من "الاركبي" وكل عفاريت الليل. (Mukhtar, The Nile 14-15)

She wanted to see her father . . . to look at his familiar face with its lovely features. Not this big, wrinkled, dark face that looked to her—on the shadowy light of the tip of his lit cigarette—strange and unfamiliar even though she woke up to his face her whole life … her fingers played with his lips and his mustache . . . and touched his beard . . . it never crossed her mind that she would feel lonely while she was in his company, or that she would feel afraid when she's with him … when her mother used to beat her, she would run to him . . . she would seek refuge in his broad chest and he would wrap his big arms around her, and the scent of his perspiration and tobacco breath would engulf her nose … she could not sleep except on his lap, she would surrender peacefully like a small dove, safe from the *irkaby* and all other nocturnal monsters.

It is evident from Farida's thoughts about her father that they enjoyed a close and warm relationship with him since she was a child. Her description of her father and her feelings toward him, however, seem not to simply resemble a strong father-daughter bond. The way she remembers his body, with his broad chest and strong arms that he wraps around her, how she recalls the smell of his perspiration and cigarette-infused breath, and her sensations when touching his beard, lips, and mustache seem to evoke a passion that transcends an innocent relationship and mirrors a more intimate bond.

From her fluid thoughts and her deeply confused emotions that swerve between fear and love, Farida's attention becomes drawn to her body when she feels a viscous trail of blood streaming down her thighs:

تسلل خيط من الدم منزلقا لزجا على فخذيها المحشورة بينهما لفافة من القماش .. كأنما الخيط من الدم في انتظار أن تصل أمواج أفكار فريدة الى ذلك الشاطئ حتى يتسلل .. او كأنما هناك علاقة بين ما كان يدور في ذهنها من جانب، وبين جسدها من جانب آخر. او بالتحديد تأثيرا من أفكارها على تقلصات رحمها لتقذف بتلك الدفقة من الدم اللزج. (Mukhtar, The Nile 15)

A trail of sticky, slippery blood leaked down her thighs which had a piece of fabric balled up and stuffed in between them … it was as if the trail of blood awaited the waves of her thoughts to arrive at this shore to start leaking … as if there were a connection between what was flowing in her mind and what she felt in her body, or more specifically, as if her own thoughts had spawned her uterus to contract and expel this spurt of viscous blood.

The memories and thoughts that have been flowing in her mind so far led her to this specific moment. It is as if her female bodily functions are in alignment with both her emotions and the flowing water surrounding her, triggering the blood to flow from her uterus in powerful contractions and stream down her vagina. These very contractions bring forth memories of what happened to her:

منذ يومين وهي تنزف .. تقلصات رحمها تتصل عنيفة قاسية ... تقلصات الرحم تحرك في ذهنها ذكرى ذلك اليوم (Mukhtar, The Nile 15)

she has been bleeding for two days . . . the painful, cruel contractions of her uterus continuously persisted . . . the contractions stir in her mind the memories of that day.

Farida starts to recall being dragged by her mother in the narrow streets of her village at sunset. When they approach a dark, dingy corridor, she starts hearing the murmuring of old women who huff and puff when they see her. The mother leaves Farida alone with the old women and closes the corridor's door. In the room, Farida feels the women's eyes preying on her body and the calloused fingers grab and touch her:

زحفن إليها مقعيات .. تكالبت الأيدي عليها .. عشرات الأيدي .. كانت كثيرة .. ازاحوا ثوبها .. مزقوا سروالها .. تناثر الى قطع مهزومة ضائعة في أركان الدهليز ... رعب ثقيل حط على صدرها كقطعة من الحجر .. سيذبحونها .. عرق الأجساد المنكفئة عليها يخنقها .. جسدها مباح للأصابع تلعب فيها.

(Mukhtar, The Nile 16)

They crawled slowly towards her . . . the hands grabbed her . . . tens of hands . . . so many of them . . . they removed her dress . . . snatched her underpants . . . its fabric scattered defeatedly across the corridor . . . a heavy horror landed on her chest like a rock . . . they will slaughter her . . . the sweat of the bodies crowding her is suffocating . . . her body is at the disposal of their fingers

Once the women pin her down, an *osheh* woman named Gebaya measures Farida's belly with her hand and announces, "three months." Farida is pregnant with a child out of wedlock, and she is sentenced by the village to undergo a bloody and horrid abortion:

بدأت أصابع اليدين ككلابتين من نار تعصر بطنها .. اسياخ النار اشتعلت في أحشائها ... حملوها وجعلوها منكفئة على الأرض ببطنها .. وقفت جباية على ظهرها .. ثم عدلوها. تسللت يدها كالثعبان بين فخذيها. الدم يتدفق حارا. العرق يغرق جسدها كله .. ينبثق باردا من مسامها المفتوحة حتى بلل ملابسها .. أظلمت الدنيا. ما عادت ترى شيئا. (Mukhtar, The Nile 16)

The fingers of the hands are hot rods of fire, burning her stomach . . . they carried her and placed her, with her stomach down on the floor . . . Gebaya stood on her back . . . then they flipped her again. Her hands snuck like a snake between her thighs. The hot blood is flowing. The sweat is drowning her entire body. Its coldness gushes out of her pores till it drenches her clothes . . . everything is dark. She can no longer see a thing.

The reason why Farida is afraid of her father becomes clear; she knows she will be punished for having premarital sex, and even worse, for being impregnated by it. Throughout

the narrative, however, it is never explicitly indicated whether this happened with Farida's consent or not, so there is a possibility that this pregnancy happened due to her being raped. What is clearly stated is that she was being pursued by the *'omda's* son, Mustafa, and that this pregnancy is the result of him pursuing her. Therefore, even if the relationship was consummated with Farida's consent, there is an obvious abuse of power which led to Farida being the blamed and punished victim and the *'omda's* son suffering no consequences for his actions. The injustice being done to Farida is profound. As readers, we would fully sympathize with her suffering, both physically, as her body has been sexually taken advantage of and subjected to the trauma of forced abortion, and emotionally, as she is being shunned by her beloved father and driven down the river to an unknown fate. Farida starts to lose hope and she feels a mixture of longing for precious memories and helplessness towards the verdict of her punishment. While she is alone with her father on the boat, she recalls the image of her mother and her entangled emotions towards her. As Farida and Abdelrahman boarded the boat, her mother walked into the water and tried to follow them. She reached out her arms and tried to embrace her daughter, but Abdelrahman's violent paddling drove them away from one another. Now, Farida's longing for her mother intensely increases:

> وتحول حنينها الى رغبة في الذوب فيها، في احتضانها حتى تتخللها ... تتحد معها. تعود الى رحمها مرة أخرى .. بعيدة وفي منأى عن كل خوف .. ذلك الخوف المغروس في احشائها كالسكين.
>
> (Mukhtar, The Nile 17)

> Her yearning for her mother transformed into a desire to melt into her, to hold her until she suffuses with her . . . to unify with her. To return to her womb once again . . . secluded and safe from any fear . . . this fear that is plunged deep within her like a knife.

Finally, when Farida feels an overpowering essence of death looming over her body, the boat, and the river, the narrative shifts to the perspective of Abdelrahman.

Abdelrahman's decision is "sharp as a knife"; he is determined to kill Farida. The omniscient narrator of the story describes that:

كان قراره قاطع كالسكين ... كان تصميمه على قراره يستدعيها من غيابها بالرغم من وجودها حية امامه. كانت قوة ما بداخله تنفي عنها الوجود الحي .. وتجردها تماما من الوجود والنبض والحياة والذكرى حتى تصبح اسما فقط بلا ظل لصورة .. تلك القوة التي كانت عونه في اتخاذ قراره .. والتي اطفأت حياة فريدة النابضة والمتدفقة بالحيوية .. ومسحت ذكرياته معها من داخله. (Mukhtar, The Nile 18)

His decision is sharp as a knife . . . His determination resurrects her from her absence, even though she is alive before him. A mysterious force within him is denying her lived existence . . . it completely denies her being, pulse, life, and memories, till she is reduced to a mere name without the trace of an image . . . This force aided him in making his decision . . . it dimmed Farida's vivid liveliness that used to burst with zeal . . . and erased her memories with him.

Despite his love for his daughter and his close, emotional connection to her, what happened has created a distance between them that now makes him view her as a lifeless being. She is not even allowed to exist in his memory. Abdelrahman knows that the memories he has of his daughter are the only thing that can soften his heart, which is why he sentences her to death both in reality and in memory. As he looks at Farida's small body curled up before him on the weak boat, her features reappear to him in the darkness:

ركز نظراته اليها في محاولة ضد الظلام ليتبين ملامحها المطموسة .. فأتت إليه في طفولتها البعيدة .. منبجسة من قاع ذاكرته ضاحكة الثغر .. راغبة في مشاغبته. تتحرش به .. تشده من ثوبه .. تجري وتلف حوله لتفاجئه بعضة في ساقه بأسنانها الصغيرة الرفيعة البيضاء .. فيصرخ .. فتكركع ضاحكة ... يقبلها في فمها .. تضم جفنيها في وجل من ملمس شاربه الخشن على جلدها الأسود الناعم. يود لو يحتويها. يضمها إلى صدره بقوة حنونة وتتسلل الى خياشيمه رائحتها الطفلة .. فيضمها أكثر ويتشممها .. تفلت منه هاربة .. ويعلق بشاربه مخاطها ولعابها فيمسحه باسم الثغر وهو يضربها بحنان على مؤخرتها.

(Mukhtar, The Nile 19)

> He fixed his gaze on her and tried to make out her dulled features in the darkness . . . she appeared to him from her distant childhood . . . tossed away in the abyss of his memory, with her mischievous smile. She molests him . . . she tugs at his clothes . . . she runs behind him and turns around to startle him with a bite on his legs with her small milk teeth . . . he screams . . . and she chuckles loudly . . . he kisses her mouth . . . she shyly closes her eyelids when his rough mustache touches her smooth, black skin. He wishes he could enfold her. He holds her tightly to his chest with affectionate force, and her baby smell slips into his nostrils . . . he pulls her closer and inhales her . . . she escapes his grasp . . . her dribble gets stuck on his mustache . . . he lovingly wipes it away as he gently spanks her behind.

Abdelrahman and Farida shared an affectionate relationship. They both vividly recall the warm hugs, playful touches, and intimate moments they shared. Mukhtar's depiction of the relationship, however, amplifies the father-daughter physical displays of affection in a way that mimics a bond between two lovers and not a parent and a child. I read this amplification not as an implication of incest, but as the result of the existence of extreme emotions in both characters that sharply shift between longing, desire, fear, anxiety, anger and a manifestation of an archetypal complex.

Freud's psychoanalytic theory of 'the Oedipus complex,' in which he builds on the mythical story of Oedipus to show that young males have an inherent sexual desire for their mothers and an envious jealousy of their fathers, is incessantly referenced in literary criticism and theory. Freud's theories are now widely denounced, especially by feminist scholars like Simone de Beauvoir and Hélène Cixous, because of his failure to thoroughly study or understand the female psyche and his misogynistic focus on male genitalia (penis envy/castration), especially after the unsuccessful case of Dora, in which he dismissed his

young female patient's viewpoint and labeled her as 'hysterical,' a stigma that continues to follow women until today. Ever since, other psychologists and psychoanalysts attempted to find female-centered theories that equally emphasized the experience of girls and women in realizing their sexual maturity. Carl Jung, for example, believed that the 'Electra complex' developed in young girls, and that they also felt a desire for their fathers and a resentfulness for their mothers. In the myth, Electra murders her mother out of jealousy for her father. Freud vehemently refused this proposal because his "formulations about the girl regarding herself as a castrated male led to his strong repudiation of the notion that the little girl has her own parallel, but distinct and different 'Oedipus' complex to that of the little boy" (Seelig 896-97). Nonetheless, later scholars would continue to explore this parallelism and the theme of father-daughter desire, like Farida's feelings towards her father, appears time and time again in literature and art.

Feminist scholarship has recently focused on interpreting female-centered mythology to establish psychological archetypes that can inform us about the woman's psyche and eradicate the phallocentric ideas that infested theoretical writings so far. Cixous is one of the writers who pioneered using mythology in recasting structured patriarchal norms as illustrated in her seminal work "The Laugh of the Medusa." In the anthology of Cixous' work, *Portable Cixous*, Segarra observes that the French feminist's writing

> invokes a myth in order to challenge the system that the myth supports and propagates. Each, in its own efforts at "remything," decenters the male figures or idea of masculinity propping up the patriarchal structure, a structure that is perhaps the hardest myth of all to dislodge. Each thus recasts central characters in such a way that the binaries male/female and masculine/feminine are undone, or at least troubled, and that the limitations of gender roles and gendered thinking are exposed. (218-19)

In this light, feminist scholars have attempted to follow the footsteps of Cixous in dismantling the overpowering presence of Oedipus in psychological and theoretical thought and to provide alternative methods that give insight into the female mind and its complexities.

An example of "remthying" archetypal narratives is the psychological study by Beth J. Seelig entitled "The Rape of Medusa in the Temple of Athena," in which she investigates the myths of both Medusa and Electra to shed light on how female sexuality is formed in childhood, especially in relation to both the father and the mother. Medusa, who is raped at the temple of Athena by the ultimate patriarch, Zeus, is punished by the virgin-daughter Athena with the curse of turning anyone who looks at her eyes into stone. In her reading, Seelig observes that "the story of the rape of Medusa can be understood as defending against and at the same time representing, by a process of decomposition, a story of the forbidden: father–daughter incest" (898). This stems from the daughter's desire for her father's love, and the father's anxiety about the *deflowering* of his innocent daughter, which reflects the "male fear and envy of woman's procreative powers [which] leads to incorporative and aggressive action" (Seelig 899). The relationship between Abdelrahman and Farida mirrors this anxiety; Farida continues to imagine her father as the ultimate caregiver and protector, while Abdelrahman is enraged by the thought of her being with another man. These distorted emotions are evident in the hyper-sexual way they remember one another, which demonstrates that Mukhtar chooses to amplify and complicate these charged gender relations.

Furthermore, Abdelrahman's decision to kill his daughter is motivated by the impulse to defend his honor. The Moroccan feminist thinker Fatima Mernissi discusses this core issue that vexed Muslim communities for hundreds of years in her essay "Virginity and Patriarchy." She explains that "the concepts of honour and virginity locate the prestige of a man between the legs of a woman. It is not by subjugating nature or by conquering mountains

and rivers that a man secures his status, but by controlling the movements of women related to him by blood or by marriage" (183). Where does this patriarchal ideology come from? Some western feminists argue that patriarchy is closely connected with Islam and its teachings and practices, while feminists from the Middle East respond by arguing that it is a combination of social, economic, political, historical and other contextual factors, in addition to misinterpretations of Islamic texts and teachings, especially by male scholars. Elboubekri answers this question in his essay "Is Patriarchy an Islamic Legacy?" in which he studies Mernissi as well as the works of other Muslim feminists. He concludes, "rather than taking patriarchy as a sacred legacy of Islam, Islamic feminist writings perceive it as a system whereby men execute their power which is endorsed by their control of class, law, nation, language, etc." (26). Abdelrahman's misogynist frame of mind is, therefore, a product of all these elements, and his thoughts about Farida's defilement further clarify his views.

"Islamic patriarchy" is the form of patriarchy where misogynists justify their acts of injustice and trace them to Islamic teachings to exploit their religious powers. This creates a form of hyper-masculinity, in which the woman's existence is only valid in relation to the man, and men, in turn, believe they have the right to enforce "Islamic" teachings on women as part of their duty and responsibility as superior males. This, of course, is an illusion. The true motivation behind this is a desire to feel powerful and maintain a hierarchy that benefits men. When it comes to defending their honor, which includes women's chastity and virginity, men in Muslim societies believe that they must protect and maintain it at all costs. This has less to do with the protection of women, and more to do with men preserving their sense of masculinity. Abdelrahman goes back and forth with his decision to kill Farida:

تنقض عليه صورة ابن العمدة وهو بفترسها .. أين .. لا يدري .. في الزريبة .. في الدهليز .. في الديواني؟

لا يدري .. الصورة شجت أعماقه كالخنجر قاسية صلبة في انقضاضة مباغتة تلاشت على ضربتها

ذكرياته مع طفولة فريدة. (Mukhtar, The Nile 19)

> The image of the ‘omda’s son ravaging her attacks him . . . where . . . he does not know . . . in the barn . . . in the corridor . . . in the courtyard? He does not know . . . the image cracked his insides like a dagger, rigid and rough, it pounced at him and erased Farida’s childhood memories from within him.

It is clear here that “women are not the centre of men’s experiences (other men are), misogyny is actually fueled by something deeper – by the fear of emasculation by other men, the fear of humiliation, the fear of being not so manly” (Ouzgane 69). Abdelrahman is not thinking of what his daughter must have felt while she was being raped and taken advantage of, or while she was going through a horrible, forced abortion. He is only concerned with his own masculinity as he imagines another man sexually abusing his only daughter, which shows that “even the most private moments in men’s lives are marked and marred by sexual rivalry and violence” (Ouzgane 69).

Abdelrahman’s memory takes him back to a time before he was Nabwa’s husband and Farida’s father. While he paddles the boat and laments his loneliness after the village people have shunned him and his family, the image of Abdelrahman’s mother comes flooding to his mind. He remembers:

> كانت قريبة اليه واضحة وحاضرة عندما صرخ فزعا مستيقظا على ظهر مركب كبير عند فجر يوم لاسع النسمة ... مع حركة من يده استيقظ على جز الحبل الليفي الملتف حول رسغيه .. تحسس بعينيه المغبشتين بالنعاس ليرى اين هو .. واين امه وابوه ... ماء النهر الداكن .. مركب كبير .. صاح فزعا اماه "بلغته القديمة" ... صبية كثيرون على المركب مربوطين في حبل ليفي مثله .. في ليلة مظلمة دخلوا جميعا الى حوش كبير واوصد الباب .. كان وجود الاخرين يخفف من رعبه الذي سرعان ما تجدد بنمو متزايد كلما تناقص عدد الذين معه .. كلما توثقت صلته بأحدهم أخذوه .. الى اين لا يعرف .. يذهبون ولا يعودون. وأخذوه ذات يوم .. وتنقل كثيرا من يد الى أخرى ومن حوش لحوش .. وأخيرا استقر عند رجل وأدرك بعد سنين أنه بيع لهذا الرجل الذي هو سيده (القديم) شاهين تموش .. وسموه عبد الرحمن .. وضرب كثيرا حتى حفظ اسمه الجديد وتعلم اللغة الجديدة. (Mukhtar, The Nile 25)

> She was close to him, lucid and present when he woke up screaming on the deck of a big ship at the dawn of a cool, breezy day . . . when he moved his hands, he woke up to the tight rope wrapped around his wrists . . . he looked around with his sleepy eyes to see where he was . . . where are his mother and father . . . the river's dark waters . . . the big ship . . . he yelled in terror 'mother' in his native tongue … so many boys are on the boat, with their wrists tied like his . . . On a dark night, they all entered a big yard, and its door was shut . . . the other boys being with him made him less frightened, which continuously increased as more boys kept disappearing . . . every time he got close to one of them, he was taken away … to where, he didn't know . . . they go and never come back. One day, they took him . . . he was transferred from one pair of hands to the next, from one yard to another, and finally he stayed with a man, and he later learned he was sold to him. It was his old master, Sheikh Shahin Tamush. They gave him the name Abdelrahman, and he was beaten over and over again till he learned his new name and the new language.

In a sense, Abdelrahman's experience mirrors that of Beloved in the Middle Passage interlude. While the contexts, histories, and culturally specific features of the transatlantic slave trade and the regional Afro-Arab slave trade differs, the essence of suffering and loss of humanity and identity remains the same.

While the Islamic faith does call for equality and stands against discrimination, the practice of slavery continued to be a part of Arab and Middle Eastern culture for centuries. Abubakr points out that:

> regional legacies of slavery in the Afro-Arab world include the ongoing slave trade across Niger, Ghana, Gambia, and Nigeria through Libya and the Mediterranean, "modern" slavery in Sudan, Egypt, and Mauritania . . . To not

> acknowledge these histories in the recounting of Afro-Arab solidarities is to ignore the particular conditions of local racial discourses for the sake of narrating a universal subaltern experience. (73)

Abdelrahman's describing of his kidnapping as a child, his encounters with tens of other boys who were also enslaved and tied at the wrists, and his transfer from owner to owner are all rememories of this legacy of slavery. Hopkins' and Mehanna's ethnological survey also refers to the *osheh* enslaved community in Nubia before the *tahgir* and describes them as "small groups of socially stigmatized ex-slaves from southern Sudan [who] lived among the Nubians and had been Nubianized" (11). Moreover, "the Fadija in particular had a form of stratification, with slaves or ex-slaves at the bottom and a small ruling caste of *kashef* [governors] at the top" (Hopkins and Mehanna 66). The journalist Yomna Mokhtar also wrote an article about the *oshehs*, in which she interviewed some well-known Nubian figures like the musician Sayed Gayer, who admitted that the *oshehs* were excluded from Nubian society, and marriage or relationships with them were strictly forbidden. He narrates that his grandfather had owned *oshehs* that came from what is now South Sudan, where famine and internal violent conflicts were widespread. In the article, the young Nubian activist Fatma Emam expressed her anxiety when she found out that her family also carried such problematic legacy. Mukhtar, being a member of the Fadija tribes, once again attempts to dismantle hierarchies of unjust power and discrimination in Nubian society by depicting the story of an *osheh* family inside a Nubian village and exposing the unjust social hierarchy in the Nubian community.

In one of the few studies on Yahya Mukhtar's writings, Sayyed Daifallah discusses the writer's awareness of class and race divisions within Nubian communities and his portrayal of this dilemma in his novels and stories. Daifallah showcases how Mukhtar's writing utilizes notions of racial centrality and cultural amalgamation in some of his creative

writings. He demonstrates that even in societies that are considered 'peripheries' to the central hegemonic world powers, namely capitalist and First World countries, discrimination based on race, class, and gender still exist, creating a periphery within the periphery (84). Mukhtar is sensitively aware of this issue, and instead of vehemently calling for a Nubian solidarity, he aims to highlight some forms of this discrimination and centralize a purely human experience. His narrative dismisses the imagery of a peaceful, harmonious people that live in pure, rhythmic existence with the Nile and the cycles of nature. Instead, he shows the Nile as a dark, powerful force that has the ability to destroy as well as create. Mukhtar chooses to utilize the Nile as the driving force of the narrative as well as the medium that integrates the memories of the two characters through the stream of consciousness. The injustice done to Farida by her own father and the people of her village and to Abdelrahman by the system of slavery that placed him at the bottom of Nubian society stands in stark contrast with the image of Nubians as noble savages. This stereotype imagined "the indigenous peoples of the world were in an original state, 'primitive,' 'backward,' the ancient ancestor to 'modern man,' the 'infants of humanity'" who are incapable of wrongdoing and eternally victimized (Gardner).

The obscure history of slavery within African and Middle Eastern regions is an understudied and sensitive subject. On the one hand, the Islamic faith, which is meant to abolish oppressive systems such as slavery and promote equality, stands in contrast with the practices of Muslims who continued to participate in the regional slave trade for centuries. On the other hand, "many Orientalists, such as the Zionist neo-conservative Bernard Lewis, overemphasize the existence of an exceptional plantation slavery system based in the marshes of Iraq – in order to draw comparisons to plantations in the Americas and to fight against the rising Afro-Arab internationalism of his time" (Abbasi). Such claims aim to equate the white supremacy that motivated the institution of chattel slavery with the slave trade that already

existed in the region to put forth the argument that 'if we, white supremacist colonizers and enslavers, did it, the Muslims had done it before too!' As Abbasi puts it, "Orientalist scholarship on this topic has attempted to white-wash the hands of the West's anti-black racism by blaming the East for also being racist." This simplistic argument ignores any in-depth investigation of the sensitive issue of race and colorism in Africa and the Arab world and excludes the internal histories and contextual cultures that informed these practices. Abubakr, who studied the history of slavery in Egypt and Sudan, observes that:

> Regional enablers of the slave trade, which included but were not limited to *jallaba* [bearers of black slaves] merchants, jurists, religious scholars, and the ruling elite, justified the enslavement of Black people through the racialization of Blackness as a paucity of civility, history, and worth. This was part of a long and established legal and intellectual tradition of anti-Blackness spanning northern and western Africa and the slave trading routes that comprised it. (73)

Few writers attempt to tackle the complicated history of slavery within the Afro-Arab region, but Mukhtar's narrative delves right into this topic.

Mukhtar's portrayal of Abdelrahman as an *osheh* in the Nubian community acknowledges and sheds light on this history. Abdelrahman was owned by the village's religious leader, Sheikh Shahin, who valued Abdelrahman's strong hands and considered him a profitable asset in his agricultural endeavors. Sheikh Shahin was a member of the ruling religious elite that Abubakr lists among the enablers of slavery. His religious and economic superiority gave him the advantage of not only being wealthy and comfortable in the community, but to also have a strong, respected opinion in the village's matters. After the incident, Abdelrahman and Farida became the talk of the village, and the men and women would insult and spit on Abdelrahman whenever they saw him. When Farida's pregnancy was aborted by the women of the village, Abdelrahman's hopes of being included in the

community once again were renewed. He thought that now that Farida's fetus has been aborted, the curse might be lifted and that his enslaver would find him valuable once again. Sheikh Shahin, however, had something else in mind:

لم يكن يعرف أن سيده القديم الشيخ شاهين تموش كان وراء اجهاض فريدة في محاولة منه للالتفاف حول اجماع القرية انه لا يصح ان يترك حمل فريدة. انه إهانة لابن العمدة والعمدة والقرية كلها .. لابد من اسقاط ذلك الجنين من رحم النجسة .. ان عبد الرحمن يد قوية مجانية خسرها بالفعلة الملعونة لابنته.

(Mukhtar, The Nile 24)

He didn't realize that his former master, Sheikh Shahin Tamush, was the one behind Farida's abortion in an attempt to influence the villagers' opinion that it is unacceptable to keep Farida's pregnancy. It is an insult to the 'omda's son and to the 'omda himself, and to the entire village . . . The fetus must be terminated from her filthy womb . . . Abdelrahman is a strong, free hand that he already lost because of the daughter's damned deed.

Abdelrahman recalls the exact moment when his heart and mind were set on murdering his only daughter--the moment when he felt complete rejection from this community which he had loyally served for decades. Unlike other enslaved men, Abdelrahman was always willing to help the rest of the village besides the household of his owner. He protected the crops from the yearly flood as if the land was his own and eagerly lent a hand to everyone who needed help. His diligence and loyalty earned him his freedom from Sheikh Shahin, and he was able to marry and lead his own life. When he married Nabwa and she gave birth to Farida, he felt a new sense of responsibility. He was not just working for his own good, he had a higher purpose of providing for his family. When Farida was defiled, he felt that his life's purpose went in vain:

وفجأة لا شيء .. الجميع ينكرونه .. جسده الفارع .. وجهه الأسود المتغصن ذو الفكين القويين. عيونهم تخترقه ولا تقف عنده ... انهم لم يعودوا يرونه .. وسقطت عليه وحدته جافة خشنة وموحشة .. لا أب لا

أم لا عم لا خال .. لا أحد .. لا أحد سوى نبوه وفريدة، وحتى هما لا يستطيع أن يتحدث اليهما.

(Mukhtar, The Nile 24)

And all of a sudden . . . nothing . . . everyone rejects him . . . his sturdy body, his wrinkly, black face with its strong jaws. Their eyes see right through him and never meet his gaze . . . they can no longer see him . . . The loneliness fell hard on him, harsh and dreadful . . . No father, no mother, no uncle, no aunt . . . he has no one . . . no one except Nabwa and Farida, and even them he can no longer speak to.

Abdelrahman thought that Farida's abortion was the act of atonement that would finally grant him the village's forgiveness. But the next day, while sleeping in his small house in the slums located on the outskirts of the village where the *oshehs* live, he woke up to another disaster:

إنتشلته من النوم مأمأة عنزته العجفاء والنار المشتعلة فيها. صاح "اماه" بلغته القديمة .. تماما مثلما استيقظ فزعا على ظهر ذلك المركب منذ سنين بعيدة .. كان الأمر ملتبسا عليه ... السنة اللهب تلحس عشته .. العشة كومة من النار .. جرى للعشة. نبوه تندفع من بابها المغطى بالدخان الكثيف تجري خلف فريدة تريد إطفاء النار التي امسكت بذيل ثوبها من الخلف والاثنتان تولولان .. جرى اليهما وتلقى في لهفة ملتاعة فريدة في حضنه .. وادارها بسرعة وامسك ذيل الثوب ودهسه برجليه على الرمال.

(Mukhtar, The Nile 26)

The bleating of his skinny goat roused him from his sleep; it had caught on fire. He yelled "mother!" in his native tongue . . . just like he did when he did years ago when he was terrified on the deck of the big ship . . . he was perplexed . . . the flames of the fire were devouring his house . . . he ran towards it. Nabwa is stumbling out the door which is covered with thick smoke. She is running after Farida, trying to put down the fire that had caught the tail of her dress . . . both women are wailing . . . He rushed towards them and embraced Farida with

anxious grief . . . he quickly turned her around and stomped on the flames at the tail of her dress.

Abdelrahman's innermost fears and desires culminated in this pivotal moment. His house, his sign of belonging to the village has been destroyed, and the flames which were eating up his home were also making their way to burn the flesh of his only daughter. The sight of his home burning triggers the feelings of loss he experienced when he was snatched from his own mother's arms and enslaved as a child. However, his love for Farida makes him for a moment forget everything, and he is only motivated by his desire to save and protect her. As soon as he takes her passionately between his arms and puts down the fire, another extreme emotion takes over him: an ultimate despair. He has lost everything, and it was all Farida's fault. Suddenly, a violent thought flashed before him:

وفجأة شج قلبه وقاع مخه معا خاطر الموت وفريدة .. لم يكن حتى مجرد احتمال موت فريدة موجودا في قاع مخه ... وأصبح موت فريدة احتمالا بعد ان كان لا يخطر بباله .. بل رغبة وامنية على السنة اللهب التي أتت على عشته ... حرق عشته التي بناها منذ ان اعتقه سيده وتزوج فيها نبوه وانجب فيها فريدة .. كان حرق العشة منجلا حادا اتى على جذور حياته ووجوده فاقتلعه .. ان القرية رفضته تماما. وأصدرت حكمها عليه ... ان جرم فريدة عظيم ولابد ان يكون العقاب. هكذا تريد السماء.

(Mukhtar, The Nile 26-27)

The thought of Farida's death suddenly struck both his heart and the depths of his mind . . . Her death had not even crossed his brain . . . But now, it became more than a possibility . . . After the burning flames had devoured his house, he saw it as desire, a wish . . . The burning of the house he had built after his master freed him . . . where he married Nabwa and had Farida . . . Its burning was like a sharp sickle that obliterated his existence from its very roots . . . The village shunned him completely and passed their verdict on him . . . Farida's sin is deadly, and so must be her punishment, it is the will of heaven.

Furthermore, he expresses his complex feelings about this sacrificial revenge as an intersectional oppression. Farida is not only erased of her identity and memory as his loving daughter, but she is now a symbol of shame for him. By sacrificing her, he is not just reclaiming his male authority over her body and her existence, nor is he only atoning for the sin, he is ultimately seeking vengeance against the oppressive system that cast him and his family in this dreadful situation:

> وشعر فجأة ان قتلها هو انتقام منهم. انتقام نابع من احساسه بأن القتل لا يجرؤ عليه الا من كان مثلهم من الاشراف .. الدعوات لم تستجب .. واجهاض فريدة كان رفضا لان تحمل من ابن العمدة .. اما العمدة فلم يكن اجهاضها يكفي لمحو العار الذي شعر به من اقتران اسم ابنه بفريدة .. فأمر محمد جعفر وبشير حمدون بحرق عشة عبد الرحمن في نفس الليلة التي اجهضت فيها فريدة. (Mukhtar, The Nile 27)

> He now felt that killing her would be taking revenge on them. A vengeance that stems from his feeling that murder is an act that only one of the *ashraf*, the nobles, would have the courage to commit . . . his prayers have not been answered . . . and Farida's abortion was their denunciation that she can carry the child of the 'omda's son . . . For the 'omda, her abortion was not enough to erase the disgrace of coupling his son's name with hers . . . so he ordered Mohamed Ga'far and Bashir Hamdun to burn down Abdelrahman's house on the same night Farida was aborted.

The story reaches its resolution when the narrative voice shifts once again to Farida's stream of thought. As they reach the banks of their old village—which is also Mukhtar's birthplace—al-Genina wa al-Shibbak, Abdelrahman is so occupied with the thought of sacrificing his daughter that he does not notice that he is approaching the very village that shunned him. Farida, however, senses the proximity with the space that held so many memories for her. She is torn between her longing for this place and the memories it holds, and the haunting defilement and forced abortion she in endured in this same place. In an out

of body experience, Farida's soul is elevated, and she peers over the village from above. As if she is engraving the features of her village one last time, Farida recounts every small detail of it: the narrow, sandy streets, the walls surrounding the houses, the decorations on each house, the barns, the palm trees, the playground where the children played, the tombs and shrines of the village's famous Sheikhs, even the small *kushk* (kiosk). Finally, she reaches the site that holds the closest memories to her heart, the tiny, modest house where she lived with her father and mother:

> تسللت كما تتسلل روح الميت الى بيته بعد ان يوارى التراب في رجعة حنونة مشتاقة الى كل ركن فيها .. كانت تتحسس كل شيء .. العنجريب .. خن كتاكيتها .. غزل شبكة الصيد معلق في المكان الذى اعتاد ابوها ان يعلقه عليه. "الصندوق السحارة" الذي كانت تعشقه منذ صغرها .. وتجري اليه كلما فتحته أمها .. تعبث بما فيه .. قطع ملابس حمراء وزرقاء .. مرايا مكسورة ... زجاجة فارغة لعطر ثقيل.
>
> (Mukhtar, The Nile 29)

> She crept into her house like a haunting ghost coming back from the dead, eagerly longing to return to its corners . . . she sensually touched everything in it . . . the *angareeb* . . . her chicken pen . . . the fishnet hanging in the spot where her father used to leave it . . . the trousseau that she adored ever since she was little . . . she ran to play with its contents whenever her mother opened it . . . red and blue pieces of clothing . . . broken mirrors . . . a strong-smelling empty bottle of perfume.

Farida revisits the physical space that holds the dearest memories to her. Despite her being on the boat with her father, awaiting her fateful sacrifice, the *pictures* of her memories are still there within her and out there, in the place where they originally happened. Unlike Abdelrahman, who continues to revisit traumatic memories, Farida experiences an elevated state that allows her to return to the places that made her the happiest. The *durée* of this

eternal moment allows Farida to cast these places as sites of rememory, as pictures that will continue to exist for her in their original space, no matter how much time passes.

Instead of the fear and hatred that has been engulfing her throughout this dark journey, Farida feels a sudden sense of pleasant relief:

> ثم احست بفرحة مفاجئة غريبة في اعماقها حيث كانت الرغبة العميقة في الخلاص قد اترعتها .. الخلاص الحقيقي من كل ما فات .. من كل اهل القرية .. من النساء المقعيات .. من جبايه .. من مصطفى .. منهم كلهم .. حتى من ابيها الجاثم عليها في صمته .. الخلاص من توتر انتظار ذلك المجهول الذي يملأ الهواء من حولها بحضوره الخفي الغامض الثقيل.
>
> (Mukhtar, The Nile 30)

> Then, she felt a strange sense of happiness in the depth of her soul that surprised her, since she had been submerged in a longing desire for relief . . . a true repose from all she had been through . . . from the people of the village . . . from the vicious women . . . from Gebaya . . . from Mustafa . . . from every single one of them . . . even her father, whose silence burdened her . . . a release from the tension of waiting for an unknown fate, a tension that swamped the air around her with its mysterious, heavy presence.

Farida starts to give in to a temptation of relief, of letting go of all the burdens falling on her shoulders. She remembers all those who oppressed and took advantage of her, including her own father, and feels a desire to get rid of all of them, to leave them behind in this physical world and embark on a spiritual journey in another place, all on her own. However, Her emotions are heightened when she sensitively thinks of her father sitting before her:

> تنبهت الى ابيها في صمته وحركته الدائبة ولطمتها نظرتها له والقت بها في طوفان نهر الإحساس اليقيني المترع بالنهاية المحتومة. وسبحت فوق امواجه المتدفقة تتقاذفها تلك الأمواج مبتعدة بها عن شاطئ الحياة .. وطغى إحساس مرير بحزن مفجع سرعان ما انبثق عن صفاء مبرق شمل روحها كلها .. صفاء شفاف

احست معه بقدرة كاملة على التسامح، حتى مصطفى ابن العمدة تبرؤه من كل ما حدث.

(Mukhtar, The Nile 29)

She was alarmed by her father's silence and his bustling movement, looking at him plunged her into a flood of emotions, an inner knowledge of the fateful ending. She was wrenched from these gushing waves that hurled her away from the shores of existence . . . a feeling of sorrowness and despair enclosed her, but soon enough, a sense of pure, vivid relief emerged from it and engulfed all of her spirit . . . clear purity that gave her an absolute power to forgive, even Mustafa, the ʿomda's son, she exonerated him from all what happened.

Farida's stream of consciousness leads to her final decision, the decision to take her life into her own hands and decide her fate. After forgiving those who wronged her, Farida experiences an overwhelming sense of giving. Like Cixous says of feminine nature, "she gives more, with no assurance that she'll get back even some unexpected profit from what she puts out" (893). Her sadness, disappointment, and her pure affection towards her father intermingle, and she finally takes a rapid decision:

اضطرمت في اعماقها رغبتها في ان تفديه، ان تريحه مما يشعر به .. ان توفر عليه آلامه. ان تلقي بنفسها .. ولم تكتمل الفكرة .. لم تناقشها ... انتفضت بفعل قوة غامضة القت بها في النيل وهي على وشك اجتياز عتبة ادراك ما تفعل. ربما وعت ما أقدمت عليه وهي في الطريق الى الماء .. او وهي في جوفه المظلم. (Mukhtar, The Nile 31)

Her soul was ignited with a desire to extricate him, to liberate him from what he was feeling, to spare him the pain. To throw herself into the water . . . before the thought was even complete, she didn't think twice . . . an abrupt, mysterious force threw her into the Nile while she was on the verge of comprehending what

she was about to do. Perhaps she realized what she had done on her way into the water . . . or when she reached its dark depth.

In this moment, the work of rememory reaches its climactic moment and the narrative culminates in an instance of Kairos. Like Asha Ashry, Farida willingly plunges into the water of the Nile. While Asha reunites with the river people, her grandaunt, and her lover, Farida's suicide resembles the sacrificial ritual of the Nile bride. The image of the Nile bride that is still suspended in Egyptian memory is of a beautiful young woman being sacrificed for the greater good of the community, and Farida's final act mirrors this sacrificial ritual in a more complicated sense. The final moments of Farida's life, when she remembers her village and her house, attempting to engrave their physical image in her memory, and her entangled, confused emotions that swing between grief, forgiveness, and the desire for release are deciding factors that led her to make the decision to sacrifice her physical existence and seek a more meaningful reunification with the Nile. Farida's internal journey through her own psyche, her memories, and her emotions led her to this final destination, the bottom of the Nile. In this ultimate site of memory, Farida resurrects the myth of the Nile bride. She is not an adorned maiden who will be sacrificed and wed to Hapi, she is a young woman who chooses to escape her doomed existence.

An important question poses itself after reading "The Nile Bride"; is Farida's death/suicide an honor crime? Or is it her own decision to take her life and become a Nile bride? Abdelrahman has undoubtedly intended to kill his daughter and was motivated to do so because of Farida's defilement and the village rejection and judgment of him and his family. Mukhtar's representation of Farida's story, however, complicates the simplistic interpretation of the myth of the Nile bride as a helpless girl oppressed by everyone around her and offered as a sacrifice to save others. Mukhtar displays intersectional forces of oppression that catalyze the story's tragic ending. Farida is oppressed by the *'omda's* son who

either raped her or lured into a relationship with him then denounced her, oppressed as well by the village people, and especially patriarchal figures like the *'omda* and Sheikh Shahin who hold power, and finally by her own father. Abdelrahman is oppressed by the enslavers and slavery enablers who kidnapped him as a child and by the community that cast him as an *osheh* at the very bottom of their social ladder and shunned him after his daughter's defilement. While Abdelrahman obviously has more power than Farida, the simple dichotomy of male oppressor and female victim does not justly represent the dynamic force of patriarchy in this context. The system of patriarchy is not merely an opposition between man and woman; it is an intricate hierarchy that takes advantage of unequal power dynamic to oppress the weaker members of society and maintain the authority in the hands of a few oppressors. Moreover, understanding the system of patriarchy is highly specific to the culture in which it operates, so generalizations of how patriarchies work are not only inaccurate, but also hinder the work of dismantling such unjust power structure because they are misleading and evasive. Mukhtar's concern with genuinely revealing a truly human experience motivates him to dismiss the fact that he is Nubian and to uncover the injustice and oppression that take place even within the 'peaceful' Nubian societies. This quality of self-awareness and self-criticism is crucial to the work of a storyteller, who writes not only to celebrate and preserve memory, but also to call for social change and pinpoint racist, misogynist, and tyrannical tendencies, even in his own community.

Conclusion: The Work of Rememory

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it"

George Santayana (248)

After studying the work of rememory in the selected texts, namely Morrison's *Beloved*, Oddoul's "The River People," and Mukhtar's "The Nile Bride," it becomes evident that the notion of rememory defies space, time, and history to foreground an authentic experience of diasporic people against a historical narrative that aims to erase it. The three writers used real memories of their communities, whether horrible memories of chattel slavery and the Middle Passage, or cultural memories that incorporated Nilotic rituals, myths, and symbols, or painful, repressed internal memories experienced individually or collectively, and weaved these memories with elements of water, rivers, and oceans. The fluid medium of water provides a transparent yet powerful vessel that holds, as Morrison asserts, the capacity to carry memories. Water is also the physical site of the pivotal events in these narratives and recalling them requires a summoning of the imagery of water. Similar to the way Hughes sees rivers in his very first published poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," I see the abundance of water figurations in the selected texts as traversing pathways that move across borders and carry an ancient, perfect memory. Some questions regarding the work of rememory, however, remain to be answered. What exactly is *purpose* of rememory? Is it different from memory or remembrance in a fundamental way? Why did Sethe not simply *remember* the plantation of Sweet Home, but see it as a *rememory*?

Besides the aforementioned differences regarding the realistic or imaginary qualities of memory and rememory, and how they operate in the capacity of the human mind, in time, and in space, a fundamental difference between memory and rememory is the act of subversively choosing to *rememory*. Remembering is an everyday act. Everyone, in any place in the world, engages in the act of remembering something every day, unless they suffer from

Alzheimer's or another memory disease. Choosing to remember something is not necessarily an act of resistance; it could be, but not by default. Rememory, however, requires an active, conscious choice to not only remember something, but to relive it, repeat it, and retell in a new way. This retelling creates a space, a loophole, for a story that has been erased or forgotten to emerge from the ruse of memory and to finally be recognized. Morrison masterfully demonstrates this through the multilayered character of Beloved. It is almost as if every time Beloved delves into the water, she reemerges as a new character who lived a different chapter of African American history and retells it in the novel, from the Middle Passage to the era of chattel slavery, and beyond.

Oddoul and Mukhtar are similarly choosing to consciously remember and retell Nubian history. Oddoul, who is perhaps the most outspoken contemporary Nubian intellectual in terms of advocating the Nubian *right to return* and demonstrating the pain Nubian people suffered, chooses to create narratives abundant with a memory of lore and myth. The stories of *Nights of Musk* all revisit the Nubians sites of memory, namely the villages that now lie under the Nile, the customs and traditions of Nubians for centuries, and the flowing water that provided them with physical and spiritual sustenance. In resistance to the cultural amnesia that will soon wash away these specific features into the larger body of Egyptian memory, Oddoul subversively revives the picture of these memories in their original time and space and allows their return in a cyclical timeframe of rememory.

Mukhtar's narrative is not only pushed forward by the gentle stream of the Nile, but also by the stream of consciousness of his characters. He revisits his own birthplace in his short story, and through the memory of Farida, chooses to retell an unjust history that is rarely addressed in the Nubian community. The enslaved *osheh* Africans had to endure a horrible journey; they were kidnapped from their southern tribes, forced to forget their origins, and cast to the very bottom of a new society that they now had to carefully assimilate

into. Any reckless or scandalous incident that breaks the rules of this new society, especially involving opposite-sex relationships, and they could be shunned by the whole village. Mukhtar traverses into the depth of his own memory to bring forth the picture of the idyllic Nile surrounding his village, but he problematizes this peaceful image of ancient people living harmoniously with the surrounding nature. Instead, he retells the story of the Nile bride, the victimized maiden who is given away to Hapi in a sacrificial ritual. The story exposes a darker narrative, one where forces of tyrannical power and misogyny lead an innocent girl to choose death by reuniting with the waters that were once her source of life.

Another purpose rememory serves is that it opens a powerful window for individual and collective healing. The repetition, recurring, and recalling of memories in the three narratives discussed in this thesis pave the way for reading and writing to become healing rituals. Morrison outspokenly acknowledges that, in her work, "there is a necessity for remembering the horror, but of course there's a necessity for remembering it in a manner in which it can be digested, in a manner in which the memory is not destructive. The act of writing the book, in a way, is a way of confronting it and making it possible to remember" ("In the Realm" 248). This confrontation takes place through rememory, in which the narrative revolves in cyclical time rather than develop chronologically, returning to sites of traumatic events to hunt down the haunting memories. Furthermore, the narrative itself is a form of rememory, because it returns to the myth and ritual that are either suppressed, forgotten, or endangered, so that diasporic peoples can return and reclaim this heritage and history. The retelling of myths is a suitable medium for the work of rememory not only because they build on cultural memory, but also, in Morrison's words, they "are told in such a way that whoever is listening is in it and can shape it and figure it out. It's not over just because it stops. It lingers and it's passed on. It's passed on and somebody else can alter it later" ("In the Realm" 253). Therefore, rememory is not only the work of the writer, but

based on the oral and reciprocal nature of mythology, it can be a healing ritual for readers as well. The work of rememory requires continuation and engagement; as myths pass on from one generation to the next, they are reshaped and retold, and just when they are about to be forgotten, the receivers of these myths are able to reform them and recast them into the collective and cultural memory of their people.

The anthropologist William Y. Adams dedicated the final chapter of his vast study on Nubia entitled *Nubia: Corridor to Africa* to reflect on the lessons he learned from studying the people and artefacts of this secluded region. He stated:

> another lesson which Nubia has taught me is that, notwithstanding the general evolutionary trend of history, there are cyclic recurrences which no amount of determinist theory can explain away . . . the recurrences in Nubian history are too numerous and too obvious to be ignored. (671)

The stories of Oddoul and Mukhtar depict this essence of cyclic repetition and recurring. Asha Ashry is the reincarnation of her grandaunt and meets the same fate of her ancestor by walking into the Nile and reuniting with the river people. Farida relives her trauma through the flow of memory and recalls her childhood before the story comes full circle when she delves into the river when she reaches the banks near her old village. Moreover, both writers construct their narratives through intertextual retellings of Nubian and Egyptian myths, which further enhances the quality of repetition they carry. Because myth is "a narrative that has acquired a symbolic value and is engraved and transmitted in memory," its recalling and retelling also requires remembering its symbolic value which carries valuable significations for Nubian people (A. Assmann 68). These symbols are also carried in the various rituals practiced by Nubians in the villages of Old Nubia, some of which survive till today.

Rememory is an act of imagination, which it is, because it is deployed by writers in their fictional works. But is it *only* that? Can it be anything else? Can it be labelled with a

specific ascription? Some things about rememory are certainly real, like the fact that it retells events that actually happened, and even some of which the authors witnessed or experienced. It is also rooted in real spaces: the Nile, the Ohio, and the Atlantic Ocean. Was there a little girl on board a slave ship in the seventeenth or eighteenth century, who watched her own mother drown in the depth of the ocean? There certainly could be. Was there an enslaved woman who escaped with her children through the streams of the Ohio to the free North? There definitely was. Morrison repeatedly affirms that her fictional work stems from "the way the world was for me and for the black people that I knew" ("Interview" 144). She says,

> I grew up in a house in which peopled talked about their dreams with the same authority that they talked about what "really" happened. They had visitations and did not find that fact shocking and they had some sweet, intimate connection with things that were not empirically verifiable. ("Interview" 144)

If the events, places, and accounts that Morrison bases her fiction on are all *real*, is rememory then, something beyond the imaginary? If so, where does it belong?

On several occasions, Morrison refused to label her fictional work "magical realism" because she saw that the word "magical" dilutes the severe reality of her work. ("Interview" 143). I also choose to dismiss this word when describing her work and the fiction of Nubian writers. Thus, rememory is not labelled as "magical realism," despite the fact that it crosses the boundaries between the real and the imaginary. Morrison uses the word rememory as both a noun and a verb, as well as in the singular and the plural form, which further complicates a specific labelling of rememory. In *The Source of Self Regard*, there is a short essay by Morrison that is based on a talk she gave about rememory, where she says that through her creation of rememory, she

> urged memory to metamorphose itself into the kind of metaphorical and imagistic associations I described [which] is not simply recollecting or

> reminiscing or even epiphany. It is doing; creating a narrative infused (in my case) with legitimate and authentic characteristics of the culture. (317)

The various manifestations of rememory ascribed by its creator answer the posed questions. Rememory should not be limited to a label, and it can be an independent framework to investigate the diverse, intersectional factors at play in fiction by and about victimized and oppressed peoples. What is certain, however, is that it is an authentic tool that reaffirms trust with narratives that these peoples remember and retell about themselves, and that it stands in defiance of a supremacist form of documentation speaking for them. While this thesis looked at the *flow* of rememory, the *work* of rememory is not done. Rememory can shapeshift and "metamorphose" into whatever form needed to aid in the crucial process of remembering and retelling.

One final note must be made in answer to a provocative question the author has been repeatedly asked regarding comparatively studying the complex and loaded histories of indigenous and diasporic African peoples. Is it useful in any way to look at the suffering of different peoples comparatively? Is this thesis meant to equate the suffering of African Americans during the transatlantic slave trade, the Middle Passage, the institution of slavery, and beyond, with the Nubian displacement in Egypt and Sudan or the regional Afro-Arab slave trade? Studying the heritage and history of African Americans and Nubian Egyptians simultaneously is not meant to insinuate that the traumas of these peoples are necessarily *equal*. Relating and connecting the collective memories of the traumas experienced by oppressed or victimized peoples is a sensitive issue that must be addressed carefully. In discussing this, Michael Rothberg cites a controversial moment when the Black Panther Party leader Khalid Muhammad compared the Holocaust's six million Jewish victims to the estimated sixty million victims of the Middle Passage, or 'the black holocaust,' in a lecture he gave at Howard University. In light of this, Rothberg examines "how to think about the

relationship between different social groups' histories of victimization" (2). He observes that people often think that there is "a direct line [that] runs between remembrance of the past and the formation of identity in the present … a struggle for recognition in which there can only be winners or losers" (3). Instead, he proposes the theory of 'multidirectional' memory, according to which memory is "subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not private" (3). The imagery of memory as being multidirectional rather than linear mirrors the way Morrison creates rememory as a notion that transcends traditional space and time and coincides with the scope in which this thesis aims to work. Additionally, the multidirectional flow of memory between various cultures allows for a better chance for scholars to highlight lessons learned from the unique experiences of these cultures. Instead of traumatic memories turning into a mode of competition that can result in supremacy and violence, they can become an educational experience that allows space for personal and collective healing.

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